



Intro to Commercial Journalism

Journalism 98, Spring 2010

Sponsored by: Prof. William J. Drummond

Mondays / Time: TBA / 1.5 hrs.

Course Website: decal.calibermag.org

Presented by the editors of

Caliber
magazine

I've been involved with newspapers, in some form or another, for a quarter century. If I don't see a compelling reason to read them, why should anyone else? – *Michael S. Malone*

Newspapers are dead! Haven't you read the newspapers? – *Anonymous*

Traditional journalism is a dead man walking. – *Brian Solis*

Newspapers are "dying" of natural causes. Putting them on life-support just draws out the inevitable. Pull the plug and move on. – *Dave Title*

Every good journalist is aware that his trade may one day go the way of phrenology – and, what's more, the population will hardly protest the extinction.
– *David Remnick, The New Yorker*

Course Description

The internet poses a big threat to print journalism. People are increasingly trading in their fresh issues of the New York Times for the glow of laptop screens. The challenge that modern journalism is now facing is finding a way to make print publications a viable commodity in today's market; to compete with the computer screen, to maintain a consistent readership and to find a way to convince people pay for information, even though they can get it for free online. This course will explore various innovative techniques which could possibly be used to reclaim this waning readership and forge an entirely new model for future publications. It will also explore various ways journalists can take advantage of online resources and optimize their submissions for online display. The course will be divided into two fields: the business side and the legal side. The business side will look at concepts such as new marketing techniques, the format and layout of successful articles, and how to create unconventional ideas which will make the consumer reach for their wallet. The legal side of the course will be looking at copyright laws, what constitutes libel and obscenity, technical details of publishing, and various key Supreme Court decisions that have strongly influenced journalism and the freedom of the press. The course also plans to provide field experience to its students by giving them the opportunity to apply the concepts described in class through the campus publication Caliber Magazine. Students will be expected to write articles as a part of their participation in the course.

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Course Objectives

- Exploring ways to produce a viable print publication in today's market.
- Improving individuals' ability to write effective stories.
- Incorporating journalistic values into current business and law standards.
- Giving members of the class real world experience by having them participate in the on-campus publication, Caliber Magazine.

Course Layout

Each week the two facilitators in this course will alternate in leading the class. One week will be devoted to the business side of journalism and the other week will be devoted to discussing the legal aspects of journalism. The class will be structured as a lecture, but is definitely open to digressions and discussions. Aside from the material that will be lectured, there will be several group activities and interactive media displayed in class, i.e. videos, pictures, online articles and such. There will be two workshops, aside from lecture, which aim to help students with the article assignments. They will deal with grammar and stylistic guidelines of a modern journalistic piece. Participation by the students is necessary and highly encouraged.

Readings

There are no assigned readings for this course. Any readings to be covered will be in-class handouts brought by the instructors.

Recommended readings (available on Amazon):

- The Best American Magazine Writing 2009 -- The American Society of Magazine Editors
- Feature and Magazine Writing: Action, Angle and Anecdotes -- D. Sumner and H. Miller

Assignments

The assignments in this class will consist of writing two full and professional articles to be published in Caliber Magazine, one for each issue.

They will be turned in two-weeks after they have been assigned.

Grading

Although this class is a P/NP class, we will be grading students on a letter basis then converting the score to a P/NP, with 70 being the threshold.

The overall score will be constituted through the following criteria:

- Attendance: 25%
- Participation: 5%
- Article 1: 35%
- Article 2: 35%

Attendance

Attendance will be taken in the beginning of class. Every student has one permitted absence, provided they contact one of the facilitators with a valid excuse. Each unexcused absence will result in a five point deduction from the overall grade.

Plagiarism (text based on the syllabus by Martha Olney, Professor of Economics)

The University defines academic dishonesty as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Plagiarizing will result in an NP grade and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs, which may administer additional punishment.

Tentative Class Schedule

Lecture 1: Nick -- Sex, controversy and humor
Marketing techniques & changing consumer preferences.
Application: What do Berkeley students want to read?

Lecture 2: Zarko
Libel, how it can affect anyone, and general journalism ethics.
Case study: Hustler v. Falwell (2002)

Lecture 3: Nick -- Standing out
Hot topics and features: Crazy and unconventional ideas.
Application: 20 articles that will blow you away.

Workshop: Nick

Lecture 4: Zarko
How to get a lot of attention without getting in trouble... or worse sued.
Case study: Bethel v. Fraser (1986)

Lecture 5: Nick -- 1,000,000 sex tips
Article format: Lists or paragraphs? + The importance of a number.
Application: A panel of 10 Berkeley students will judge the class’s ideas.

Lecture 6: Nick -- More than just the article
Article supplements: Video, interviews, quotes, statistics and more + online journalism
Case study: The Daily Californian website, dailycal.org.

Workshop: Zarko

Lecture 7: Nick -- Excuse me, sir
Content: How to gather info, interview and poll. Secrets to being credible.
Application: The art of interviewing, group work.

Lecture 8: Zarko
Knowing your free-speech rights as a writer.
Case study: Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District

Lecture 9: Nick -- Jewel in a desert
The title and the cover: How it should sound like and how your article can make it there.
Application: Slideshow of bestselling covers.

Lecture 10: Zarko
Technical Details: model release forms, controversial photos, anonymous interviews...and more!
