

News Reporting COMM 2315 Spring 2020

Instructor: Charles L. Ehrenfeld

Office: Communications Building, Room 158.

Phone: (806) 716-2448, or (806) 716-2532 (Newsroom).

E-mail: cehrenfeld@southplainscollege.edu

Class Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:30-3:45 p.m., CM 130.

Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays, 9-9:30 a.m., 2:30-4 p.m.; Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9-9:30 a.m., 1:30-2:30 p.m.; Fridays, 9 a.m.-noon; or by appointment.

Course Description: This course focuses on advanced news-gathering and writing skills. It concentrates on the three-part process of producing news stories: discovering the news, reporting the news, and writing the news.

Learning Outcomes: Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

1. Evaluate newsworthiness of information.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of story idea creation.
3. Comprehend the basic structure and format of a news story (lead, body, and conclusion).
4. Demonstrate an understanding of reporting and feature writing.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of multimedia journalism and alternative story forms.
6. Demonstrate an understanding of journalistic ethics.

What to expect from this class: This course includes work on the staff of the online college newspaper, *The Plainsman Press*, selling ads, taking photographs, writing stories or designing page layouts on computer. Much of the work is done in class using the most modern equipment. By the end of the course, you should have practiced and improved your skills in at least one of the following areas: reporting, writing and editing; layout and design; advertising; photography; and public relations.

What is expected of you: As a member of the *Plainsman Press* online staff, you are expected to contribute to each of the six issues produced during the semester. You also are expected to be a good representative of South Plains College, the Communications Department and the journalism program. Your work should reflect that you take this as seriously as you would any other professional publication. You are expected to be a responsible journalist, paying strict attention to balance and fairness in stories, accuracy, honesty and objectivity. An effective newspaper requires news reporters, feature writers, opinion writers, sports reporters, entertainment reporters, copy editors, page designers, and graphics designers working together for a common goal, the success of the *Plainsman Press*. You may be interested in only one of those areas, or all of those areas, but you are expected to contribute something to each issue, though you can contribute in multiple ways as well. What you take away from this experience depends on your initiative.

Attendance: Twenty percent of your grade is based on attendance and participation. Attendance will be checked at the beginning of each class. Due to the nature of publications work, students may leave to cover assignments or take photos as needed on some days. But everyone should report to every class promptly. Missing more than three classes (unexcused absences) will result in your *final* grade being lowered by a full letter grade. After the fourth absence, you may be dropped from the course (at the discretion of the instructor).

Excuses: Don't bother to try any. I've heard most of them and have used some of them myself. Only deaths of immediate family members (parents, grand parents, siblings – ONLY), or your own, may be considered for an excused absence. Of course, you will need to provide proof (such as the obituary notice). Student athletes or those participating in other college-sponsored activities that require an absence will be excused, with prior notice to me and appropriate documentation.

Deadlines: ALL deadlines are absolute. You need to get used to deadlines that exist in the off-campus world. Since meeting deadlines is essential in journalism, your ability to do so will be a major factor in the grading process. If you cannot turn in an assignment on time, you still are expected to complete it, though your grade will be lowered. If you fail to turn in an assignment, you will fail the course. Technical malfunctions (i.e. "My computer ate my homework," or "My printer crashed") will not be an excuse for late work.

Grading: Issue Participation/Attendance = 20%
Evaluations of Effort = 80%

Students will be evaluated based on the following criteria: responsibility; meeting deadlines and expectations; attitude; working as a team player; quality of the assignment, including writing a story, producing ads if needed, taking a photograph, editing copy and helping with layout; and working effectively to contribute to producing each issue.

After work on each issue is completed, students will be evaluated on their contributions to each issue. Students will provide information on what work (such as stories written, ads sold, ads designed, pages designed, photos taken) they contributed to the issue. The instructor/advisor will evaluate the work and provide grades accordingly.

Academic Honesty and Professional Conduct Policy: The same standards and ethics will apply to students enrolled in this course as apply to news reporters and other media professionals. Violations of these standards will result in a failing grade for the assignment and immediate dismissal from the course will be considered. These standards include, but are not limited to:

1. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. You may not take material verbatim from other sources such as previously published newspaper stories, wire service stories, broadcast news stories, etc... To do so is to plagiarize.

