

Journalism 317

Community Journalism

Ed Mullins, 488C Phifer, 348-8592

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JN 317 Community Journalism

Spring 2001

Monday/Wednesday: 8:30-10:30 a.m.

Dr. Edward Mullins, Professor and Chairman, Department of Journalism, Room 488C Phifer Hall. Office hours by appointment or half an hour before class and one hour after class

Phone: 205-348-8592, office; 205-349-2006, home. E-mail: mullins@jn.ua.edu. Call or e-mail me at any time regarding class work.

If you expect to be late or absent, you must let me know 30 minutes before class or you will be counted absent. Just tell me why you are going to be late or absent. No questions asked. Four absences (or lateness, same thing) and you will be dropped from the course regardless of when it occurs.

Catalog Description: News, editorial, and business issues in rural, suburban, and ethnic publications and Web sites. During most semesters, students produce an issue of Alabama Journalist and make a field trip to a community publication. During Spring 2001, we will make team forays into the field to cover stories but we will not produce an issue of Alabama Journalist or take a field trip as a class. We will contribute to Dateline Alabama and to the Communicator and do background research on the Black Belt.

Textbook and materials: James Glen Stovall and Edward Mullins, The Complete Editor, Kendall/Hunt, 2000, 361 pages. AP Stylebook, recent almanac, dictionary; 8.5 x 11 portfolio or three-ring notebook with plastic inserts. Zip disk.

Purpose

This course deals with the principles, practices and culture of community journalism. The key words in community journalism are practical and technical competence, compassion, common sense, responsibility, independence, involvement, initiative, integrity, performance, people. The community journalist must be capable across a broader range of skills, qualities and behaviors than other journalists. This range embraces editorial, circulation, advertising, production, management, finance, technology and dealing with people.

Probably the two most important qualities of community journalism are common sense and understanding people. Common sense can be defined as selecting the most practical course of action from the hundreds of possibilities that exist at any moment. The expression that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and sounds like a duck it probably is a duck illustrates common sense. You can spend a lot of time trying to think of other possibilities than being a duck, but it would usually be a waste of time. The common sense community journalist manages

himself/herself and other people in a timely, common sense manner. You can apply the common sense principle to all kinds of behaviors: being prompt, telling the truth, meeting deadlines, returning phone calls, staying healthy (yes, that's mostly a matter of choice, not of chance), being reliable, dressing properly — i.e., all those so-called soft skills that turn out to be more important to career success than the hard skills, provided the hard skills aren't severely deficient. The effective community journalist holds his or her position in the public interest and by the public's trust. That's the essence of the community journalism philosophy used in this course. This trust places a great burden of responsibility on the operator of a community publication. This trust is based on the community journalist's ability to manage the qualities listed above. Probing their meanings and applications is a major objective of the course.

The community journalist cannot be the lapdog of special interests. The people's interest must come first. This is not only good journalism, but it is also good business. The community journalist should attempt to be an intellectual and moral leader in the community, but he or she cannot be an ivory tower journalist, a common scold or a know-it-all, as tempting and seductive as those things are to the person who controls what thousands of people read on a regular basis. Thinking they have to tell smart people how to behave and always knowing the best action for them to take is why so many media have such a poor image with the public today. The best community journalists lead by example, by thoughtful, comprehensive, balanced coverage, by presenting a marketplace of goods, services and ideas. This is what the public needs, not a know-it-all, smart aleck editor.

Community journalists must maintain their independence while being part of the scene and the seen, not by being isolated. They must be seen at, and participate in, the chamber, religious institutions, volunteer organizations, civic clubs, associations of owners, associations of workers. Community journalists must attend and give coverage to the public events that help define their community. It is a shame when an event attracts hundreds of people and no one from the news media show up. Each week in communities all over the nation there are activities occurring in churches, schools and other organizations that attract hundreds of citizens but not a single journalist. Maybe that is inevitable in large cities, but when it happens in small towns it's a sign of lazy, smug journalism. People look for their local news media to cover things that matter, and when large numbers are involved, it matters, one way or another. The paper must be seen at the chamber banquet, the town or religious festival, at civic clubs and special school events. But community journalists cannot allow participation to substitute for coverage and commentary about these activities. Nor can they allow their insider information to silence their voice where the public's interest is concerned. Better for them to resign from groups than compromise their journalistic role. What is even better is to educate the others involved about the value of shining a public light on all public matters.

