

# Middlesex Community College

## COM 226 - JOURNALISM I

CRN Item # 3210 - 3 credits

**On-Line via Blackboard Learn**

Fall 2016

**John Shafer**, Professor

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## SYLLABUS

### Course Description:

This course is designed to teach students the ins and outs of journalism through both theoretical study and practice doing journalism. This includes writing news, features, and opinion type articles for both print and electronic news outlets. Emphasis will be placed on learning investigative reporting and general news gathering skills as well as specific writing techniques for news articles, including researching strategies, learning how to judge appropriate news content, interviewing techniques, constructing stories, revising and editing techniques, fact checking, and legal and ethical concerns for journalists. The course also asks students to engage in some supporting area of news production, such as editing, photography, videography, graphics, design, or layout, depending on students' interests and skills.

As part of this class, students automatically become reporters for *The Flying Horse*, MxCC's student newspaper, and may have their work appear in the printed paper or on its web site.

### Specific Learning Objectives:

- Develop methods for judging what makes something newsworthy;
- How to find good story ideas;
- Understand the difference between fact and opinion;
- How to gather information and develop effective search techniques;
- What distinguishes reliable sources and how to develop them;
- Learn who to interview and how to conduct effective interviews;
- Learn basic elements of a news story;
- Understand specific grammar and style techniques used in news writing; including Associated Press stylebook guidelines;
- Practice and develop skill at analyzing a news story for effectiveness, economy, accuracy, and flow.
- Be familiar with basic journalism code of ethics and relevant laws;
- Understand consequences of inaccuracy, including libel situations;
- Use techniques to insure accuracy and check information;
- Know something about the other aspects of newspaper production including, photography, design, layout, production timelines, marketing, advertising, and distribution.

### Text and Resources

**NEWS REPORTING AND WRITING, 12<sup>th</sup> ed.**, by Melvin Mencher. [REQUIRED]

McGraw Hill, 2011. \$193 new; \$85 used rental.

This text is a valuable resource of both theoretical and practical information for beginning journalists. Discussion Forums will be based on readings in the text.

### Other Resources – *New York Times* / *Hartford Courant* / *Local Newspapers*

For each assigned article, you will be directed to read professional samples of similar articles using one or more of the above news sources. As an MxCC student, you are entitled to a free digital subscription to the *New York Times*. A link with information is available on Blackboard.

## Grade Breakdown & Course Requirements

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| (5) Articles @ 10% each             | 50% |
| (7) Discussion Forums @ 6% each     | 42% |
| Supporting Production Contributions | 8%  |

### (5) Articles @ 10% each = 50%

Each student is required to write (5) articles during the semester based on specific assignment guidelines. These articles are to be ORIGINAL, based on first-hand sources, research and investigation. Ideally they should be oriented toward MxCC or its communities. Other subject matter may also be acceptable including college-related issues in general, the CSCU system, or Connecticut. Articles should typically run somewhere between 500-1000 words in length (2-4 double-spaced typed pages). **Proper grammar and spelling is ESSENTIAL.** Please proofread carefully before submitting work. Too many errors will result in a returned article. **DEADLINES MUST BE ADHERED TO. Late articles will be subject to a grade penalty** (see calendar for deadlines). All articles will undergo a process of critique and revision. Both drafts and final articles will be posted on Blackboard and be viewable by other students in the class for review and comment. Relevant, news worthy, well-written articles will be published in MxCC's student newspaper, *The Flying Horse*, on its web site and possibly in a printed edition of the paper. Articles and due dates are as follows:

| ARTICLE                     | DUE DATE      |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Interview Profile Article   | Wed., Sep. 14 |
| News Article                | Wed., Oct. 5  |
| Feature Article             | Wed., Oct. 26 |
| Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed)   | Wed., Nov. 16 |
| Final Article – open format | Wed., Dec. 7  |

### (7) Discussion Forums (DF) @ 6% each = 42%

You are required to read several chapters from the textbook, *NEWS REPORTING AND WRITING*. After reading the chapter material, you will be asked to respond to the readings through specific questions and post your responses on the designated Discussion Forum for those chapters / topic (see below and on the calendar). In some cases, there may be multiple questions for you to choose from, in other cases, just one. You are required to write one original longer response post to the questions. You are also asked to read and respond to at least (2) other students' posts. These responses may be shorter in length. The one exception to this pattern will be our first discussion forum, which is based on the film, *SPOTLIGHT*, rather than the text. Original responses will be due on Wednesdays by midnight. Responses to other students' posts will be due the following Sunday by midnight.

