

School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies

MDIA 304-News Culture

Wednesday 1:00-2:00 PM; Thursday 12-1 PM—HM105

Term 2 2008

Coordinating Instructor: Dr. Douglas A. Van Belle

Office: KP44-210

Office Hours: 1-3PM Thursdays, 2-4PM Wednesdays

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Course Aims

This course is intended to provide students with a perspective on the culture of the news profession. To accomplish this, students must first understand who and what journalists are. How are they trained? What does their job entail? What are they producing and how? From that foundation, a variety of perspectives on journalists, journalism and their interrelationships with society are explored. Students need to be aware that this is not a course for training journalists. It is intended to provide a familiarity with the profession sufficient to analyze the culture that permeates it.

Course Objectives

Students are expected to be able to:

- 1) Demonstrate a familiarity with some of the basic skills expected of a journalist.
- 2) Demonstrate an understanding of how the profession shapes news content and delivery.
- 3) Identify and analyze aspects of the dynamic tension between the cultures within and around the profession.
- 4) Identify and analyze political and social influences on the news profession
- 5) Demonstrate a comprehension and ability to apply theories and findings from the text, ancillary readings and self-selected readings.

Expectations and Presumptions

Students are presumed to have a high level of interest in the news as a subject of analysis and inquiry.

Students are presumed to have all of the knowledge and skills of a third-year university student. This includes the ability to write coherent argumentative papers of a modest length, the ability to independently extract relevant information from assigned readings and the ability to prepare for tests.

As documented in the course catalog, the average student is expected to commit a full 18 hours per week to a third-year paper. This means 15 hours of reading, study, assignments and writing in addition to lectures and tutorials. If you read slowly, have trouble writing in English or have other difficulties working efficiently, you should commit additional time as needed.

Students are expected to be reasonably computer literate. This includes the ability to use a word processor, the ability search and explore the Internet and competence using email as a means of communicating with the course coordinator and tutor.

All students will be assessed with absolute equality. No exceptions to course requirements will be made for personal circumstance of any kind. Students with documented special needs will be accommodated on a case by case basis, but as per university policy accommodations will only be made to help the student attain the required quality of work. There will be no adjustments to the work expected from the student. The course is designed to minimize the need to make such accommodations, but students needing accommodations should arrange for them as soon as possible during the term.

Students are expected to be able to work comfortably in English. This includes understanding lectures, reading, writing, speaking and all other aspects of university work. An occasional, minor grammatical or vocabulary error in written English will be overlooked so long as the substantive content remains clear. No other adjustments to assessment or course material will be made for non-native English speakers or others who might have language difficulties. Students experiencing language difficulties are encouraged to use the variety of support mechanisms provided by the university and should feel free to ask their tutor or the instructor for assistance in locating those resources.

Texts, Required Materials, and Expenses

All students are expected to purchase the required text. Every effort has been made to insure that the class materials are reasonably priced but books are expensive. The book students are required to purchase is:

Bruce Grundy (2007) *So You Want to Be a Journalist*. Cambridge.

MDIA 304 ancillary readings: All ancillary readings are required and every effort will be made to make them available free of charge to students, either on-line through the VUW library or through Blackboard

Students are also required read the Dominion Post, daily, throughout the semester.

In addition, students will be expected to read independently as needed for the completion of assignments and this may require the payment of interlibrary loan fees and/or the purchase of additional reading materials.

Tests and Assessed Assignments

This course is internally assessed. Below is an outline of the points of student assessment. These criteria are final for Term 2-2008 and supersede all other descriptions or depictions.

All four assessments must be completed to pass this course.

Please note the definition of completion for the tutorial assignments in its description.

