JMC-325W-1: Reporting for the Mass Media  
(Fall 2016, 1:55-2:10 MWF; Library 223)

Jim McPherson, Ph.D.   Office: Lindeman 112  
Office phone: 777-4429   Home phone: 326-2026  
Email: jmcpherson@whitworth.edu   Blog: http://jmcpherson.wordpress.com  
Twitter: @JimBMcPherson  
Also see Communication Studies on Facebook & Twitter (@WhitCommStudies)

Office hours: 9-3 Tuesdays or by appt. I will rarely be on campus on Thursdays.  
(Note: The students who do the best in this class tend to be the ones who stop in to discuss story ideas, drafts, etc.)

What you’ll need:
1. *Inside Reporting* (any edition OK; later ones are better) by Tim Harrower.  
3. *The Penguin Handbook* or other grammar guide  
4. *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manuel*  
5. Your own blog, which you will link to the class blog  
6. A Twitter account that I can follow  
7. Access to a daily newspaper and the *Whitworthian*  
9. Notebook and pen/pencil for taking notes – every day  
10. Pocket folder for syllabus, handouts, returned work, etc.  
11. Sharp pencils for editing copy  
12. **On-time attendance** at every class session. Yes, I know it’s right after lunch, and that it snows in Spokane. Yes, I know that if you come just in time for this class you may not find a convenient place to park. Those excuses won't work with an employer. There are no automatic makeups. In-class assignments cannot be made up without a university-approved excuse, and you are responsible for finding out about anything assigned in your absence. Barring your own death or possibly dismemberment, no late papers will be accepted.

By the end of the semester, you should:
- Be adept at identifying elements that make something “newsworthy.”  
- Have improved your news writing and feature writing skills enough to be comfortable in an entry-level journalism or public relations job  
- Know basic AP style rules for common usage, and know to look up others.  
- Be able to gain information needed for meaningful reporting, from a variety of sources, based on interviewing and research skills.  
- Be able to construct coherent stories in a variety of ways from a variety of sources, including documents, meetings, speeches and/or interviews that you conduct.
Grading:

This may be the most difficult and most time consuming course I teach. It’s not a difficult course to pass (few are, outside of math and some of the sciences), but it is very difficult to get an A. Grading is based on writing assignments and exercises, both in and out of class. Exercises and quizzes will cover course materials and such things as grammar, Associated Press style rules and spelling. Major assignments count 50-100 points each.

Ten-point exercises/quizzes **cannot be made up.** The lowest 10-point grade will be dropped. “Real-world” inaccuracy leads to lawsuits, lost accounts, professional embarrassment and/or job loss. On major assignments, **at least 10 points will be deducted for a misspelled name or other major factual error.**

Spelling, grammar and style errors will significantly affect your grade; frequent use of a dictionary and appropriate style manuals is recommended, and you are urged to learn style rules and symbols quickly. At least one point will be deducted for each error of spelling, grammar or AP style. Keep in mind that this is a reporting class, and I assume you have a grasp of the writing skills you need—and that you know how to use the AP Stylebook and a grammar guide.

This course will focus on the following departmental goals:

2. **Demonstrate writing skills required to excel in an entry-level communications-related job and/or graduate school.** Students will be able to gather information and present it clearly, concisely, accurately, coherently and creatively to a target audience. Students will present information both to more formal academic and to mass audiences. Students will demonstrate careful, honest and imaginative work at each stage of the writing process: in generating ideas, gathering and organizing information, and revising their work.

5. **Demonstrate critical thinking skills required to excel in the intellectual, professional and personal dimensions of life.** Students will be able to apply higher level thinking skills to human communication situations. Higher level thinking skills include: application of communication principles in the classroom and beyond; analysis of the parts, organization, arrangement, relationships and principles of communication; synthesis of parts of communication to produce unique communication messages; and evaluation of communication by making appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative judgments of communication; practice defining, resolving and defending sound ethical decisions.