| CHAPTERS AND TOPIC                       | DUE DATE      |
|--|---------------|
| <i>SPOTLIGHT</i> (film)                  | Wed., Sep 7   |
| Ch. 2, 3, 4 – The Basics & Story Writing | Wed., Sep 21  |
| Ch. 5, 6 – The Lead and Story Structure  | Wed., Sep. 28 |
| Ch. 11, 12, 14 – Reporting Principles    | Wed., Oct. 12 |
| Ch. 7, 8 Writers Art and Features        | Wed., Oct. 19 |
| Ch. 25 – Reporters and the Law           | Wed., Nov. 2  |
| Ch. 26, 27 – Taste and Morality          | Wed., Nov. 9  |

### **Supporting Production Contributions (8%)**

In addition to writing articles, students are asked to make some type of contribution to other supporting aspects of newspaper production or the paper's web site. These typically include editing, photography, videography, graphics, design, or layout work. Students who have particular skills or interests in any of these areas can contribute. The most common and easiest contribution is to take photos or find other relevant images to go with the subject of your article and include them with your submission, along with a caption description. Students with experience using *InDesign* or web layout could be valuable with the design and layout process. Contributions should be coordinated ahead of time. Let me know.

### **Withdrawals and Incomplete Grades:**

**Fall 2016 Withdrawal Deadline: Friday, November 11**

If for some reason you are unable to complete the course and do not wish to receive a grade, you may withdraw from the course and receive a "W" by picking up a withdrawal form from the records office before the deadline above. You may also send me an email requesting to withdraw. Otherwise, I will assign a grade based on the work you have completed and will have no choice but to assign an "F" if there is little or no work. A grade of "W" does not affect your grade point average so that would definitely be preferable to an "F" which does affect your GPA. If you have completed a substantial amount of work but are unable to finish before the end of the session due to unavoidable circumstances, I am usually willing to give an incomplete grade, which will give you an additional semester to complete the work. Again this is provided you speak to me before the end of the session. Incomplete grades require a form to be filled out and signed by both of us.

### **Grading Concerns:**

Grades will be posted on Blackboard under "MyGrades." Please check your grades carefully. Though I take great care to be accurate, occasionally a mistake is made. If you have any questions about the grade you received on an assignment or your final grade for the course, please ask me about it. If a mistake is discovered, I will change your grade accordingly. For this reason, it is important that you always save any written evaluations returned to you until well after the semester is over.

### **Additional College Policies and Information for Students**

For further information and a complete description of relevant college policies for students, go to the following page on the college's web site:

[www.mxcc.edu/catalog/syllabus-policies/](http://www.mxcc.edu/catalog/syllabus-policies/)

Additional policies and information include the following:

- Academic Honesty & Plagiarism
- Accessibility & Disability Services
- Attendance Expectations
- Audio Recordings in the Classroom
- E-Mail Accounts for Students
- Grade Appeal Process (Review of Academic Standing)
- Non-Discrimination Policies
- Religious Accommodation Statement
- School Cancellations Due to Weather or Emergency Situations
- Student Code of Conduct
- Withdrawing From Class

## Calendar

| <b><u>Week</u></b> | <b><u>Activity and Assignments</u></b>   |
|--------------------|--|
| AUG 29             | Introduction Overview<br>Profile Article Assigned  |
| SEP 5              | ch. 15 - Interviewing / view film <b><i>SPOTLIGHT</i></b><br><b>DF</b> (Discussion Forum) on <b><i>SPOTLIGHT</i></b> / conduct Interview |
| 12                 | <b>Profile Article Due</b>   |
| 19                 | <b>DF</b> - Ch. 2, 3, 4 - The Basics<br>Research News Article  |
| 26                 | <b>DF</b> - Ch. 5, 6 - The Lead and Story Structure<br>Profile Revisions Due   |
| OCT 3              | <b>News Article Due</b>  |
| 10                 | <b>DF</b> - Ch. 11, 12, 14 - Reporting Principles<br>Research Feature Article  |
| 17                 | <b>DF</b> - ch. 7-8 - Writers Art and Features<br>News Revisions Due   |
| 24                 | <b>Feature Article Due</b>   |
| 31                 | <b>DF</b> - ch. 25 - Law<br>Research Opinion-Editorial   |
| NOV 7              | <b>DF</b> - ch 26, 27 - Taste and Morality / SPJ Code of Ethics<br>Feature Revisions Due   |
| 14                 | <b>Opinion/Editorial Due</b>   |
| 21                 | Thanksgiving week<br>Research Final Article and Revise Op-Ed   |
| 28                 | Work on Final Article<br>Op-Ed Revisions Due   |
| DEC 5              | <b>Final Article Due</b>   |
| 12                 | Final Article Revisions Due  |

### Blackboard - Course Web Site

This on-line course is administered through Blackboard Learn. To access Blackboard go to: <http://my.commmnet.edu/>. If you've never logged on to *MyCommnet* before, follow the link below the LOGIN box "Need Your Initial Password" for login directions. After logging in, look for the Blackboard link. If you have problems logging on or using Blackboard, call tech support at 860-343-5756.