

Journalism 562

Spring 2016 – The University of Alabama
Schedule Code 13740
Dr. Chris Roberts

Contemporary Issues in Journalism

When and where we meet

Join [me](#) from 2-ish until 4:45 P.M. Thursdays in Room 104-D of Reese Phifer Hall.

How, where and when to find Dr. Roberts

My office is Room 400-A of Reese Phifer Hall – on the fourth floor facing University Boulevard, just past your boxes in the Journalism Department mailroom. Official office hours are 8 to 11 A.M. Tuesdays and Thursdays, but you can find me other times by appointment. You can reach me:

- Weekdays at 348-8619. That's my direct line on campus.
- With email at croberts@ua.edu. Please include "JN 562" in the subject line.
- Most any-ol' time. Take me to lunch. Come on by. I'm here for you.

Don't be shy in calling or writing with questions and concerns early and often throughout the semester, or even after you land your first high-paying job. If there's a problem, it's best to let me know early.

JN 562: An overview

The goal of this three-credit-hour course is to explore, through discussion and writing, the broad range of evolving issues that affect journalism. We'll consider newspapers and other channels of news media.

Learning objectives and outcomes:

What you'll learn here, and what you can use the rest of your life

The University's thrill-a-minute [course catalog](#) describes JN 562 as the course where students will examine "current issues facing the news media, ranging from professional problems to the human, social, and other consequences of news, news practices, and news technology." Those learning outcomes are just for starters. This semester you'll also:

- Understand how ethics, law, and changing technology underlie many issues in the newsgathering and presentation processes of journalism, but also in issues related to the business and management of journalism.
- Investigate other issues that traditional journalism faces—falling circulation and declining revenue, changes in publication schedules; changes in the gatekeeping model, working fairly and effectively within diverse communities, competition from old and emerging media, credibility, agenda-setting to focus community attention on key issues, etc. You'll be asked to define additional issues.
- Demonstrate solid mastery of issues that tie into other classes in our master's program.
- To the extent possible and practical, work on topics that could inform your future work in our master's program, such as a foundation for thesis literature review or underpinnings for work in the Community Journalism program.
- Continue to be responsible for your own learning. A professor of graduate students' job is to facilitate learning, as our goal is for you to learn from yourselves as well as the professor. Reaching that goal requires all of us to be prepared weekly. It will help you to become a lifelong learner, which is what journalists (and other grownups) should be.

The textbook

Required: Sloan, David, & Greer, Jennifer. (Eds.). (2012). *Contemporary Media Issues* (3rd ed.) Northport, AL: Vision Press. (I wrote a chapter but receive no money from its sale.)

You'll use Blackboard Learn and the Reading Room

Updated material for this class – class assignments, links to other readings and other useful stuff – will be posted on UA's Blackboard Learn site. You are responsible for going online to find the latest information on the course. Grades will be posted there, too.

Values and competencies

This course will help you gain the following professional values and competencies, which are required by the Accrediting Council on Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC).

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Think critically, creatively and independently
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

Americans with Disabilities Act

I cheerfully make appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities defined by the Americans With Disabilities Act. Be sure to provide documentation, including details of the specific accommodations you seek, from the [Office of Disability Services](#) (1000 Houser Hall, 348-4285) early in the semester. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services before receiving academic adjustments.

The class' attendance policy and severe penalties

Attendance is required. Contact me in advance if you'll be absent or late. You'll drop a letter grade for missing a second class with an unexcused absence; a third absence will drop you another letter grade, etc.

Excused absences?

I will consider grace for an absence only after you provide, within a week of returning to class after absence,;

- A letter from the proper University authority to verify a medical or other reason for missing classes. This would note that you missed all your classes, not just this one.
- A letter from the Athletics Department verifying a student-athlete's schedule.
- The acceptable form from the Student Health Center or other medical facility.
- Proof that you attended the funeral of a family member or close friend: An obituary, memorial card or other note.
- An official court record showing the date and time you were ordered to appear on a legal matter.

