

# Digital Public Affairs Reporting

JRN 408  
Michigan State University  
Spring 2007  
Tuesday/Thursday 3-4:50pm  
Room 243  
<http://www.msujrn.com/index.html>

## Instructors:

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**Prerequisites:** Jrn 200

**This is a pilot course combining public affairs reporting with multimedia storytelling. The intent of this class is to demonstrate how to effectively report news online. The experimental nature of this class means that the syllabus is subject to change.**

## Course Objectives:

1. To develop beat reporting skills
2. To enhance interviewing skills
3. To gain a better understanding of local government and public affairs reporting
4. To learn how to cover public affairs in new and innovative ways
5. To expose you to different styles of storytelling
6. To critically analyze online journalism trends and its impact on journalism
7. To gain technical skills
8. To become a critical journalist in the online environment
9. To be trained in ethics when reporting digital public affairs

## Required Text:

Quinn, Stephen, and Filak, Vincent F. *Convergent Journalism*. Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2005.

Parks, Perry. *Making Important News Interesting. Reporting Public Affairs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Oak Park, IL: Marion Street Press, Inc, 2006.

## Recommended:

Kovach, Bill, & Rosenstiel, Tom. *The Elements of Journalism*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001.

## Required Supplies:

1. 2 Mini 60-minute DV Tapes
2. Headphones

### 3. 6g Flash Drive

**Equipment Reservation:** All equipment is to be checked out from the School of Journalism including cameras and laptops. It is your responsibility to ensure that you check out all of the necessary equipment for your story. You must check out a kit with a lav microphone, battery, tripod, firewire and camera when you check out your camera. Please report any problems with equipment to the Digital Reporting instructors immediately.

**Disability Policy:** Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for People with Disabilities to develop reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 (voice) or 355-1293 (ITY). Web site address is <http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/Home/>

**Food/Drink Policy:** There is no drinking or eating in the classroom at any time.

**Academic Honesty:** Plagiarism means the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results or words without giving proper credit. Article 2.3.3 of the Academic Freedom Report states that "the student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In additions, the School of Journalism adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, *Protection of Scholarship and Grades*, and in all-University Policy on *Integrity of Scholarship and Grades*, which are included in *Spartan Life: Student and Handbook and Resource Handbook*. All students in the School of Journalism are required to follow the J-School Code of Ethics and Standards. Falsifying sources, using unattributed online or other sources for stories, dishonesty and other code violations will lead to failure in the course and possible dismissal from the School.

**Attendance Policy:** The only excused absence is for a religious observance. Days off for religious reasons must be cleared in advance. One absence will be ignored (though any missed homework, quizzes or assignments due earn a 0.0); two absences result in a 1.0 grade drop; three in a 2.0 grade drop and four in failure of the course. This may seem harsh, but we are training reporters for the real world.

At least one Friday each month, students are required to attend lectures by special guest speakers. Dates and times will be announced as the term progresses. Speakers lined up thus far include Jennifer Carroll, VP Online News at Gannett and Chet Rhodes, Deputy Multimedia Editor, Breaking News, WashingtonPost.com.

### Assignments

**\*All stories must be approved in advance.**

**Quizzes:** You will be given current events or other types of quizzes such as AP style quizzes every week. Some quizzes will be pop quizzes.

**Beats:** Three beats that must be covered are: 1) local government; 2) local school system and 3) law enforcement/fire. You will be broken up into teams of two. You must cover each of these beats every week among the three people. Beat reports will be

submitted each week by Wednesday at noon on Angel. At mid-semester, you will switch beats.

**Beat Report:** By second week class, you must identify who are the 1) contacts within your beat (Including names, titles, phone numbers, both work and home, and email), 2) issues facing your designated community, 3) identify non-traditional locations and hang-outs where people gather to discuss issues of local concern, 4) a description of your community and 5) identify the reporting/information gathering procedures for the media for your first beat report 6) have read previous minutes for the past year for any public body on your beat (school board, city council, township trustee meetings) and read the city or township charter. **Following that first beat report, you will be required every week to submit a beat report by Wednesday @ noon unless announced by faculty.** This report will include new developments, possible story ideas including in-depth analysis of issues beyond the coverage of meetings, upcoming issues and other information deemed of relevance.

