

POLITICAL REPORTING – JO 502

PROFESSORS LINDA KILLIAN and ROBERT SCHLESINGER
MONDAY – 7-9 P.M., FRIDAY – 8:30-9:30 A.M.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is an advanced course in public affairs reporting. Through lectures, class discussion and readings we will explore the development of political reporting, analyze contemporary public affairs reporting and explore and practice the key elements of the best political journalism – good writing, dogged reporting and a commitment to the truth.

During this course we will also examine and practice the different ways political stories are developed. Writing and reporting assignments on Congress and the federal government will be a significant aspect of the course and will dovetail with work in the newsroom of the Washington News Service.

We will consider what makes an outstanding political story versus an ordinary one

We will study, discuss and practice:

- How to develop a beat – getting close enough but not too close to sources
- How to find the local angle - spinning off stories with a local angle from national stories
- How to get people into your stories
- Interview techniques and strategies
- The importance of detail
- How to reconstruct events
- How to do a political profile

REQUIRED READING:

The Freshmen: What Happened to the Republican Revolution? by Linda Killian, Westview Press
The Elements of Journalism by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, Crown

Additional chapters from relevant texts and news writing from newspapers and magazines that will be passed out in class.

In order to participate in this class and function effectively in the newsroom students should also read on a regular basis: The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal; watch “Nightline”, “The Newshour” on PBS, the network nightly news and the Sunday morning public affairs shows; listen to National Public Radio and regularly check the websites of Congress and news organizations that cover them:

<http://www.senate.gov/galleries/daily/>
<http://www.house.gov/daily/hpg.htm>
<http://www.hillnews.com/>
<http://thomas.loc.gov/>
<http://oncongress.cq.com/home/home.jsp>
<http://www.c-span.org/capitolspotlight/>

ASSIGNMENTS:

--- We will have regular discussions in class about the news and about your newsroom work. Class participation counts for a significant portion of your grade and students are expected to actively participate in these discussions.

--- Students will bring to class news stories which reflect excellence in reporting and writing and will lead a five minute discussion about these stories. All students are expected to have read the stories and to participate in the discussion. Students will sign up at the beginning of the semester for one class in which they will be required to distribute copies of an article or bring to class a broadcast piece they consider to be an example of excellent writing and reporting. They must distribute these stories either electronically or in hard copy by the Friday before their Monday presentation to the class and the professors. Each Monday different students will lead class discussions about their articles and will be graded on their article choice and presentations.

INDIVIDUAL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

--- FEC or Financial Disclosure Story – Oct. 31

--- Profile or Feature – Subject due Nov. 7. Story due Nov. 21.

FINAL PROJECT – Students are required to complete a 1,500-2,000 word enterprise article or long-form broadcast piece on a public affairs issue of your choosing with our consent. Due: Topic – Nov. 14. Outline – Nov. 28. Final piece due– Dec. 12.

REQUIREMENTS AND RULES

--- Attendance is mandatory. All absences must have prior approval. Two unexcused absences will result in a reduction of a student's grade by a full point.

--- Deadlines will be observed. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior consent of the professors. If you miss a deadline that assignment is recorded as a failure.

--- Plagiarism is forbidden and will result in automatic failure. You are responsible for reviewing and understanding Boston University's policy on plagiarism.

GRADING CRITERIA:

--- Reporting Assignments – 35%

--- Class participation – quizzes, article presentation – 30%

--- Final Project – Outline – 5%. Final project - an enterprise article on a public affairs issue – 30%.

MONDAY CLASS MEETINGS - Outline is approximate. Changes may be made in class

Sept. 12 – Introduction of course and syllabus

The ABC's of Covering Congress
Reporting on Capitol Hill
Useful websites

Sept. 19 - General discussion of Covering Congress

How a bill becomes a law
How and Where to Find Stories, Develop Sources and What to Do Next: Developing a Beat

How to Write a Story Based On a Press Release or Press Conference

Readings: The Freshmen: Chapters 1-3, 6, 11-12

Sept. 26 – Computer Assisted Reporting

Using the Web in political reporting: Discussion of useful websites
Derek Willis, The Washington Post and Scoop.org

Oct. 3 – Covering Congress – Committee Work and Hearings: Committee Chairmen and the Congressional Leadership

Floor Action and Legislation. Key issues facing Congress and resources for reporting them.

Understanding the differences between the House and Senate

Reading: The Freshmen: Chapters 4, 9-12

Oct. 10 - HOLIDAY – NO CLASS

Oct. 17 - FEC/Financial disclosure stories and Campaign Spending Reports

Jeff Birnbaum, Washington Post columnist

Reading: The Freshmen: Chapters 8-10 and 21 and 23

Oct. 24 – Writing Political Features and Profiles: Getting color, detail and people into your stories

Reading: The Freshmen: Chapters 5, 7, 14, 16,
Kevin Merida, Washington Post

Oct. 31 – Enterprise and Project Reporting

Mark Thompson, Time Magazine

Nov. 7 – Interviewing and Reporting Techniques. How to Cover Elected Officials – Going Beyond Press Releases
Fairness and Accuracy

The Freshmen, Chapters 29-30

Nov. 14 - Covering government agencies
Lisa Stark, ABC News

Nov. 21 – “The Elements of Journalism” – Ethics and Practices
Screening of “Shattered Glass”

Nov. 28 – Covering the White House
Ken Lisaius, Communications office, The White House

The Freshmen, Chapters 17 -18, 25

Dec. 5 - Covering Foreign Affairs, the Defense and State Departments
Tom Bowman, Pentagon Reporter, Baltimore Sun

Dec. 12 - Last Class/Wrap Up