

COM 215 – 01/02 Basic Reporting Fall 2019

Schedule: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30-11:45 a.m./1:30-2:45 p.m.
Location: Caterpillar Global Communications Center 207

Instructor: Dr. Cory Barker
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Office hours: Friday, 9-11 a.m., or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

COM 215 will build on the foundations of COM 201 – Journalistic Writing and apply them through hands-on practice. The course will focus on further developing journalism skills—including newsgathering techniques, story development, advanced story structures, and interviewing—with an eye toward the production of news stories.

GOALS & LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

I recognize that many students who take this course do not strive to be journalists or consider themselves active readers of “the news.” That’s okay. My goal with COM 215 is not to convince you that journalism is the most important major or career path in media. I have two goals with the course:

- First, I want to show that journalistic skills (clear writing, interviewing, researching, and curiosity about the world) can improve anyone’s skills as a communicator and thinker.
- Second, I aim to explain how the news industry connects to the other media sectors and consistently embodies broader trends and challenges related to technological change, audience engagement, and political discourse.

We will cover a wide range of material to accomplish these goals. Some days will focus entirely on how to structure a story or get a source to email you back. Other days will highlight broader shifts in the news industry that impact how professionals do the job. I hope to create a welcoming atmosphere where you feel invited to explore and question course topics every day. I ask that you invest in the course material and consider how it interfaces with your interests. This approach will help you build a toolkit to understand journalism’s function in society as well as develop your media literacy skills.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students should:

- Demonstrate an improved competency in journalistic writing and reporting. This includes the application of key components of COM 201 (news values, leads, nut graphs, the inverted pyramid, and AP style) as well as areas new in COM 215 (newsgathering, interviewing, structure, voice, editing and revising, and digital literacy).

- Develop a clearer comprehension of and skills related to reporting and source selection to exhibit the pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.
- Fairly evaluate their work and that of others for accuracy, grammar, and style.
- Understand the evolving role and responsibility of journalists in modern society.
- Apply laws of freedom of speech and the press, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances.

MATERIALS

- John R. Bender, Lucinda D. Davenport, Michael W. Drager, and Fred Fedler, *Writing and Reporting for the Media, Eleventh or Twelfth Edition*. New York: Oxford UP, 2016/2019.
- *The AP Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. Cambridge: Perseus Publishers, 2017.
- Additional readings and resources posted on our class Sakai page.

ASSIGNMENTS

Detailed descriptions and rubrics for graded work will come as things are assigned. Your output will derive from three main areas: **exercises and projects** (30 percent of final grade), **reported stories** (60 percent), and **professionalism** (10 percent).

Exercises and projects will largely consist of activities assigned and completed during a single class meeting. This category includes short responses to textbook readings and reporting samples. It will more commonly involve applying learned techniques like diagramming news stories, writing leads and nut graphs, style and grammar prompts, and critiquing work from professionals and your peers. The first third of the semester will require you to execute a handful of brief writing and revising assignments to prepare you for the in-depth reporting you will complete later. Classroom work will be submitted on Sakai and generally cannot be made up.

However, two assignments in this category will require work outside GCC 207. First, you will work collaboratively in a multi-day team project. This assignment will ask groups to pool your skills together to engage with journalistic endeavors that go beyond interviewing and writing. Expect to do some minor multimedia production (audio and video) in this assignment. Second, you will present on a product of professional multimedia reporting (e.g., a podcast or short documentary). These individual presentations will focus on how the reporters deliver their stories to non-print audiences. I will assign topics at random. Presentations will occur in the final third of the semester.

Reporting stories will ask you to apply journalistic writing strategies and build a toolkit of reporting and newsgathering skills. You will pitch, develop, report, and write **four** stories: (1) an event cover; (2) a hard news story; (3) a feature story; and (4) a final story type of your choosing. Each of these stories will be part of a beat or broad topic coverage area.

Approximate due dates for the course’s major assignments are as follows:

Assignment	Due Date
Event Story	Week 5
Hard News Story	Week 8
Digital Team Project	Week 10

Feature Story	Week 12
Digital Reporting Presentations	Week 13/14
Final Story	Week 17

Professionalism will be established through preparation, respect for peers, active participation, integrity, and a willingness to offer and receive constructive criticism. It will also be established through attentiveness to class material and a healthy technology etiquette toward me and peers.

GRADING SCALE

Grades are assigned based on the following scale:

Percent	Grade
90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS

COM 215 will require you to use a laptop nearly every class period. In-class assignments will be submitted digitally via Sakai, Google Drive, or email. I encourage you to use **technology** (also including tablets, cell phones, and recording devices) in whatever ways that best facilitate your learning. However, please be mindful of instances that your technology use might interfere with the learning of others. I will, for instance, occasionally ask that you close your laptops and participate in other, non-technological ways. Distracting technology use will be noted and impact professionalism scores. Let’s keep an open dialogue about this throughout the semester.

Please keep a basic level of **professional communication etiquette** in mind. I will keep the class Sakai updated with course materials and regular announcements. Read them. Emails should be addressed to me and use proper grammar. I do not check my email after 6 p.m. I will do my best respond the next morning and absolutely will respond within 12 hours. Please respect my desire for work-life balance and do not send numerous follow-ups expecting that it will inspire me to respond. I love to talk to students before or after class or during office hours. Do not hesitate to ask for an alternative in-person meeting time or location.

Attendance will be taken every day. You have **three** absences to utilize for any reason. You do not need to provide documentation for these absences. I understand that there may be certain points of the semester where you need to prioritize other classes, your job, or something else. If you are regularly late to class, it will impact your professionalism grade and, if warranted, count as a full absence. Each absence after the third will negatively affect your professionalism score by 10 percent.