Tips for success:

As noted, I assume that you have better-than-average writing ability. Still, the most important aspect of learning to write well is to write a lot. Learning to write in a relatively new style isn’t easy, and you can’t learn it without doing it.
A second key to learning to write well is to read a lot. Reading anything, including novels, helps develop an eye and ear for language. Of course, you should read/review the textbook ahead of time – lectures are intended to supplement the text, not to replace it. Perhaps more importantly, you should read the newspaper every day, read a variety of magazines and Web sites, and watch television news regularly. You should also read this syllabus, of course – if you copy and paste this sentence by the beginning of class on Friday, Sept. 9, you will earn 10 points of extra credit.

Below are some tips for improving your writing:

• Talk to the instructor and others about your ideas and your progress before completing the story. Check your assumptions
• Proofread hard copy, not just the computer screen – forward and backward.
• Finish well before the deadline – factual errors hurt more than leaving out a few minor details.
• Go over assignments when you get them back, and make sure you understand any criticism – repeated errors are worse than first-time errors. Don’t automatically assume I’m right. If you don’t understand why I marked something, perhaps I made a mistake.
• Try to think of each exercise as a learning opportunity, rather than as a way of keeping you busy or making you suffer.
• What you don’t know, ask. If you don’t understand something, or are getting low grades, please see me outside of class. It is important to me that you succeed.
• When you read outside of class, focus on the specific types of writing that you will do next in class. Pay attention to how the pros do it.
• Use a checklist: http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2015/02/journalism-professors-should-teach-accuracy-checklists/

Cheating policy:

Please note that I take extremely seriously the university’s policy on the need for academic honesty in all your work. I refer you to the Whitworth Catalog, and the current Student Handbook, where guidelines on plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are spelled out. Any form of dishonesty in an assignment will lead to a zero on the assignment, and I reserve the right to give a grade of F for the course as well. Instances of plagiarism are reported to the associate provost of instruction.

Except when told to do so, you should not read or discuss anyone else’s class work, or let anyone else read yours. Do not fabricate sources, interviews or quotes. Anyone caught cheating should expect to fail the course and be reported to college administrators. If you’re not sure if something is academically dishonest, it probably is. Check with the student handbook (or me) if in doubt. You must properly cite the sources you use. Plagiarism is defined by Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary as to steal or pass off the ideas or words of another as one’s own, or to use a created production without crediting the source. The Penguin Handbook also has a section on plagiarism.
Grade sheet used for 50-point story assignments*:

_____/5 Lead (including slug, heading and lead; deduct 2.5 points for “label” lead)
_____/5 News emphasis/audience consideration and links (Did you find what was most relevant to your readers and include/highlight it?)
_____/10 Grammar & syntax (Lose one point for each grammar/syntax error)
_____/10 AP style & spelling (Lose one point for each AP style or spelling error)
_____/10 Quotes & attribution (appropriate number & types of sources, quote selection, attribution use and placement, etc.)
_____/10 Overall (organization, focus, cohesiveness, transitions, etc.)

Deductions for factual errors, etc. (at least 5 points for any minor factual error, at least 10 points for any major factual error)

Extra credit for blog photos, video or graphics (up to 5 points)

_____/50 Total

* All numbers doubled for the story package

What is an “A”?

In general, written assignments will be graded according to the following:

A: An “A” paper is exceptionally well-written, thorough, and essentially free of errors in style and grammar (at least 1 point deducted for each such error). The lead is clear, and a reader can quickly grasp the point of the story. The story has an appropriate number and variety of sources and is meaningful and well organized, with effective transitions, quotes and descriptions. Copy is ready for publication or broadcast.

B: Copy is well-written, but may contain minor errors in style and/or grammar. Most of the information is presented clearly. Another source may be needed. Minimal editing required.

C: Writing is poorly organized, and/or sources are weak. It may have a rambling, vague lead, a poorly constructed body, and/or an excess of errors in style and/or grammar. Substantial editing required.

D: Copy lacks organization or purpose, or key sources are missing. It may contain many of the necessary elements, but requires major rewriting to make those elements cohesive and meaningful. Extensive editing required.

F: Copy is incomplete, confusing, libelous and/or full of errors, or it contains a major factual error.

