

American University Washington Semester
Journalism Spring 2007
Seminar Professor Caroline Comport

Intensive Writing Seminar Professor Iris Krasnow

Seminar Syllabus

Course Description

The Washington Semester Journalism course is designed to give student's an insider's view of what defines, shapes, makes and breaks stories in the Nation's Capital. Over the course of this semester we'll take a journey that examines the relationship between members of the press and those who reside in the halls of power.

From the White House to the Hill, from the Pentagon to the State Department, from the Supreme Court to the Justice Department you'll learn what it takes to cover these powerful institutions as a journalist. You'll also meet professionals whose work impacts Washington journalism including politicians, press secretaries, think tank researchers and public relations executives.

The course is divided into three sections – the seminar class, an intensive writing component and an internship with an accompanying class. The seminar class is a mix of guest speakers, lectures, assigned readings, mixed media assignments and class discussions related to journalism. There is a separate syllabus for your Journalism Internship class.

Seminar days: Monday, Tuesday

Intensive Writing Component: Wednesday

Internship days: Thursday, Friday

On Wednesdays, you will meet for intensive writing sessions with Professor Krasnow. All assignments for this portion of the course will be based on thorough reporting and clear writing, jammed with facts, anecdotes and quotes. You will learn how to become a relentless reporter, and a perfectionist with words, stripping each sentence down to its cleanest, most powerful components. You will develop style and vocabulary, and of course, make certain to spell every word correctly! (Each word misspelled in a final paper makes the grade drop down one notch.) By the time the semester is over, you will know the difference between good and great writing. Additionally, you will learn how to excavate the human spirit through interviews in our semester-long focus on The Art of the

Interview. Some lectures will be devoted to query letters and how to sell your stories to editors and get your name in print!

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

write a spot news story

write a news feature

write a profile

write an opinion piece/editorial

help edit a newspaper

be bold in pursuing sources and leads.

Course Objectives

*Develop or improve news writing skills

*Discover sources for covering news in Washington

*Gain an understanding of the relationship between the press and policy makers

*Learn to read, watch and follow news cycles

*Learn or improve non-linear video editing skills

*Learn or improve on-camera presentation

Assignments / Grading

Class participation / attendance 25%

Mixed Media Assignments 25%

Quizzes 15%

Mid-term 15%

Final Exam 20%

Attendance / Punctuality Policy: Attendance is mandatory. Being on time is a must. If an illness or family emergency arises you must notify me before class begins. Each unexcused absence will negatively impact your final grade. Two unexcused late arrivals equal one unexcused absence.

Class Participation: Each seminar will present a unique opportunity to interact with a Washington professional. Students are expected to research guest speakers and formulate relevant questions. All students are expected to conduct themselves professionally and be respectful of guest speakers, peers and the professor.

Deadlines: All assignments are due at the start of the scheduled seminar. Any assignment turned in late will receive an immediate 5 point deduction. An additional 5 points will be deducted per day an assignment is turned in past deadline.

Course Requirements

Final Cut Pro Tutorial – All students enrolled in the Journalism course will be required to learn how to use Final Cut Pro, a non-linear video editing system. Tutorials and assistance are available at American University's New Media Center located in Hurst Hall Room 212. Pod cast tutorials may also be downloaded from the New Media Center's website. We will take a class tour of the New Media Center early in the semester.

<http://www.american.edu/academic.depts/provost/teachingcenter/student/nmc.html>

The Tenley Times – The Journalism class composes a newspaper each semester called *The Tenley Times*. Every student participates in the process, either in writing, editing, photography or layout. Past editions of *The Tenley Times* have focused on issues that affect civil liberties, such as abortion, Gay marriage, gun legislation and the subsequent controversies surrounding Charitable Choice legislation.

Required Books

Bernstein, Carl and Bob Woodward. All the President's Men. 2nd Touchstone ed. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1994
Freedman, Samuel G. Letters to a Young Journalist, Basic Books, 2006
Kovach & Rosenstiel. Elements of Journalism. Three Rivers Press, 2001
Schieffer, Bob. This Just In. Berkley Trade. 2004 (paperback)
Tompkins, Al. Aim for the Heart. Bonus Books, 2002

Required Newspapers / Websites / Beat Checks

The Washington Post – daily hard copy
The New York Times – daily website
USA Today
Your hometown paper website

www.cnn.com

www.whitehouse.gov

www.senate.gov

www.house.gov

www.defenselink.mil

www.state.gov

www.supremecourtus.gov

The Washington Post, The New York Times and USA Today are available free at the front entrance to Congressional Hall.

Supplemental reading and viewing as assigned over the course of the semester.

Suggested Reading

Goldstein, Norm. *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. Revised Edition. Perseus Books Group. 2006.

Strunk Jr., William. *The Elements of Style; With Revisions, an Introduction, and a Chapter on Writing* by E.B. White. 4th edition. Allyn & Bacon. 2000

Utterback, Ann S. *Broadcast Voice Handbook: How to Polish Your On-Air Delivery*. 2nd Edition. Bonus Books. 1995

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well, 30th Anniversary Edition: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. Collins. 2006

Seminar Course Topics

Our journey this semester will take us down many roads though we'll make unexpected detours along the way to account for breaking news, speaker availability and special events.