Assignments and course requirements

During the semester, you will:

- Do weekly readings on that week's topic.
- Write at least a two-page summary (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman, 1-inch margins) of that week's reading. Submit them before 6 A.M. each Tuesday before class, via Turnitin on Blackboard Learn.
- Lead the discussion on at least one issue during the semester. I'll provide (or approve) your topic well in advance, and you'll need to find and provide supplementary readings at least one week in advance of the class meeting, which gives plenty of time for fellow students to have read (and summarized) them before class. Your topic may tie into the topics listed on the syllabus, or you may propose your own. Many students use PowerPoint or other way to make the discussion bright.

→ Write a final paper, either (1.) on a topic of your own choosing, or (2.) write very thoughtfully on an assignment based on a final assigned reading. (See “Details on the final paper” below.)

Grading and assignment weights

Weekly summaries.....40 percent
 Class discussions.....30 percent (20 percent participation; 10 percent your leading of discussion)
 Final paper.....30 percent

Grade scale for this class

AMeets expectations. Class presentations meet professional standards, as do topic summaries. Manuscripts are ready for publication with minor revisions.
 BMeets expectations, but writing requires significant revision. Class presentations need polish and precision.
 CDoes not meet expectations.
 F.....Does not meet expectations and student did not seek assistance or appropriately consider that assistance during the semester.

JN 562 weekly readings summary rubric

	Low mastery	Average mastery	High mastery
The readings. (10 points)	Obviously, you didn't do all the readings.	Some suggestion that you are close to up-to-date in readings.	Evidence aplenty to show you did all the readings.
Quality of argument and synthesis (30 points)	You didn't make any arguments or synthesize the readings. Or you just weren't thinking.	You made an argument or two, but they weren't well considered.	Extended arguments that make sense, especially in context of the readings.
Grammar, style, punctuation, quality of writing, following directions (10 points)	Yikes. Many mistakes that suggest you weren't paying attention in other classes.	A few mistakes that better editing would have caught.	You're showing off your journalism <i>bona fides</i> . Roll Tide!

Details on the final paper

You've got a choice: (1.) Write a paper on a topic of your own choosing, or (2.) write very thoughtfully on an assignment based on a final assigned reading. The deadline is 11:59 P.M. on Friday, April 22. Submit the paper using turnitin.com on Blackboard Learn. **Late papers:** Anything turned in after that loses one letter grade per day.

Option 1. Write a paper on a topic of your own choosing

If you're on the thesis track or have a great idea, this is a terrific way to work through some of the literature and thinking that will pay off down the line.

You'll write a paper that uses what we've discussed in class to further develop a class topic, or ties together several key themes from throughout the semester. You'll pore through the syllabus and your previous weekly writings—or maybe even riff on a topic from *Contemporary Media Issues* or a week's focus that needs be further developed. Or, if you wish, you can write on another topic that we didn't discuss (or haven't yet discussed) in class.

You'll need to:

1. Find the theme for the paper that ties together a key issue discussed during the semester. Or, if you wish, another topic that wasn't discussed.
2. Make sure it's approved by Dr. Roberts in advance. Sooner is always better. Just send an email. Take me to lunch.
3. Write between 8 and 12 pages on that topic, citing both material from class (the readings, your weekly notes, the discussion) and incorporate new material that you'll find. Some of that new material needs to come from current (or fairly recent) events, proving that you pay attention to what's happening in the industry and can weave in that as an example.
4. Write using Associated Press style for text and APA style for citations. Use 12-point Times New Roman and 1-inch margins.
5. Consider footnotes: What the APA says about footnotes: "Because they can be distracting to readers, ... footnotes should be included only if they strengthen the discussion. A content footnote should convey just one idea; if you find yourself creating paragraphs ... as you are writing a footnote, then the main text or an appendix probably would be a more suitable place to present your information."

Option 1 grading rubric

- 60% Quality of thinking and argument. Includes sophistication of thought, with clearly communicated ideas, and the complexities of the topic. Moves beyond clichés and vague generalities.
- 10% Incorporates new material that goes beyond what was discussed in class. It includes a mix of academic literature and industry literature. Interviews with academics or industry employees (editors, reporters, etc.) as appropriate.
- 10% Appropriate length to cover the topic. In 12-point Times New Roman, with 1-inch page margins.
- 20% Mechanics of writing. Uses Associated Press style for text and APA style for citations.