Note-taking & laptops:

The course is taught in a computer lab, so there is no need to bring a computer. Laptops must remain closed during class, except during designated times. All notes – in class, and in interviews for stories – must be taken with pen or pencil and paper.
**Course blog:**
Stories will be posted on the course blog ([http://jmc325.wordpress.com/](http://jmc325.wordpress.com/)) throughout the semester. You will receive (if you haven’t already) an invitation to join the blog as a contributor. Accept the invitation.

**Twitter:**
Media professionals are expected to be adept with social media. You must have a Twitter account that I can follow during this semester.

**Professionalism:**
I **highly recommend** that you be on the staff of *The Whitworthian* or the Beyond the Pines PR agency **this semester and every semester from now until you graduate**. That experience will mean more to prospective future employers than your GPA or any class you take.

This is an upper-division class; the assumption is that you are within a year or two of becoming a professional. As such, you will be expected to act in a professional manner. Professionals share the following traits:

- They understand not only what they are doing, but why.
- They dress and act in a manner that draws respect from other professionals.
- They are capable of both accepting and offering meaningful, fact-based criticism.
- They are prepared for each meeting, and have read relevant materials before the meeting begins.
- They respect other professionals and they make personal sacrifices on behalf of the profession or to support other professionals.
- They like challenges, enjoy learning new things, and adapt to changing situations.
- They share credit, and accept responsibility.
- They accept that ambiguity is a part of life, asking questions when they do not understand.
- They don’t whine.

*Note: Professionals in both journalism and public relations regularly rank Reporting as the most important class they took in school.*

*To do almost anything well is as easy as PIE:*

**Preparation, Implementation, Evaluation**

Many people fail because they concentrate only on the “I”
In-class interviews:
By Friday, Sept. 16, you must turn in two copies of a current resumé for yourself. Starting on Sept. 26, on each Monday and Wednesday one student will conduct a 10-minute interview of another student, based on information gleaned from his/her resumé. Each student in the class will take notes on the content of the interview and on the performance of the interviewer. The class will then critique the interview. The idea is to teach and learn from one another.

The interviewer and subject both will be graded (maximum 10 points for each). If you are the interviewer, you must turn in a list of at least 10 questions before the interview begins; you will be graded on the quality of the questions and on the interview itself. If you are the person being interviewed, you must turn in a typewritten report (one page, double-spaced) critiquing the interviewer. That will be due at the beginning of the following class period.

Mini field trips:
On some Fridays during the semester you will leave the classroom to go elsewhere on (or slightly off) campus. If you're not here at the beginning of class, you will miss the exercise – and will be unable to turn in any story due that day (resulting in a "zero"). Dress warmly, wear appropriate shoes, and bring a notebook and pen or pencil.

Exercises:
A number of 10-point exercises/quizzes will be assigned throughout the semester. Some will be due during the same period in which they are assigned, while others will be due for the next class period. You may use your own AP Stylebook for any quiz. You cannot make up any in-class assignment missed, and in case of absence you are responsible for finding out if you have an assignment due for an upcoming class. No late assignments will be accepted.

Story memos:
Each story you write must be based on a typed memo approved (and graded, worth 10 points each for up to six memos) by the professor. You must convince me that your story is “doable” and unique, that you understand the relevant issues, that you can meet your deadline, and that you can fulfill legal obligations and ethical expectations. You cannot do a story on a topic that someone else is covering, or that the Whitworthian has covered within the past year. I am unlikely to approve stories based on interviews with Beck Taylor, any university dean or Leonard Oakland, or which use sources affiliated with the communication department, the health center, leadership studies, the theatre department, the athletic department, landscaping services, Young Life, off-campus study programs, student housing, or food services at Whitworth University. Do not use communication majors, your roommates or anyone related to you as sources. You may not do a story about any program or class in which you participate, or one that focuses on any person involved with your own major.
Each memo must include the following information:
• Proposed subject of story
• Where the idea came from (based on story you’ve seen elsewhere, personal curiosity, etc.)
• Research you’ve already done, if any
• Names and titles of proposed human sources (note the plural)
• Other sources you expect to use, and why
• Appropriate publication besides the blog, and why the story is appropriate for the publication

Submitting assignments:

Give me a hard copy and other required items in a pocket folder (see many more details below) on the due date for all assignments – except the speech story, which you may submit via e-mail. Also post stories to the class blog as described below.