If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to acquire any notes from a peer or assignment prompts from me. Please do not email me simply asking for a slide deck or if you “missed anything important.” **Missed in-class work** cannot be made up.

Media careers are premised on punctuality and reliability. Journalists who miss deadlines do not often get second chances. As such, the **late policy** for COM 215 is stringent. You will have 24 hours to submit any late assignments. Late assignments submitted in the first 12 hours will receive a 25 percent grade penalty; those submitted within the next 12-hour window will receive a 50 percent grade penalty. There are few legitimate excuses for late assignments, but keep me in the loop.

Given that this is a journalism course, **writing expectations** are high. Major factual errors, including misspelling/misidentifying sources and numerical mistakes, will result in a lower grade. Style errors, typos, misspellings, grammar issues, and sloppiness in presentation will also lower your grade. I recommend [downloading and using Grammarly to proofread your work](#). It's a great free tool.

Careful consideration of topics and sources is essential to your reporting, and thus your success, in COM 215. You have an ethical responsibility to inform everyone you interview that you are a Bradley University student working on a new story for class. You should also never, ever use a family member, friend, roommate, fellow Greek life member, or close acquaintance as a source in your articles. Try to refrain from selecting beats or topics in which you are personally involved or feel strongly about. Building your reporting toolkit requires you to learn to be impartial and fair.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY

I want this all things related to this course to be fully accessible to everyone. If you have any concerns regarding learning accommodations, religious considerations, or anything at all, please communicate those to me as soon as possible. I am happy to work out a satisfactory alternative, but it is harder to accomplish at the absolute last moment.

Specific disabilities requiring alternative classroom arrangements must abide by university policy. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations in this course, please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. You must be registered with the [Office of Student Access Services](#). The SAS is located in Heitz Hall 100 and can be reached by phone at 309-677-3654. If you need help with this, let me know—I am happy to guide you through the process however I can.

[Bradley University's Counseling Center](#) offers mental health guidance to address students' personal, social and career challenges. Services include confidential mental health assessment, counseling (individual and group), and referrals. The Counseling Center can be found in Markin Center 52 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. It can also be reached by phone at 309-677-2700, and after hours at 309-677-3200. Please do not hesitate to talk to me for assistance. I will even walk you to the Counseling Center if you would like.

It can be challenging to do your best in class if you have trouble meeting basic needs like nutrition, safe shelter, and sleep. If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or lack a safe and stable place to live, I urge you to contact [Student Support Services](#) or me. We are here to help.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any breaches of university standards will be treated severely and, [as per the undergraduate handbook](#), will be reported to Residential Living and Leadership. Instances of academic misconduct may result in, though are not limited to, a zero on the assignment, failure of the course and further

potential discipline as determined by the university, up to and including the possibility of expulsion. If there are questions or concerns about the academic integrity standards, I will be more than happy to clarify expectations. Uncertainty about academic misconduct policies will not be considered a valid justification for an offense.

If tempted to commit an instance of academic dishonesty, please contact me. Rather than commit an intellectual crime, we can explore alternatives—possibly an extension or some other solution that doesn't involve risking your academic welfare.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

The schedule is likely to change as we tailor course content to your needs. Readings should be completed by the day they are listed. Check Sakai regularly for readings and updates.

WEEK 1		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Reading</i>
Th 8/29	Class Introduction & News Values	N/A
WEEK 2		
Tu 9/3	Review: Story Components & Structure	Bender, Chapters 7 & 9
Th 9/5	Review: Interviewing	Bender, Chapter 11
WEEK 3		
Tu 9/10	Beats & Developing Ideas	Beats Folder (Sakai)
Th 9/12	Covering Events & Meetings	Bender, Chapter 15
WEEK 4		
Tu 9/17	Writing Workshop: Revising	N/A
Th 9/19	Writing Workshop: Misc. Story Formats	Bender, Chapter 16
WEEK 5		
Tu 9/24	Writing Workshop: Press Releases	Bender, Chapter 19
Th 9/26	Writing Workshop: Academic Studies	Scholarship Folder (Sakai)
WEEK 6		
Tu 10/1	Hard News: Voice & Organization	Hard News Folder (Sakai)
Th 10/3	Hard News: Attribution & Quotes	Bender, Chapter 10
WEEK 7		
Tu 10/8	Broadcast Reporting & Podcasting	Bender, Chapter 13
Th 10/10	Digital/Social Media & Reporting	Digital Folder (Sakai)
WEEK 8		
Tu 10/15	No Class — Fall Break	N/A
Th 10/17	Data Journalism	Data Journalism Folder (Sakai)
WEEK 9		
Tu 10/22	Digital Team Project	N/A

Th 10/24	Digital Team Project	N/A
WEEK 10		
Tu 10/29	Digital Team Project Presentations	N/A
Th 10/31	Features: Observation & Interviews	Bender, Chapter 12
WEEK 11		
Tu 11/5	Features: Organization	Features Folder (Sakai)
Th 11/7	Features: Voice	Features Folder (Sakai)
WEEK 12		
Tu 11/12	Public Affairs Reporting	Bender, Chapter 17
Th 11/14	Investigative Reporting	Bender, Chapter 18
WEEK 13		
Tu 11/19	Investigative Reporting Workshop	IR Folder (Sakai)
Th 11/21	Digital Reporting Presentations	N/A
WEEK 14		
Tu 11/26	No Class — Thanksgiving Break	N/A
Th 11/28	No Class — Thanksgiving Break	N/A
WEEK 15		
Tu 12/3	Digital Reporting Presentations	N/A
Th 12/5	Digital Reporting Presentations	N/A
WEEK 16		
Tu 12/10	Final Stories Workshop	N/A
Th 12/12	No Class	N/A
WEEK 17		
Final Stories Due: Saturday, December 14 at 12 p.m.		