

J401: In-Depth Reporting

Spring 2017, Tuesday & Thursday, 8:00am-9:15am
Vilas Hall 2112

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Office Hours
Thursday: 10:00am-11:00am
Rathskeller Hours
Monday: 1:00pm-2:00pm
Also by appointment

Welcome to J401! This is an intensive, advanced reporting and writing class that builds upon the foundation you've already established in J202 and J335. You'll learn how to write and report with depth and context, and you'll produce stories using different strategies and narrative styles. You'll cover a beat of your choosing and largely, though perhaps not entirely, explore issues through a Wisconsin-focused lens. You will aim to publish your work in outlets such as *Madison Commons*, *Isthmus*, *Madison 365* and so forth.

This is a demanding course and will require your full engagement and effort.

Here's what you can expect to gain from J401:

- Fine-tuning a crisp, clear writing style
- Knowledge of current events and trends in Wisconsin and nationwide
- Experience consistently covering and deeply understanding an issue of your choosing
- Learning how to use a variety of sources, such as documents, data, records and interviews to develop stories
- Practice delivering news and messages across platforms, including text, digital audio/video and social media
- A set of clips to anchor your portfolio of reporting and writing work

What You Will Do

You will write five different kinds of in-depth stories this semester. For each story, you will pitch your idea to the entire class and receive feedback from everyone. Then, you will turn in a draft on which you will receive feedback from everyone. Then, you will turn in a final version for a final grade.

Incomplete drafts will be penalized a full letter grade when I assign a grade to your final draft.

Select a Beat

We will treat the class as though you are a feature writer for a Madison-based magazine or newspaper – a feature writer who has a wide berth of freedom with respect to what to cover. That is, you can choose the general topic area you want to cover. You will pitch that topic area to the class and together, we will come to agree on the precise nature of the beat you'll cover. You could think traditionally, (i.e. "state government," "police," "education," "music," etc.) or non-traditionally, (i.e. "poverty," "the Wisconsin Idea," "digital security," "heroes," "administrative bloat") in your selection, but choose carefully. Once it is approved, you are stuck with the beat you choose and cannot change it. No exceptions.

Neighborhood Feature

You will write a 750-1000-word feature on a Madison neighborhood and a challenge/opportunity it is facing/change it is undergoing. You must have at least five sources, three of which must be humans. The story should come with two-to-three photographs, a headline, suggested tweet, suggested Facebook post and a pitch to an outlet in which you can publish the story. After you receive feedback on your final draft, you must pitch this to *Madison Commons*.

In-Depth Feature

You will write a 2000-word feature on a topic of your choosing that is within your beat. Eight sources, minimum. The story must also include a multimedia element (graph, timeline, interactive chart, audio slideshow, video, etc.). The story should come with two-to-three photographs, a headline, suggested tweet, suggested Facebook post and a pitch to an outlet in which you can publish the story. This story must be written from the traditional perspective of journalist as omniscient narrator.

Wisconsin Fact-Check

You will produce a fact-check of a claim, relevant to your beat, made by a Wisconsin lawmaker. If your last name begins with A-L, you will fact-check a Democrat. If it begins with an M-Z, you will fact-check a Republican. After receiving your final grade on the fact-check, you will submit your Fact-Checks to WCIJ for fact-checking, editing and revision. Fact-checks have no set length. You just need enough to demonstrate you have the evidence to reach a conclusion. Your fact-check will be published at [The Observatory](#).

COMMUNITY-BASED FOLLOW-UP: All fact-checks will be accompanied by an additional piece of *community-based* reporting that reveals how the result of the fact-check affects a Wisconsin community. These community-based reports can be produced as traditional stories (500 words), video, audio, or alternative story forms.

In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative

You will write a 2500-to-4000-word feature story about a topic of your choosing, just as you did with the In-Depth Feature. Eight sources, minimum. The story must also include a multimedia element (graph, timeline, interactive chart, audio slideshow, video, etc.). The story should come with two-to-three photographs, a headline, suggested tweet, suggested Facebook post and a pitch to an outlet in which you can publish the story.

The difference here is that you will write the story from a “new journalism” perspective, integrating your own ideas, style, experiences, and perspective. We will read examples of this ahead of the time you need to produce the story.

Personality Profile

You will write a 1250-to-2000-word profile of a person who is central to your beat. You must engage in at least two interviews with the personality you profile. Or, your single recorded interview must last more than 90-minutes. Four sources (including the personality), minimum.

