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JRNL 471.01: Legislative Reporting - Covering the Legislature

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Legislative Reporting: Course Syllabus

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Winter/Spring 2017
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Office Hours: We will meet in person every two weeks in Helena but I am otherwise available between the hours of noon and 5 p.m. for editing and questions via email, phone, text and Google Drive.

CLASS DATES AND LOCATION:

This is a project-based class in which students cover the Montana Legislature from Helena for scores of broadcasters and newspapers across the state. It runs from the start of each legislative session in January to end of the legislative session, often at the end of April or beginning of May.

TECH RESOURCES:

UMOnline (406) 243-6367, coursewaresupport@umontana.edu, http://umonline.umt.edu (Contact Us tab).

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OUTCOMES:

UM Legislative News Service (broadcast and online) students will produce at least two daily broadcast stories for distribution to Montana Broadcasters Association members and other news organizations that sign up for the service.

UM Community News Service (print and online) students will produce two reports a week, including one feature and one roundup of briefs, for Montana Newspaper Association members and other news organizations that sign up for that service.

Students will learn and improve skills including interviewing, reporting, curating, writing and producing political and government stories. They will also experiment in methods of delivery, including social media, email newsletters, curation, data visualization and interactivity.

Specifically, successful students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of truth, accuracy and fairness.
- Research and evaluate information.
- Use appropriate tools and technology.

PREREQUISITE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE:

Students must have successfully passed J270 and ideally Public Affairs Reporting. Any experience writing, producing or reporting political stories for online, print or Radio/TV news organizations is desirable, but not mandatory.

COURSE PARTICIPATION:

UM Community News Students will file both the feature and the roundup each Friday by noon and then be available for edits and rewrites throughout the day Friday. Instructor will send pieces, as well as photographs and captions, to the distribution list either on Saturday or Sunday mornings.

The daily schedule for the broadcasters in the UM Legislative News Service is as follows:

Monday-Friday:

WRAP UP
This wraps up the day's news. Often it tackles one issue or bill. These are one minute exactly, but you have to leave room for the 10-second tag, so your script should be 50 seconds long.
Deadline: Scripts to Courtney by 2:30, full recorded items to Courtney by 3:30 p.m. **(Must be emailed to stations before 4:00 p.m.)**
- Self-contained with open & sponsor close
- Should include at least 1 or 2 bites
- File name should be xgrDATEWrap_up.doc/.mp3

Sound Bites
These are soundbites that stations use with their own anchors. They can be from the wrap up or preview topics, but can be something different as well. Scripts don't need lead-in or tag, but they should be complete scripts for anchors to read.
Deadline: Send scripts and mp3s as early as possible, preferably before or at the same time that initial scripts come in (2:30).
- 3 or 4 sound bites on different topics (These are standalone bites, so the audio just needs to be the bite. No anchoring required.)
- Each bite gets own script with lead in and tag
- Script and mp3 **must have matching file names**: name these xgrDATEbite_slug.doc/.mp3

PREVIEW

This previews a bill or issue coming up the next day. These are also one minute exactly, but you have to leave room for the 10-second tag, so your script should be 50 seconds long.

Deadline: Script to Courtney by 3:45, fully recorded preview by 4:45 (**Must in day's public folder by no later than 5 p.m.)**

- Self contained with open & sponsor close
- Bites preferred but not necessary
- Name the file xgrDATEPreview.doc/.mp3

Here's the ideal flow to the afternoon:

2:30: Scripts (both bite scripts and wrap up) to Courtney
3:00: Get wrap-up script back from Courtney and record
3:30: Send produced mp3 and final script to Courtney for review. Courtney will make final changes to script and (although hopefully never) have you rerecord to correct any mistakes.
3:30: Courtney will edit bite scripts after editing wrap up
3:30-4:00: Send email to distribution list with link to the day's folder on Google Drive.
4:15: (Or earlier) Put bite scripts and bite mp3s in public folder.
3:45: Send preview script to Courtney
4:15: Get script back from Courtney and record
4:30-4:45: Put final preview and script in the day's folder.

Remember: Make no time-sensitive references (no "today", "tomorrow", etc.) Use the day of the week. "On Tuesday, lawmakers…"

Start the updates with "With your legislative news update I'm _____"

PACKAGES
- If there is a particularly big story with great sound, produce a package of 1:30-2:00 in length.
- This is the least-aired product, so only do it when you have time and content warrants.

GRADING:

Students are graded in this class on their overall performance by the end of the legislative session.

Grades will be based on a scale of 100 percent and will use the University of Montana's plus/minus system. Letter grades will not be used in this course, although the final grade (per requirement) will be given as a letter grade. The equivalents are as follows:

90 - 100 percent: A

80 - 89 percent: B
70 - 79 percent: C
60 - 69 percent: D
50 - 59 percent: F

UM's plus/minus system also makes the following distinctions:

A+: 97-100
A: 93-96
A-: 90-92
B+: 87-89
B: 83-86
B-: 80-82
C+: 77-79
C: 73-76
C-: 70-72
D+: 67-69
D: 63-66
D-: 60-62
F: 59 or lower

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own. Think of it as stealing words or ideas without giving the original writer credit. Professionals get fired for doing this. It could result F for the course. The solution is simple: When in doubt, attribute.

Academic honesty:

Misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the university. Students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code.

No double dipping:

You may not submit any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class unless you receive approval from the professor of this course. Doing so without permission will result in an F for the assignment, and could result in an F for the course.

Accommodation for students with disabilities:

This course is accessible to otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult with the instructor. [Disability Services for Students](#) will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process.