Option 2: Write very thoughtfully on an assignment based on a final assigned reading

Late in the semester, I'll assign one last reading. You'll work through that reading and then write an exhaustive answer to a tough case study. I'll have more details as we move closer to that part of the semester, including deadlines and the grading rubric. Don't think of this as the "easier" assignment than writing a paper. It's just a service for those who might not need to do other focused research for their master's work.

The obligatory paragraphs about cheating and other academic misconduct

Your professor is a third-generation Southern Baptist deacon who knows that "Thou shalt not steal" is in [Exodus 20:15](#). When you break the [Code of Academic Conduct](#), you are stealing education from yourself, showing disrespect to students who didn't take shortcuts, and stealing from the University's reputation. The consequences are real: You'll be reported to school officials in accordance with University academic misconduct procedures, which I have unfortunately had to do multiple times at the University. The bottom line: You're expected to follow the University's Code of Academic Conduct:

All students in attendance at the University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academically related matter and any knowing or intentional help or attempt to help, or conspiracy to help, another student.

The [Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy](#) will be followed in the event of academic misconduct.

Plagiarism detection software

In order to uphold the University's high standards of ethics, students have agreed that their enrollment in this course means I can use electronic devices to prevent plagiarism. UA's [Code of Conduct](#) defines plagiarism as "representing the words, data, pictures, figures, works, ideas, computer program or output, or anything not generated in an authorized fashion, as one's own." (Notice how the previous sentence was attributed to the code, available at www.studenthandbook.ua.edu/conduct.html.) All course materials are subject to submission to Turnitin.com for the purpose of detecting textual similarities and [plagiarism](#). Turnitin.com will be used as a source document to help students avoid plagiarism in written documents. It can be used as evidence in academic misconduct procedures filed against you.

Severe weather reminders

All University activities – including classes – are suspended in the case of a tornado warning (tornado has been sighted or detected by radar; sirens activated.) If this happens during class, we'll move quickly to the first floor center of Phifer Hall and stay until the tornado warning has expired. (I did this on April 27, 2011, and the system works.) You are **not** to leave the building. After the warning is lifted, I'll decide whether to continue class.

To find out what's going on, you'll (of course) use mass media and information from the UA office of public relations via weather advisories you can find on the UA home page, UA's "[Be Ready](#)" site, Connect-ED (sign up on myBama), student-operated [WVUA-FM 90.7](#), Alabama Public Radio [WUAL-FM 91.5](#), and University-owned [WVUA-TV 7](#).

UAct: Ethical Community Statement

The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (<http://www.ua.edu/uact>) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.

Cultural Diversity Statement

The University of Alabama values the diversity of its student body and is committed to providing a classroom atmosphere that encourages the equitable participation of all students. Patterns of interaction between the faculty member and students and among the students themselves may inadvertently communicate preconceptions about student abilities based on age, disability, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, religion, class, regionalism and/or sexual orientation. These patterns are due in part to the differences the students themselves bring to the classroom. Instructors should be particularly sensitive to being equitable in the opportunities they provide students to answer questions in class, to contribute their own ideas, and to participate fully in projects in and outside of the classroom. As an institution of higher learning, The University of Alabama attaches great value to freedom of speech and open debate, but it also attaches great importance to the principles of civility and respect which govern an academic community. Harassment or other illegal discrimination against individuals or groups not only is a violation of University Policy and subject to disciplinary action, but also is inconsistent with the values and ideals of the University.

Our issues

Some of the issues we'll focus on this semester include:

- Journalism ethics (during Weeks Two and Three.)
- Changes in journalism's traditional role as gatekeeper.
- The emergence of non-traditional journalism
- How shrinking newsrooms and budgets affect coverage and decision-making.
- Bias in news coverage
- Reaching a diverse community
- News as entertainment
- The effects of PR and advertising on journalism
- Civic (also known as "public") journalism
- Objectivity, credibility, transparency
- Technology's influence on journalism and its public
- Current and continuing legal issues, with a focus on Alabama media law.
- Covering specific beats, such as politics, etc.
- **The issues you decide are important.**

Key dates for this class

Jan. 19 – First day of class.

Jan. 26 – Dr. Roberts talks ethics.

Feb. 2 – Dr. Roberts talks more ethics.

Feb. 9 to sometime in April – Student-led discussions.

March 15 – Spring Break. Stay away.

April 22, 11:59 P.M. – Final papers due