Mid-Term Test	30%
Final Test	30%
Paper	30%
Tutorial Assignments	10%
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Total	100%

Mid-Term Test, Thursday 14-8-2008

The Mid-Term test is primarily focused on the student's ability to meet Objectives 1, 2 and 4. The test will be held in the lecture theater. Testing accommodations will be made as required but official university procedures must be followed to enable the instructor to provide those accommodations. Make up tests will only be offered to students with documented emergencies and please do note that the university is very strict about what counts as a justification for a make up test. **TRAVEL PLANS FOR THE BREAK ARE NOT AN ACCEPTIBLE JUSTIFICATION FOR RESCHEDULING TESTING.**

Paper, Due Tuesday 30-9-2008 1:59 PM

This paper is to be placed in the essay submission box in the Media Studies office, located on the second floor of KP-42. It must include a signed cover sheet. Late papers will be accepted. However, without a documented excuse that meets the university requirements for granting an extension, late papers will suffer a 15% penalty, with an additional 5% taken off for each working day after 2 October, 2008. Assignments turned in after Tuesday, 7 October, 2008 will still count as completing the assignment, enabling a student to pass the course, but will be limited to a maximum grade of 51%. The assignment is primarily intended to evaluate Objectives 3 and 5.

Final Test, Thursday 9-10-2008

The final test is focused on the student's ability to meet Objectives 2-5. The test will be held in the lecture theater. Testing accommodations will be made as required but official university procedures must be followed to enable the instructor to provide those accommodations. Make up tests will only be offered to students with documented emergencies and please do note that the university is very strict about what counts as a justification for a make up test. **TRAVEL PLANS FOR THE BREAK ARE NOT AN ACCEPTIBLE JUSTIFICATION FOR RESCHEDULING TESTING.**

Tutorial Assignments

Tutorial assignments will be assigned and explained during tutorials and will be due at the start of tutorial the following week. These short assignments test Objective 1 but will in some way address all 5 course objectives. They are intended primarily as exercises to enhance tutorial discussions and student engagement with lecture material. They are marked by the tutor on an acceptable/not-acceptable basis. Students must attend at least 70% of tutorials and complete 50% of tutorial assignments to complete this assessment. Full credit will only be given to students who attend all tutorials and complete all

assignments. Just over half of the tutorial assignments will be completed before the midterm break and students will be provided an indication of their tutorial performance at that point.

Additional notes on written assignments.

Always keep a copy of the finished essay or take-home test. It is your responsibility to submit the assignment on time, and in the event of loss, regardless of fault, it is in your best interest to be able to immediately make a new copy available to your tutor.

All text should be typed, double-spaced with a 12 point serif font (Times Roman preferred) for the main essay text and a 10 point font for footnote/endnote details.

The essay must include a signed Media Studies cover page. It must be stapled and each page numbered. Do not use plastic covers or binders.

Contacting the Coordinating Instructor

Students who wish to make contact should use the email address provided above for anything official or otherwise requiring a response. The other way to make contact is to drop by during posted office hours.

Blackboard

Blackboard will be used sparingly as a bulletin board for this course. Copies of assignment handouts and a few other notices will be posted on blackboard during the course of the term. It will not be used for direct communication. Students wishing to contact the coordinating instructor should not use the Blackboard system and should send an email directly to the instructor.

Lecture notes will not be posted on Blackboard.

GENERAL UNIVERSITY STATUTES AND POLICIES

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the Victoria University Calendar available in hardcopy or under "about Victoria" on the Victoria homepage at:

http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/calendar_intro.html

Information on the following topics is available electronically under "Course Outline

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/newspubs/universitypubs.aspx#general>

- Academic Grievances
- Student and Staff Conduct
- Meeting the Needs of Students with Impairments
- Student Support

Course Schedule

Lecture notes, powerpoint slides and other aspects of what is presented in lectures will not be provided outside of those lectures. Students missing a lecture will have to find another student willing to share notes and discuss that lecture.

Do note that the readings do not proceed straight through the text.

Section 1 The Reporter and the Culture of a Profession

Week 1

Tutorial Activity: Tutorial signups.