**Court Observation:** Students must attend a three-hour circuit court trial during the first half of the semester. Each student must submit a two-page double-spaced report.

**Blogging Assignment:** You will create a blog on an issue of importance to you relative the community you are covering and how the media can make a difference. The blog will be posted on blogger.com. Your topic must be cleared by an instructor. You will be required to create two posts directly related to the issue you chose per week on different days. You will be graded on the use of your personal voice, knowledge of the issue, creativity and the deliberate use of hyperlinks. You will also create a separate blog within blogger where you will post your weekly beat reports. You will be required to incorporate that “beat report” link within your primary blog.

**Midterm Project:** This project will include a main package with one sidebar that is beat or community related. The project must include a video interview, photo, info-box and text written for online. Each member of the team is supposed to create their own project.

**Citizen Journalism Assignment:** The team will recruit one person within your assigned community to create a blog that can be accessed from your blog page on issue of direct importance to them. You must teach them how to set up a blog and the key elements of blogging. The person cannot be a college student, a friend, a relative, a friend of a relative or an acquaintance. Each team member will write a 1-2 page reaction regarding the recruitment process and on citizen journalist’s contributions.

**Final Project:** You will write on a topic of importance to the community. We want you to take risks. Each member of the team is supposed to create their own project. Your final assignment should include:

Text: 300-600 words

Photo: The package must include at least one photo.

Slideshow Package: This assignment should include natural sound, at least two sound bites, at least 12 photos, and at least nine chunks of text (100-200 words).

Reporter Bios: This bio must include your work history and personal background information including a photo and email address.

Video: The assignment must include one interview or montage of shots.

Interactive Element: This package must include one element that provides an interactive opportunity for users.

Interactive elements: This can include engaging the user with the text, polls, questions, maps, requests for content contribution, quizzes, etc.

## **Grading**

Class Assignments 40%

-Quizzes and Court Report

- Blogging

-Beat reporting and coverage

-Citizen Journalism

Midterm 20%

Final Project 40%

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### **Week 1**

*Jan. 8<sup>th</sup>/Tues*

Introductions (A)

Course overview

In-class writing assignment

Pick your beat location

Student Survey

Blogging like the Best (B)

*Jan 11/Thurs.*

Setting up your blog (B)

Team/Beat Assignments

Dash Class Assignment

\*Parks, Chapter 7, 9

### **Week 2**

*Jan. 16/Tues*

Public Affairs/Beat Reporting (S & J)

Event Reporting (J)

FOI and OMA (J)

Overview of the Michigan Court system (J)

\*Parks, Chapters. 1-4

*Jan. 18/Thurs.*

Shooting Photos (D)

Preparing Photos for the Web

\*Beat Report Due

\*\* QF Chp. 7

### **Week 3**

*Jan. 23/Tues*

Broadcast Writing (S)

First Personal Blog Assignment Due

*Print Beat Report (Weds at noon)*

\*\*QF Chp. 4

*Jan. 25/Thurs.*

Using news to teach and helping people to act (J)

People's view of the news media assignment (J)

*\*Print Story Due*

#### **Week 4**

*Jan. 30/Tues*

How to shoot and conduct interviews (S)

Print vs. Broadcast Interviewing (S)

*Broadcast Beat Report (Weds at noon)*

\*\*Parks Chp. 5-6

*Feb. 1/Thurs.*

Info. Boxes (B)

In-class exercise

*Broadcast Story Text Story-Reader Due*

Serena Gone

#### **Week 5**

*Feb. 6/Tues*

Dreamweaver

\*\*QF Chp. 5

Serena Gone

*Beat with Broadcast Interview Report (Weds at noon)*

*Feb. 8/Thurs.*

Broadcast Interview Critique

Broadcast Story Critique

*Broadcast story with video interview*

#### **Week 6**

*Feb. 13/Tues*

Online Writing (B, S & J)

Hyperlinking (B & S)

Writing headlines (B, S & J)

*Broadcast Beat Report (Weds at noon)*

Bonnie Gone

*Feb. 15/Thurs.*

Uploading material including video to the web (B)

Using Final Cut Pro to edit your interviews

*Broadcast Story with Interview Due*

\*\* QF Chp. 10

#### **Week 7**

*Feb. 20/Tues*

Lab time (J)