Grades

Neighborhood Feature: 15%

In-Depth Feature: 15%

Fact-Check & Community-Based Follow-up: 15% & 5%

In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative: 15%

Personality Profile: 15%

Professionalism: 10%

Participation: 10%

Grades are calculated as follows:

A	93-100	publishable in current form with few revisions
AB	88-92	close to publishable with minimal work
B	80-87	strong story, needs rewriting to be publishable
BC	75-79	mix of strengths and flaws, needs work
C	67-74	major flaws, needs major work
D	59-66	critically damaging flaws, needs overhaul
F	0-58	work not done

Late Work is accepted at a penalty of 15 points per 12 hours the assignment is late. Late or incomplete drafts will be penalized a full letter grade on the Final Draft grade for each story.

Graduate Coverage

Protrack MA students in Journalism can take J401 for graduate credit. Protrack MA students will write a small number of additional stories and have additional long-form and alternative stories form assignments on the final project.

Attendance

Treat J401 as you would treat a job in a professional newsroom. You must show up on time to every class period. You must be prepared – with your reading, your work and your assessment of your classmates' work.

You must have your work done.

You will be required to help others by commenting upon their stories. You are under no obligation to wait until the last minute to complete your assignments. Start cultivating sources now. If something goes wrong, technology-wise, 15 minutes before a story is due, that is your fault. If your source wouldn't get back to you, find another one.

Life happens to all of us and there may be a good reason that you must miss class on occasion (personal travel is not a good reason). If you must miss class, get ahold of me before class. You have at least five ways to get ahold of me (email, Twitter, Facebook, phone, office). Do so before class and we can work something out. Do so after you miss the class and we can't.

Plagiarism and Fabrication

Integrity is very important. Please take note of the university's policy on academic misconduct: <http://students.wisc.edu/doso/acadintegrity.html>. If you have questions about how to properly

cite a source, the quality of a particular source, and the like, I will help you with gusto and vigor.

You should all know what plagiarism is — using someone else’s work in your own stories. This includes cutting and pasting material that was written by others, as well as patch writing, when you change a word or two but keep an original source’s general meaning.

Fabrication is making up a source, pretending a source is something that he or she isn’t, or creating information that you report as true. Your work should only include your own writing, paraphrased material or direct quotes from sources. Again, if you have questions about plagiarism and fabrication, or wonder whether what you’re doing is wrong, please ask. You will not be punished for asking, but you will be disciplined for plagiarism.

Like many instructors in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, I reserve the right to use Turnitin to maintain academic integrity. This means your work may be uploaded to [turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) to be compared with material submitted by other students, as well as information from websites, publications and other sources. If we review your assignment this way, we will receive a report with a “similarity score” and details about possible matches between the assignment and other sources. After reviewing that report, I — not the software — will evaluate and decide whether there has been plagiarism or other academic misconduct. Your assignments will be kept in the global Turnitin database, but I am the only one who is permitted to view your assignment there.

If I determine there has been academic misconduct, punishment will include an “F” for the assignment. Depending upon my opinion of the severity of the infraction, punishment may also include an “F” for the course. I will report all instances of academic misconduct to the Dean of Students. Do not try me.

Sourcing

There are no anonymous or confidential sources allowed in J401. Each story will list all sources at the end (with hyperlinks)

Course Schedule

Jan 17

What is In-Depth Reporting? Why is it Valuable?

Jan 19

Choosing Your Beat

Read:

[Obama vs. Trump: 5 Medical and Science Stances](#), Dylan Scott, *Scientific American*

[Why We Need News Literacy Now](#), Dean Miller, *Nieman Reports*

[The Disunited States of America](#), Jamelle Bouie, *Slate*

[The Death Rate Gap Between Urban and Rural America is Getting Wider](#), Sarah Frostenson, *Vox*.