The community journalist must be an active, not passive, journalist. There are so many things going on that the community journalist may be tempted to allow the schedules and agendas of the community to control his or her own agenda. The only way the community journalist can be ahead of the pack is to associate with it but somehow stay just far enough off to the side to be able to see potential conflicts of interest. Hindsight is easier, but foresight is better. Cynicism is to be avoided at all costs.

A community journalist can possess all the ability, compassion and integrity in the world, but those are of little value in the abstract. Community journalists must act, and not only in areas they enjoy but also in areas that they merely tolerate. For example, community journalists may enjoy college sports, but their franchise is in school and recreation league sports. Try them, you'll learn to love them, and your readers will love you for the effort. Local heroes are more interesting and relevant than professional heroes.

Finally, my association with good community journalists in many cities and several states has shown me that a compassion for and understanding of people — first those with whom you work and second those whose lives and activities you cover — are the most important factors in effective community journalism, both from a professional and financial perspective.

From my experience as a practitioner on small publications and from my observation of them since becoming a journalism educator, I believe it is the ability to assess and recruit talent, to delegate responsibility, to coach and correct performance, yes, and sometimes to direct some other careers or other media, both for your benefit and theirs, that are the most important in successful community journalism.

Assignments/Schedule of Activities Date completed by

Part I: Tooling up February 28 (midterm exam)

Topics: Word processing, spreadsheet,
Quark, Photoshop, Internet, language
writing, copy editing, headlines, layout,
Infographics

Chapters 1-10, Appendix A,
The Complete Editor

Part II: Field Work April 11

Assigned and enterprise stories for
Dateline Alabama and the Communicator.
Total number: 15

Part III: Visits Visits by community journalists, some of which we will develop into Dateline
Alabama or Communicator stories

Part IV: Portfolio April 25

Compilation of all assignments,
plus updated resume and personal page

Basic Books for Journalists

ASNE, The Local News Handbook, by the Readership Issues Committee, ASNE Publications,
Reston, Va., 1999.

Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual, Norm Goldstein, editor, New York, 1995 or later.

Thomas R. Berner, Language Skills for Journalists, Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

Theodore M. Bernstein, The Careful Writer, Atheneum, 1977.

Bernstein, Watch Your Language, Pocket Books, 1965.

John Brady, The Craft of Interviewing, Vintage Books, 1977.

John B. Bremer, Words on Words, Columbia University Press, 1980.

Brian S. Brooks, James L. Pinson and Jean Gaddy Wilson, Working with Words, St. Martin's
Press, 1997.

E.L. Callahan, Grammar for Journalists, Chilton, 1979.

Roy Copperud, A Dictionary of Usage and Style, Hawthorn Books, 1964.

Rudolph Flesch, The Art of Readable Writing, Harper & Row, 1949.

Wilson Follett, Modern American Usage: A Guide, Jacques Barzun, editor, Hill & Wang, 1966.

H.W. Fowler, A Dictionary of English Usage, Oxford Press, 1957.

Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald, *When Words Collide*, Wadsworth, 1992.
James J. Kilpatrick, *The Writer's Art*, Andrews, McMeel & Parker, 1984.
Jock Lauterer, *Community Journalism*, Iowa State University Press, 1995.
Charles M. Laymon, editor, *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, Abingdon Press, 1971.
Robert McCrum, William Cran and Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English*, Viking, 1986.
Merriam-Webster's Webster Collegiate Dictionary, latest edition, Merriam-Webster.
William Safire, *On Language*, New York Times Books, 1980.
Angela Parrington, editor, *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, Oxford University Press, 1992
Wm. David Sloan, James D. Startt, *The Media in American*, Vision Press, third edition, 1996
William Strunk Jr., and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, Macmillan, 1979.
Bruce Westley, *News Editing*, Houghton Mifflin, 1980.
World Almanac, latest edition, World Almanac Books
William Zinser, *On Writing Well*, Perennial Library, 1990.