Serena Gone

**Helping your community understand the city or township gov. due**

*Online Beat Report (Weds at noon)*

*Feb. 22/Thurs.*

Podcasts

Reporter Bios and Transparency (S&B)

Site architecture and navigation

Initial Midterm Project Pitch

*Online story with hyperlink and headline due*

### **Week 8**

*Feb. 27/Tues*

Multimedia Analysis/Chunking

Serena Gone

*Mar. 1/Thurs.*

### **Final Pitch**

#### **Reporter Bios Due**

Upload bios in class

Quiz #1

### **Week 9**

Spring Break

### **Week 10**

Site architecture and navigation

#### **Community Information Packages Due (Team). Must uploaded to the Web site**

Who's Your Audience? (S)

Defining journalism (S)

Citizen Journalism (Blogs, Wikis, Journalist/User Relationship, Photo Galleries) (S & B)

Discuss Citizen Journalism Assignment

(Jane Gone)

*Mar. 15/Thurs.*

Soundslides - Photo Slideshows with Audio (B)

Prepare questions for Friday's speaker

#### **Individual Midterm Project Due**

**\*\*\* Jennifer Carroll/Vice President/New Media Content, Gannett March 16**

(Jane Gone)

### **Week 11**

*Mar. 20/Tues*

#### **Midterm Critique**

*Online Beat with Photo Report (Weds at noon)*

*Mar. 22/Thurs*

Online trends

Shooting B-roll (S)

*Online Photo Story Due*

**\*\*\* Deputy Multimedia Editor Chet Rhodes, Washington Post, March 23**

### **Week 12**

*Mar. 27/Tues*

Shooting Video (S)

**Final Pitch for their Final Project Due**

*Online Beat with Photo Report (Weds at noon)*

*Mar. 29/Thurs.*

Practice Shooting Sequences in Class (S)

Sourcing/Diversity (B)

Web Sources (J)

*Online Photo Story Due*

**Week 13**

*Apr. 3/Tues*

History and Trends in Beat Reporting (S)

*Online Beat with Video Report (Weds at noon)*

*Court reports due*

*Apr. 5/Thurs.*

Video Editing (S)

**\*\*QF Chp. 9**

*Work on video story in class*

**Week 14**

*Apr. 10/Tues.*

Video Editing (S)

*Standup on Beat Report (Weds at noon)*

*Apr. 12/Thurs.*

Business Models for Online Journalism (B)

Jobs in Online Journalism (B)

**\*\*PP Chp. 14**

*Edited standup due*

**Week 15**

*Apr. 17/Tues*

Work on Final Project

*Apr. 19/Thurs.*

Work on Final Project

**Week 16**

*Apr. 24/Tues.*

Final Project Presentations Due (A)

*Apr. 26/Thurs.*

Final Critique

In Class Survey

**\*\*Perry Parks (PP)**

**\*\*Quinn & Filak (QF)**

**Beat Report** - Almost every week you will be expected to produce a story stemming from your beat including a beat report which encourages you to reflect upon the coverage of your beat. This report is due Wednesday at noon before your beat story is due. The beat report will only be accepted via email, and it must be emailed to all instructors. Here are the questions that should be answered each week along with the story:

1. Who are all the stakeholders involved in this issue?
2. How did you go about double-checking assertions?
3. How are you educating/informing/interacting with news users?
4. How are you mobilizing news users?
5. What are your concerns with this week's story?
6. What are you excited about this week's story?
7. What do you wish you would have done differently on your previous beat assignment?
8. If applicable, what video do you envision for this story?

### **Blogging Grading Criteria**

It should follow the same there, but it should not be redundant. Your comments should be unique, and support evidence (links) and logic. You are allowed to use a pseudonym because future employers may read the content. You are also required to post one comment per week.

You will be graded on these criteria:

#### ***Content:***

Is your blog timely?

Is your post interesting?

Is the length appropriate? Get to the point.

Does it link to quality relevant outside content? No "click here" or "this link".

Headline? Straight to the point, but attention-getting.

Engaged writing?

#### ***Mechanics:***

Grammar?

Punctuation?

AP style?

### **Student Survey**