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 9-7-2008 Introduction. Teaching strategy and related suggestions for learning strategies. Tutorial signups. The paper.

Readings for Thursday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapter 1, pp 7-51

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 10-7-2008 Story telling and the dramatic imperative inherent in newswriting. The three part story structure.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 2: Watch a children's cartoon (or read a children's book) and write a 100 word newspaper story as if reporting the events of the story.

Readings For Week 2 Wednesday Lecture:

Grundy Chapter 8, pp197-213

Week 2

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 16-7-2008 Reporting and Editing for the Spatial Structure of Newspapers. Inverted Pyramid and Beyond.

Tutorial Activity: Exchange and critique newspaper news stories. Discuss strategies for maximizing the value of tutorials.

Readings for Week 2 Thursday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapter 2, pp 53-72

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 17-7-2008 Television News Reporting-The Academic Perspective.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 3: Watch an episode of Shortland Street and note what you believe to be dramatic elements in the story. Please type out these notes and turn in a

copy. Considering what you have identified as dramatic, rewrite your newspaper story as a radio news spot.

Readings for Week 3 Wednesday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapter 3, pp 73-106

Week 3

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 23-7-2008 The Dramatic Imperative in News Reporting. The Four Laws of the Soap Opera.

Tutorial Activity: Use your radio story to discuss the dramatic.

Readings for Week 3 Thursday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapter 4, pp 107-126

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 24-7-2008 Don't be Fooled by the Ideals. Some of the Mundane Realities of Working as a Reporter.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 4:

Pick a scientific topic, other than global warming, and conduct some background research to establish a factual base from which you might write a news story.

Readings for Week 4 Wednesday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapters 13 and 14, pp 283-316

Week 4

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 30-7-2008 Structuring Journalistic Inquiry

Tutorial Activity: Discuss the challenge of determining what a fact is in an environment of interpretation and framing.

Readings for Week 4 Thursday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapter 15, pp 317-331

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 31-7-2008 Interviewing

Readings for Week 5 Wednesday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapter 5 and 6, pp 127-171

Tutorial Assignment for Week 5:

Write up a set of questions for interviewing Robbie Deans and Graham Henry.

Week 5

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 6-8-2008 The Devil is in the Details. Technical Language Errors and the Affect Upon Audience Trust.

Tutorial Activity: Discuss the connection between presumed audience and your interview questions. Discuss test

Readings for Week 5 Thursday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapter 7, pp 171-196

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 7-8-2008 The visual news media.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 6: Study for test.

Readings for Week 6 Wednesday Lecture:

Grundy, Chapter 16, pp 335-342

Week 6:

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 13-8-2008 Ideals, Self-selection and the Demographics of Reporters.

Tutorial Activity: Term paper assignment discussed.

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 14-8-2008 Test

Tutorial Assignment for Week 7: None.

Readings for Week 7 Wednesday Lecture:

None

Section 2 The Cultural Landscape of the Profession

Week 7

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 3-9-2008 Stories from the News Studio
Guest lecturer- Gordon McBride, TV3

Tutorial Activity:

TBA

Readings for Week 7 Thursday Lecture:

TBA

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 4-9-2008 The New Zealand Newspaper Industry
Guest Lecture from APN New Zealand

Tutorial Assignment for Week 8:

TBA

Readings for Week 8 Wednesday Lecture:

TBA

Week 8:

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 10-9-2008 Rugby Provinces and the Landscape of New Zealand News.
Paul J. Davies-Guest Lecturer

Tutorial Activity: TBA

Readings for Week 8 Thursday Lecture: TBA

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 11-9-2008 Idealistic Presumption of News as the Fourth Estate, and
Democratic Governance

Tutorial Assignment for Week 9:

Comparison of the promotion materials of British, NZ and American Journalism Schools
Find the web site for a journalism program from each of the aforementioned locals and
examine what they emphasize in the way they promote themselves to students. Write a
bullet point list of differences and be prepared to discuss how the ideals implicit or explicit
in that material might influence the self-selection of who becomes a journalist.

