Comm 3020/STS 3021:
Science Writing for Media
Fall 2012

[The course website is on Cornell's Blackboard site, which will always have the latest syllabus updates. This version last updated 3 September 2012.]

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Time and location
Class: MW 11:15-12:05, Comstock B106
Lab: W 12:20-2:15, Mann B30B (computer lab)

Course description

What's the OVERALL GOAL?
This course is about science journalism (one aspect of "science in media"), especially "how-to-do-it." It looks at opportunities for covering science, constraints that shape that coverage, and techniques needed to write about science. You will write a lot in this course, and at the end you should know how to begin writing about science for media. We will also talk some about "why-we-do-it," but that's a secondary goal.

What are we GOING TO ACTUALLY DO?
Most of our classes will be discussions (based on readings, handouts, and your own reading and watching of media) about science journalism. Some classes will feature outside speakers, both science writers and scientists. Some classes will involve intensive review of the writing you've been doing. Some class discussions will focus on background issues that will help put science journalism in its social context. In the weekly labs, you will write, write, and write some more. All major assignments will be media stories of one kind or another.

Books and Reading

Most required readings will be on Blackboard or online. One book is required; you can purchase through your favorite online bookstore.

First, read science news – daily!
    Use your favorite site – *New York Times,* CNN, Yahoo!News, your hometown paper's website, or whatever. Other sites will be recommended on Blackboard.

Second, read science journalism commentary – daily!
>   http://ksjtracker.mit.edu (Experienced science journalists review the day's news, and also
>   comment on science journalism)
>   http://www.cjr.org/the_observatory/ (Commentary on current science journalism)
>   http://www.healthnewsreview.org/blog/ (Commentary specifically about health journalism)

Finally, some books (available via Amazon or your favorite online bookstore)
- REQUIRED: Deborah Blum, Mary Knudson, and Robin Marantz Henig ('73), eds., *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, 2nd ed. (2005). (Do not try to use the first edition – there are *substantial* changes in the second edition.) This is a series of short chapters about various aspects of science journalism – a good intro to the field.
- RECOMMENDED: Victor Cohn and Lew Cope, *News and Numbers: A Guide to Reporting Statistical Claims and Controversies in Health and Related Fields*, 2nd ed. (2001). Just what it says.
- RECOMMENDED: Dennis Meredith, *Explaining Research: How to Reach Key Audieces to Advance Your Work*. New York: Oxford University Press. (2010). See also the accompanying website, http://www.explainingresearch.com. This is the best of many "how to do it" handbooks.

And, for those looking for introductions to journalism:
- Any "introduction to media writing" textbook
- http://www.NewsU.org (requires registration, but it's free)
- http://www.courses.vcu.edu/ENG-jeh/BeginningReporting/Introduction/home.htm
- http://www.journalism.org/resources/j_tools
- http://cubreporters.org/education.html

Assignments and grading

- Weekly bulletin board posting (ungraded)
- Weekly lab assignments (ungraded)
- News tweets, due Friday, 31 August
- News brief, due Monday, 10 September
- Speech #1, due Monday, 24 September
- Blog post (news brief), due Friday, 3 October
- Speech #2, due Monday, 5 November
- Book review, due Wednesday, 28 November
- Feature:
    o Proposal, due Monday, 15 October (ungraded)
    o Outline, due Monday, 29 October (ungraded)
    o Feature, due Friday, 16 November
    o Revised feature, due 7 December

<u>Grading and related matters</u>

Deadlines, Spelling, Facts, and Grammar
Papers are due at the time specified in the assignment. Papers will be graded down for being late. Spelling errors (including typos), incorrect names, and other factual errors will count against your grade. Grammatical problems will enter into the general evaluation of your assignments.

Computers, typing, and other mechanical details
See the copy of "Bruce Lewenstein's Idiosyncratic Style Guide for Student Papers," available online through the class website. You are responsible for grammar and stylistic points listed in this document.

Grades
Some assignments will be graded; others will merely receive a check-mark. In general, grades reflect the following evaluation:

> A = Excellent story. Worthy of prominent play in a newspaper, magazine, or major website after minor editing. Reporting shows enterprise; writing shows flair.
> B = Good story. Publishable with little editing. Well-written, reported, and edited. OK on a good blog.
> C = Fair story, but one that requires substantial editing. A wordy, slow-paced story. A story that needs more reporting.
> D = Dull story. Unpublishable without rewriting or major surgery during editing. Careless or sloppy writing. Unsupported material.
> F = Unpublishable story. Poor in content or structure.

All assignments are required. Before calculating the final grade, I will drop your lowest score. If you are missing more than 2 assignments (including ungraded ones), or if you are missing the final project, you will fail the course.

The final grade will be based on: major assignments (70%), labs, class participation, and professor's discretion (30%). I use my discretion mainly to help those who have shown real improvement and effort through the semester. Be warned, however, that I can use it in ways less beneficial to you when someone tries to slouch through the entire semester.

Academic responsibility
As students at Cornell, you are subject to the University's Code of Academic Integrity. (http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html). You should familiarize yourself with the full code. The key principles are:
1. A student shall in no way misrepresent his or her work.
2. A student shall in no way fraudulently or unfairly advance his or her academic position.
3. A student shall refuse to be a party to another student's failure to maintain academic integrity.
4. A student shall not in any other manner violate the principle of academic integrity.