What is the purpose of Journalism? Freedom of the press, The First Amendment, an obligation to the truth, independence from sources – we'll examine the cornerstones of journalism and the role of the press in a democracy.

News inside the Beltway: To most people the word pool means something you swim in and RON is just a name -- but inside the beltway these terms have very different meanings. Learn to decode Washington buzzwords and watch how news is covered inside the Beltway.

Writing for Broadcast: Writing well is hard. Writing to pictures and sound on deadline is even more challenging. We'll take a look at the demands of writing for broadcast and learn some tips for crafting better stories.

The Art of the Interview: To tell a story, you have to get the story and that means talking with people. We'll explore ways to ask better questions, how to be a better listener and how to deal with difficult subject matter.

Covering the White House: What's it like to work at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue? We'll meet some of the journalists on the White House beat and learn what it's really like to file a story while traveling around the world with the President.

Covering Congress: Who's who on the Hill and how do they wield their power? What kind of access do journalists have to the power brokers? Learn what you can and can't do while covering Congress as well as how to distill a six-hour hearing into a 1:30 television story.

The Supreme Court: From the steps of the Supreme Court to your TV screen we'll examine how the press deals with the special challenges of covering the highest court in the land.

Wars and Foreign Affairs: Iraq, Afghanistan, the conflict in the Middle East. What are the dangers of reporting from a war zone? What stories don't get told in the midst of a conflict? Do U.S. media outlets "sanitize" pictures and video from war zones? How do foreign media outlets tell the story? We'll look for answers to these hard questions and meet some of the journalists who cover these conflicts.

Hurricanes, Hearings and Public Policy: Few will forget how Hurricane Katrina devastated communities along the Gulf Coast. We'll examine how the aftermath of the storm swept through Washington igniting a blame game and shaping future policy.

The Spin Cycle: From the press podium to the boardroom political messages are carefully crafted and questions deftly sidestepped. Learn how stories are spun by politicians, think tanks, lobbyists and PR campaigns.

Consider the Source: Who said it? Why did they say it? Where did that video come from? Should you use the material in your story? We'll take a look at the world of video news releases, pre-taped political responses and pre-paid promotional events.

Leadership & Ethics: The clock's ticking; your deadline's fast approaching but is your story really ready to go on-air? The petitioner wants your signature, the club wants your membership – but should you lend your name and money to the cause? Consider ten questions that will help you make ethical decisions on deadline and examine the qualities of a leader.

The I-Game: From the internet to I-pods to instant messaging the speed of today's technology is having a profound impact on journalism. We'll examine the changes as well as the pros and the pitfalls of reporting at warp speed.

Fame, Fortune and Your Future: Is a career in Journalism really for you? What does it take to succeed? We'll take a look at the realities facing aspiring journalists in today's economic environment.

Seminar Schedule

The location, start time and seminar topic will vary each week. Schedules will be sent to you via email every week usually by Thursday.

The weekly schedule of seminars will provide names of guest speakers, dates, times, locations and directions to off-campus seminar venues.

A key factor in our weekly schedule is the availability of guest speakers which can change at the last minute. You will be notified of schedule changes via email or phone. Please check your preferred email account everyday. You may have your AU email forwarded to your preferred daily email account. You can do this by going to <http://myamerican.edu> or call the AU Office of Information Technology at 202-885-2550. Online at helpdesk@american.edu

American University Academic Integrity Code

<http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.htm>

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. It is expected that all assignments will be completed according to the standards set forth American University's Code. By participating in this program, every student has acknowledged his or her awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and is obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will be taken seriously, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the code.

Transportation

American University does not pay for or provide transportation to seminars, internships or class projects. Traffic is unpredictable in the Washington area and the best defense is to allow plenty of travel time and carry both a Metrorail map and a map of downtown DC.

About Caroline Comport:

In addition to teaching Journalism at American University I continue to work as a freelance journalist. My most recent assignment was covering the State Funeral of President Gerald Ford.

Prior to joining American University I worked as the Executive Producer for Tribune Broadcasting's Washington News Bureau coordinating live and taped reports of national and international events for Tribune's major market television stations. Stories I've covered include: the Sept 11th attacks, Hurricane Katrina, the death of Pope John Paul II and the Clinton Impeachment. I also helped create 'RxTV' a weekly health program seen across the United States from 1997 to 1999.

Before moving to the DC area with my husband, I worked for Tribune's Los Angeles affiliate KTLA where I was honored to win three Emmy Awards for the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, the 1993 Southern California Wildfires and the KTLA Morning News.

About Iris Krasnow:

My journalism career started in my hometown of Chicago as a freelance contributor to Chicago Magazine and the Chicago Tribune. In 1981 I became a feature writer for the Dallas Times Herald, a position I held until 1984 when I moved to Washington, D.C. to join United Press International as the national feature writer. My specialty at UPI was celebrity profiles and trend stories. I became a full time freelance writer in 1989, and my work has appeared in The Washington Post, Life, Self and The Wall Street Journal. I am the author of four books: *Surrendering to Motherhood*, the New York Times-bestseller *Surrendering to Marriage*, *Surrendering to Yourself*, and *I Am My Mother's Daughter*. I have been a guest on many national radio and television shows, including twice on Oprah, the Today show, Good Morning America and several times on CNN.

My husband and I live in Annapolis, Maryland with our four sons.

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