Readings for Week 9 Wednesday Lecture: TBA

Week 9

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 17-9-2008 Educating Journalists Part 1: What the journalism industry
expects of its new recruits. A rundown of the standard journalism curriculum, what's
taught and how it is taught, ongoing training once journalists enter the industry.

Guest Lecturer:

Grant Hannis-Head of Journalism Programme-Massey University at Wellington

Tutorial Activity: Discussion of self-selection of journalists and how that might shape the culture in the newsroom.

Readings for Week 9 Thursday Lecture:

TBA

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 18-9-2008 Educating Journalists Part 2: Who become journalists? A rundown on what sort of people enter journalism courses, obstacles to becoming a journalist, what applicants can do to increase their chances of being selected, what affirmative action programmes are in place, who stay in journalism..

Guest Lecturer:

Grant Hannis-Head of Journalism Programme-Massey University at Wellington

Tutorial Assignment for Week 10: Bring full draft of term paper to tutorial for paper workshop

Readings for Week 10 Wednesday Lecture:

Week 10

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 24-9-2008 Stories from the Newsroom

Guest Lecturer

Tutorial Activity: Paper Workshop

Readings for Week 10 Thursday Lecture:

TBA

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 25-9-2008 Stories From the Studio

Guest Lecturer

Tutorial Assignment for Week 11: Prepare abstract of term paper

Readings for Week 11 Wednesday Lecture:

None

**Paper Assignment Due
Tuesday 30 September, 2008 1:59 PM**

Week 11

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 1-10-2008 Technology and Change: The Case For Information Revolution as Transformative.

Tutorial Activity:

Present abstract of term paper.

Readings for Week 11 Thursday Lecture:

David Domingo (2008) Interactivity in the daily routines of online newsrooms: dealing with an uncomfortable myth. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13: 680-704.

Available through the library database- Wiley Interscience. Access this database through the library website and search using the full title of the article.

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 2-10-2008 Technology and Change: The Case For Information Revolution as More of the Same.

Tutorial Assignment for Week 12:

None

Readings for Week 12 Wednesday Lecture:

None

Week 12

Lecture Topic:

Wednesday 9-10-2008 Press Freedom and the Globalization of Western News Culture

Tutorial Activity: Last chance for questions.

Lecture Topic:

Thursday 9-10-2008 Test

Paper Assignment

Reporting: The Clash of News Cultures

In order to better enable students to identify points and arguments of potential relevance as they arise during the course, a general outline of the kind of paper the student will be asked to write is provided here. Do note that this is not the assignment. The assignment will fit within the boundaries identified here but details and the specifics of the paper assignment will be provided and discussed during tutorials of week 6.

News culture is not a singular concept. It is a mishmash of social ideals, social-political roles, professional ideals, professional practices, imperatives of the medium and business realities of the industry. The term paper will examine news coverage of an issue where the clash of two or more elements of news culture has become apparent in the coverage. For example the dramatic imperative that arises from journalism practice and the business reality of news might compromise the social ideal of news media as educator. Or the professional practice of reporting both sides of an issue as a means of neutral and unbiased reporting might undermine the professional ideal of accurate and objective reporting by presenting an image of two balanced sides when a clear majority and minority exist in a lopsided debate.

There will be a very wide variety of ways that students will be able to approach this idea of clashing news cultures and we advise students not to try to select coverage for analysis or to decide on the point or points they want to argue in their paper until the detailed assignment is handed out in week 6. Until that time students will simply want to take a bit of extra time to consider the lecture and reading material in terms of how the facets of culture might influence coverage and how that might demonstrate possible clashes.

Before week 6 students should also familiarize themselves with the essay guidelines that will be used for this course.

http://www.cqpress.com/%5Cdocs%5Ccollege%5CVanBelle_WritingAppendix.pdf