- Jan 24** **The Tools of In-Depth Reporting in Action**
Read:
[The Case for Reparations](#), Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic*
[These Women Reporters Went Undercover to Get the Most Important Scoops of Their Day](#), Kim Todd, *Smithsonian Magazine*
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- Jan 26** **Interviewing in In-Depth Reporting**
Watch: Charlie Rose, [The Brain Series “Social Behavior”](#)
Listen: Here’s the Thing w/ Alec Baldwin, [Questlove Can’t Take a Compliment](#)
- Feb 2** **Neighborhood Feature Pitches**
Read and Watch: [Walk Like a Journalist](#), Pulitzer Center
Read: [Madison Commons](#) (several articles of your choosing)
- Feb 7** **Neighborhood Feature In-Class Discussion and Work**
- Feb 9** **Neighborhood Feature In-Class Work**
Due: Neighborhood Feature Draft, 11:59pm, Learn@UW
- Feb 14** **Neighborhood Feature Rapid Fire Critiques**
- Feb 16** **In-Depth Feature Writing**
Read:
[A Brand New World in Which Men Ruled](#), Jodi Kantor, *New York Times*
[One Man’s Quest to Change the Way to Die](#), Jon Mooallem, *NYT*
[The Democratic Party’s Down-Ballot Collapse, Explained](#), Matthew Yglesias, *Vox*
[A Muslim Leader in Brooklyn, Reconciling Two Worlds](#), Andrea Elliot, *New York Times*
- Feb 21** **In-Depth Feature Pitches**
Due: Neighborhood Feature Final Draft, 11:59pm, Learn@UW
- Feb 23** **In-Depth Feature Discussion and Work**
Read:
[How an Ad Campaign Invented the Diamond Engagement Ring](#), Uri Friedman, *The Atlantic*
[Want to Fix Gun Violence in America? Go Local](#), Aliza Aufichtig, Lois Beckett, Jan Diehm, and Jamiles Lartey, *The Guardian*
- Feb 28** **In-Depth Feature Work**
- Mar 2** **Fact-Checking as In-Depth Reporting**
Due: MARCH 4TH, In-Depth Feature Draft, 11:59pm, Learn@UW
Read: Holan, Angie Drobnic. 2014. “7 Steps to Better Fact-Checking.”

[Politifact](#).

Holan, Angie Drobnic. 2016. "What Do Fact-Checkers Around the World Have in Common?" [Politifact](#).

Assigned Exercise: Selecting Claims to Fact-Check

Mar 7 In-Depth Feature Rapid Fire Critiques

Mar 9 Fact-Checking Skill Building

Read:

Adair, Bill and Angie Drobnic Holan. 2013. "The Principles of Politifact, PunditFact and the Truth-O-Meter." [Politifcat](#).

Krueger, Vicki. 2016. "How Reliable is Your Source? Start By Asking These Questions." [Poynter](#).

Hare, Kristen. 2016. "Six Fact Checks You Should Read on Clinton's DNC Speech." [Poynter](#).

Due: Three potential Wisconsin lawmaker claims to check, rank-ordered.

Due: In-Depth Feature Final Draft, 11:59pm, Learn@UW

Mar 14 Fact-Check Skill Building Exercises

Mar 16 In-Class Work on Fact-Checks

SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK

Mar 28 In-Class Work on Fact-Checks

Due: Fact-Check Draft, 11:59pm, Learn@UW

Mar 30 Fact-Check Rapid Fire Critiques

Apr 4 In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative

Read:

[My President Was Black](#), Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic*

[Michael Keaton Interview](#), Tom Chiarella, *Esquire*

[The Birth of 'The New Journalism': Eyewitness Report](#), Tom Wolfe, *New York*

[On Self-Respect](#), Joan Didion, *Vogue*

Due: Fact-Check Final Draft, 11:59pm, Learn@UW

NOTE: Still requires a fact-check with WCIJ

Apr 6 In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative Skill Building

Apr 11 In-Class Work In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative

Apr 13 In-Class Work In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative

Due: In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative Draft, 11:59pm,

Learn@UW

- Apr 18** **In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative Rapid Fire Critiques**
Due: In-Depth Feature Integrating Personal Narrative Final Draft,
11:59pm, Learn@UW
- Apr 20** **Personality Profile Pitches**
Read:
[A Pickpocket's Tale](#), Adam Green, *The New Yorker*
[Frank Sinatra Has a Cold](#), Gay Talese, *Esquire*
[Kerry Washington: More Than Just Another Pretty Face in Hollywood](#), Aliya S. King, *Ebony*
[Soledad O'Brien: 'Every Setback is Ultimately a Setup for Something Else'](#), Gianina Thompson, *The Undeclared*
- Apr 25** **Published Personality Profile Critiques**
- Apr 27** **In-Class Work Personality Profile**
Due: Personality Profile Draft, 11:59pm, **APRIL 30**, Learn@UW
- May 2** **Personality Profile Rapid Fire Critiques**
- May 4** **Wrap-Up**
Due: Personality Profile Final Draft, 11:59pm, Learn@UW