2. Pay strict attention to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Since the invention of the dictionary and spell checker, there is no excuse for a misspelled word. To allow for a misspelled word to appear in any assignment you submit for a grade is laziness. Any misspelled words or factual errors will be graded harshly.

Civility Code: As future journalism professionals, communicate with each other in a professional and civil manner. We all may feel passionately about certain issues; however, passion is no substitute for a solid grasp of the facts and sound, logical reasoning. Disparaging comments about gender, ethnicity, religion, etc... will not be tolerated. Understanding and respecting multiple experiences and perspectives will serve to challenge and stimulate all of us to learn about others, about the larger world and about ourselves.

Disruptive behaviors such as cell phones ringing, leaving and returning to class while in session, arriving late to class, talking with others when the instructor is addressing the class, checking your e-mail and Facebook, sending/receiving text messages, eating or drinking in class, etc... will result in a substantial reduction in the participation portion of one's grade and a request that such students leave the class. Cell phones must remain turned off during this class. They may be "silent" if out of sight. They may only be activated in individual extenuating circumstances after consulting with the instructor.

ADA Statement: Students with disabilities, including but not limited to physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities, who wish to request accommodations in this class should notify the Disability Services Office early in the semester so that the appropriate arrangements may be made. In accordance with federal law, a student requesting accommodations must provide acceptable documentation of his/her disability to the Disability Services Office. For more information, call or visit the Disability Services Office on the Levelland or Reese Center campuses.

Diversity Statement: In this class, the instructor will establish and support an environment that values and nurtures individual and group differences and encourages engagement and interaction. Understanding multiple experiences and perspectives will serve to challenge and stimulate all of us to learn about others, about the larger world and about ourselves. By promoting diversity and intellectual exchange, we will not only mirror society as it is, but also model society as it should and can be.

Nondiscrimination Policy: South Plains College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability or age in its programs and activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: Vice President for Student Affairs, South Plains College, 1401 College Avenue, Box 5, Levelland, TX 79336, (806) 716-2360.

Title IX Pregnancy Accommodations: If you are pregnant, or have given birth within six months, Under Title IX you have a right to reasonable accommodations to help continue your education. To [activate](#) accommodations you must submit a Title IX

pregnancy accommodations request, along with specific medical documentation, to the Director of Health and Wellness. Once approved, notification will be sent to the student and instructors. It is the student's responsibility to work with the instructor to arrange accommodations. Contact the Director of Health and Wellness at (806) 716-2362 or [email cgilster@southplainscollege.edu](mailto:cgilster@southplainscollege.edu) for assistance.

Spring 2020 Plainsman Press Online Schedule

Issue 7

Jan. 14– Review Syllabus/Brainstorm
Jan. 16 – Work Day
 (Notes: Information Gathering)
Jan. 21 – Work Day
 (Notes: Structuring the Story)
Jan. 23 – Rough Drafts Due!
Jan. 28 – Final Drafts Due!
Jan. 30 – Brainstorm next issue
Jan. 31 – Upload Issue

Issue 8

Feb. 4 – Work Day
 (Notes: Interviewing)
Feb. 6 – Rough Drafts Due!
Feb. 11 – Work Day
Feb. 13 – Final drafts due/Brainstorm
Feb. 14 – Upload Issue

Issue 9

Feb. 18 – Work Day
Feb. 20 – Rough Drafts Due!
Feb. 25 – Final Drafts due
Feb. 27 – Brainstorm/Upload

Issue 10

March 3 – Work Day
March 5 – Rough Drafts due
March 10 – Final Drafts due
March 12 – Brainstorm/Upload

March 16-20 – Spring Break!

Issue 11

March 24 – Work Day
March 26 – Rough Drafts due
March 31- Final drafts due
April 2 – Brainstorm/Upload

Issue 12

April 7 – Work Day
April 9 – Rough Drafts Due!
April 14 - Final Drafts due
April 16 – Brainstorm/Upload

Issue 13

April 21 – Work Day
April 23 – Rough Drafts Due!
April 28 – Final Drafts due
April 30 – Upload/Wrap-up