

**Writing and Reporting News II, COMM 339-01**  
**Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts**

Spring 2021

T-Th 4:00-5:15 p.m., Murdock 320

Jim Niedbalski

Mark Hopkins 107A; 662-5418

James.Niedbalski@mcla.edu

Office hours: Tuesday & Thursday 3-4 p.m. and by appointment

**Text/Materials**

*Math Tools for Journalists*, Wickham, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Marion Street Press, 2003  
*The Beacon Stylebook* (class handout)

All of your newswriting must adhere to AP and Beacon style. We will take one or two class periods to review the most common AP and Beacon style considerations, with which you should quickly become familiar if you're not already.

**Description**

*Writing and Reporting News II* will build upon the skills you learned in W&R News I. This course is designed for you to make the leap from your introduction to journalism to amassing the skills and desire to be an effective news reporter. Journalism serves the public, and the public – your readers and viewers – deserve your best effort at ascertaining the truth and explaining the issue fully, accurately and succinctly.

Whether or not you intend to pursue journalism as a career, next year or down the road, this course and other journalism classes will help you understand and evaluate public affairs and become a more informed citizen. Along the way, you'll become a critical thinker and a better writer.

You are expected to be voracious consumers of news, in all forms of media - print, television, radio and Internet. Please sign up for a free digital subscription to the New York Times, courtesy of MCLA's Library Services, at this link - <http://accessnyt.com/>. You will get a much better sense of how journalism works, and the crucial role it plays in society, if you are a regular reader/viewer/listener of news. To that end, we will have weekly quizzes of names/places in the news, including from stories in *The Beacon*, to ensure you are well informed. Frequent news consuming will also help you understand the principles of news media convergence.

We will utilize lecture, class discussion, peer editing, "workshop" writing, readings from the text and other sources, and other exercises during the progression of the course.

## Convergence

It's also digital journalism, online journalism, multi-media, multi-platform, etc. But it's a reality in journalism, and we must get on board. To that end, some of your assignments may be geared towards multi-media presentations of your stories. We may be able to do some group/class projects. We will integrate your "print" stories with video, and possibly prepare stories for radio broadcast and/or collaborate with Beacon Web News (BWN).

## Course objectives

- Develop interviewing and research skills;
- Learn how to cultivate sources, particularly on certain beats;
- Develop a "nose for news;" i.e., learn how to spot newsworthy issues in daily life;
- Gain understanding of how the professional news media work, in all media formats;
- Continue practicing how to write succinct, newsy story ledes;
- Continue learning the elements of news story structure;
- Continue development of your writing skills, paying attention to brevity, clarity, active voice, strong verbs, etc;
- Develop a sense of the difference between truth and accuracy, and pursue truth as the basis for all your stories;
- Become acutely aware of campus, local, regional, national and international news;
- Develop a respect and (hopefully!) admiration for the profession of journalism.

## Attendance/Policies

Attendance is mandatory. Class participation and discussion are essential for a writing/journalism course. More than three unexcused absences could adversely affect the student's final grade. I reserve the right to fail a student who compiles more than six absences, regardless of the grade.

***I will not accept late assignments without penalty without prior notice and arrangement.*** Unexcused late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for each day they are late. This includes all drafts.

***Plagiarism is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.*** Penalties range from failing the assignment to disciplinary action by the Dean's office. Early in the course we will discuss plagiarism in all its forms, and also the ethics of newsgathering.

***Cell phones must be turned off during class and stored out of sight.***

Laptops - occasionally I might ask you to bring in your laptops for an in-class assignment. Also, you may choose to type notes on your laptop during class discussion. Otherwise, there is no need to have laptops open and be fixated on the screen while we're engaged in discussion.

## **Assignments**

For every one of the four graded assignments, you will have the opportunity for a revision for a better grade. Whenever I return to you a graded assignment (via e-mail using the Track Changes function In Microsoft Word), I will tell you when the revision is due. I will grade the revision, and your final grade for that assignment will be the average of the first and second grades. For example: first submission, C+; revision, A-; final assignment grade B. (When the average is between grades, you get the higher grade.) E-mail your assignments as MS Word attachments.

### **GRADING:**

News stories (4)	65% (15% each, Enterprise 20%)
Names/places in news quizzes	10%
Final exam	15%
Attendance, participation	10%