Every day/week: Read Dateline Alabama, the CW, the Tuscaloosa News, any weekly newspaper.
Watch a newscast and listen to NPR.

Attend: Cason Narrative Writing Symposium: March 16, Bryant Conference Center, 8 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Speakers: Rick Bragg, Howell Raines, others.

Dailies

1. Alabama dailies
2. Alexander City Outlook
3. Anniston Star
4. Andalusia Star-News
5. Athens News-Courier
6. Birmingham News
7. Birmingham Post-Herald
8. Clanton Advertiser
9. Cullman Times
10. Decatur Daily
11. Dothan Eagle
12. Enterprise Ledger
13. Florence TimesDaily
14. Fort Payne Times-Journal
15. Gadsden Times
16. Huntsville Times
17. Jasper Daily Mountain Eagle
18. Lanett Valley Times-News
19. Mobile Register
20. Montgomery Advertiser
21. Opelika-Auburn News
22. Fort Payne Daily Sentinel
23. Selma Times-Journal
24. Talledega Daily Home
25. Troy Messenger
26. Tuscaloosa News

Weeklies

1. Abbeville Herald
2. Albertville Sand Mountain Reporter
3. Arab Tribune
4. Ashford Power
5. Atmore Advance
6. Auburn Lee County Eagle
7. Bay Minette Baldwin Times
8. Bessemer Western Star
9. Birmingham Alabama Messenger
10. Birmingham Business Journal
11. Brewton Standard
12. Butler Choctaw Advocate
13. Camden Wilcox Progressive Era
14. Centre Cherokee County Herald
15. Centreville Press
16. Chatom Washington County News
17. Clayton Record
18. Columbiana Shelby County Reporter
19. Cullman Tribune
20. Dadeville Record
21. Daphne Bulletin
22. Demopolis Times
23. Eclectic Observer
24. Elba Clipper
25. Eufaula Tribune
26. Eutaw Greene County Democrat
27. Eutaw Greene County Independent
28. Evergreen Conecuh Countian
29. Evergreen Courant
30. Fairhope Courier
31. Fayette Times-Record
32. Flomaton Tri-City Ledger
33. Florala News
34. Foley Onlooker
35. Fort Deposit Lowndes Signal
36. Fort Payne DeKalb Advertiser
37. Gadsden Messenger
38. Gardendale North Jefferson News
39. Greenville Advocate
40. Grove Hill Clarke County Democrat
41. Gulf Shores Islander
42. Guntersville Advertiser-Gleam
43. Haleyville Northwest Alabamian
44. Hamilton Journal Record
45. Hanceville Herald
46. Hartford News-Herald

47. Hartselle Enquirer
48. Headland Observer
49. Heflin Cleburne News
50. Jackson South Alabamian
51. Jacksonville News
52. LaFayette Sun
53. Leeds News
54. Linden Democrat-Reporter
55. Lineville/Ashland Clay Times-Journal
56. Livingston Sumter County Record-Journal
57. Luverne Journal
58. Madison County Record
59. Marion Times-Standard
60. Millbrook Community News
61. Millport West Alabama Gazette
62. Mobile Beacon
63. Monroeville Monroe Journal
64. Montgomery Independent
65. Moulton Advertiser
66. Moundville Times
67. Northport Gazette
68. Oneonta Blount Countian
69. Opp News
70. Ozark Southern Star
71. Pell City St. Clair News-Aegis
72. Phenix City Citizen
73. Piedmont Journal-Independent
74. Prattville Progress
75. Rainsville Weekly Post
76. Red Bay News
77. Roanoke Randolph Leader
78. Robertsdale Independent
79. Rockford Coosa County News
80. Rogersville East Lauderdale News
81. Russellville Franklin County Times
82. Samson Ledger
83. Sheffield Standard and Times
84. Stevenson North Jackson Progress
85. Sulligent Lamar Leader
86. Tallassee Tribune
87. Thomasville Times
88. Tusculumbia Colbert County Reporter
89. Tuskegee News
90. Union Springs Herald
91. Vernon Lamar Democrat
92. Wetumpka Herald

Final Exam: Portfolio presented the last day of class for preview, May 4. Final submission: 4:30 p.m., Friday, May 11.