If you violate the code, you may be assessed severe penalties (including potentially failing the course). Please take the time to review the code. If you have any questions about whether something falls under the code, or about any other aspect of the code, please feel free to ask.

The following comments on the Code apply *for this course only*.
1. After you have written an article, you may ask classmates or friends to comment on it. Indeed, I encourage you to do so. Commenting is not editing; it is merely reading and saying, "What do you mean here?" or "This isn't clear," or "Did you check this fact?" or similar remarks. You may not ask for detailed grammatical, stylistic, or similar comments, which would constitute editing.
2. You should use standard journalistic forms to cite the source of any information you use. You will learn these forms in class; common ones are: "According to Cornell geologist Frank Rhodes," "in an article recently published by Dean Hamer," or "a Theory Center spokesperson said."

Disabilities

Cornell University (as an institution) and I (as a human being and as instructor of this course) are committed to full inclusion in education for all persons. Services and reasonable accommodations are available to persons with temporary and permanent disabilities when conditions cause barriers to equal educational opportunity. The Office of Student Disability Services (http://www.clt.cornell.edu/campus/sds/index.html) determines the eligibility of students to receive formal accommodations and works collaboratively with the student and university faculty and staff to recommend appropriate accommodations. Please visit the Student Disabilities Services site for more information about accessibility at Cornell.

Tentative Course Schedule

Note: in addition the readings listed, I will post links to many items online.

Week	Date	Topics, readings, assignments
1	22 Aug	*What is science, what is media, and so what is science in media?* Readings: Various science news sites (see Blackboard for list) LAB 1: News briefs
2	27, 29 Aug	*Basic science news* Readings: Several "handouts" on Blackboard, and various blogs by science journalists. **NOTE: Class will not meet on Wednesday, 29 August. A recorded lecture will be available online for viewing.** LAB 2: Tweet today's news **DUE: Friday, 31 August: News tweets**
3	3, 5 Sep	*Story structures* Readings: Blum, chs. 23-25, 30-34 **NOTE: No class on Monday, 3 September – Labor Day** LAB 3: Speeches
4	10, 12 Sep	*Documenting the news (reporting, quotations)* Readings: Blog posts on Jonah Lehrer case LAB 4: Speeches [*guest scientist for press conference*] **DUE: Monday, 10 Sept: News Brief**
5	17, 19 Sep	*Documenting the news (cont.)* **NOTE: No class on Monday, 17 September (Rosh Hashanah)** Readings: Blum, chs. 1, 2, 17, 18 LAB 5: Reporting

6	24, 26 Sep	*Documenting the news (cont.)*
		NOTE: No class or lab on Wednesday, 26 September (Yom Kippur)
		Readings: Examples posted on Blackboard
		LAB 6 (to be done on your own): Simplifying
		DUE: Monday, 24 September: Speech story
7	1, 3 Oct	*Simplifying and explanations*
		Readings:
		• Handouts on Blackboard
		• Meredith, chs. 6, 10
		LAB 7: Explanations
		DUE: Friday, 5 October: Blog post
8	8, 10 Oct	*Stepping back: The context for science journalism*
		NOTE: Fall Break, NO CLASS on Monday, 8 Oct
		Readings (required): Articles posted on Blackboard
		Readings (optional): Science journalism careers: Blum, chs. 4-13, 37-42
		Lab 8: Features
9	15, 17 Oct	*Planning a feature story*
		Readings: Blum, chs. 17-22 and article posted on Blackboard
		LAB 9: Profiles
		DUE: Monday, 15 October: Feature memo
10	22, 24 Oct	*The modern feature: cross-platform publishing*
		Readings: Blum, chs. 14-15, and articles posted on Blackboard
		LAB 10: Writing for new media (blogs, tweeting) [*or should I say "blogging and tweeting," otherwise known as "bleeting"?]*

11	29, 31 Oct	*Covering Controversies* Readings: • Blum, chs. 26-29, 35-36 • Current controversy stories online, to be assigned (hey, there's an election next week, there's *gotta* be some kind of controversy!) LAB 11: Environmental controversy *or* election story **DUE: Monday, 29 October: Feature Outline**
12	5, 7 Nov	*Writing about Health, Risk, and Numbers* Readings: *Health News Review* blog; Cohn, chs. 1-5 LAB 12: Dealing with numbers **DUE: Monday, 5 November: Speech #2**
13	12, 14 Nov	*Science journalism when science has been "media-lized"* Readings: various blogs on climate change and evolution, linked from Blackboard LAB 13: Cultural science writing (reviews) **DUE: Friday, 16 November: Feature story**
14	19, 21 Nov	*Covering science in culture* Readings: various book, art, and exhibition reviews linked from Blackboard **NOTE: Thanksgiving. Class on Wednesday will meet in Prof. Lewenstein's office; NO LAB**
15	26, 28 Nov	*Putting all the pieces together: Science writing for media* Readings: Current science news sites, linked from Blackboard LAB 14: Science writing for media **DUE (Wednesday, 28 Nov): Book review**
Finals		**REVISED FEATURE DUE:** Friday, 7 December, 4:30 pm (the time an exam for this course would have ended)