Major writing assignments:

Important: Use a pocket folder for submitting each story (except the speech story and your personal blog entries) and accompanying materials. Each story is to be submitted at the beginning of class (no late papers accepted). Each must include a separate typed sheet that lists contact information (phone number and email address) for yourself and all human sources used, and links for any information gathered off the Internet. In addition, you must turn in your handwritten notes, the approved story memo AND a relevant graphic element (photo used with permission or art done by hand or on computer) for each story. No anonymous sources may be used, and all sources must be told that your story will be posted on a public blog and may be published in the Whitworthian.

Primary interviews must be done in person, though the phone is fine for follow-up interviews. E-mail “interviews” are absolutely forbidden.

Your own blog (50 points). The subject may be anything you like, ideally something on which you have some expertise. You must post something to your blog at least 10 times during the semester, not more than twice in any one week. (You can post more often, but I’ll only give credit for two per week.) I will grade spelling and grammar on your blog, which must be linked to the course blog.

Speech or meeting (50 points). At least three options will be assigned. Cover the speech or meeting as if you were a reporter. The story will be due via email before 9 a.m. the following day. You may practice by covering an earlier speech or meeting (any setting, including your pastor’s Sunday sermon) and having me review it for no grade. No revision permitted, though you may do more than one of the assigned options for the highest possible grade. No handwritten notes need be submitted, nor will this story be posted on the course blog.

Political story (50 points) due Friday, 9/30. Based on approved story memo, and on interviews with at least three people, this story should cover report on something related
to the upcoming elections. Must be timely and relevant to the audience designated in your memo.

**Political story revision** (50 points) **Friday, 10/14.** Attach the graded original (with grade sheet), and post the story, with at least one relevant photo (taken with your phone is fine) on the course blog with appropriate links before class begins. Provide relevant links.

**Press conference** (25 points). On the evening of **Tuesday, Oct. 25**, we will do a joint exercise with Dr. Erica Salkin’s PR class. The story will be due at the beginning of class the following day.

**Public records story** (50 points) **Wednesday, 11/2.** Based on approved story memo. Must incorporate information from human sources and public records you’ve gathered from government or non-profit sources. (Be on the lookout for ideas while doing your political story.) Attach copies of records used. Story must be timely and relevant to the audience designated in your memo.

**Public records story revision** (50 points) **due Wednesday, 11/16.** Attach the graded original (with grade sheet) and post the story on the course blog with appropriate links (including to records) before class begins.

**Issue story with sidebars** (100 points) **Friday, 10/2.** In-depth profile or issue package that has at least one primary story, one written sidebar story, and at least one significant alternative-format story, based on approved story memo. I would expect such a package to have at least six human sources and probably some documentary sources. You may not use the same sources as with any previous story. No revision of these stories will be required, but you may revise them within one week of the date they are returned. In that case I will add one more 50-point grade. If you choose to revise them, attach the graded originals (with grade sheet). This story must be posted on the course blog with appropriate links at the time it is first submitted (you may edit/update the blog post later). Stories must be timely and relevant to the audience designated in your memo. The alternative format piece must be approved in advance, and may take one of several forms: audio, video, slideshow, interactive timeline, etc. It must be audio and/or visual in nature, and must be more than a simple graphic.

**Professional submission story** (50 points) **due Monday, 12/12.** You can work on this story throughout much of the semester, based on an approved story memo and query letter. Cannot duplicate sources or type of story used previously. Include contact info and query letter. Include contact information (phone number and e-mail address) for all sources used. None of your sources for this story may be associated with Whitworth University (students, faculty, staff or alums). No revision will be permitted. It must be posted on the course blog with appropriate links, unless you submit it elsewhere e (in that case, give me a copy of the submission letter or e-mail).
Tentative schedule and reading:

Read/review the main text before each Monday; note that chapters are not assigned in order. Subjects may change according to events, availability of guest speakers, etc.

9/7-9  Getting acquainted; syllabus, qualities of reporters; social media (Inside Reporting Ch. 1 & 2)

9/12-16  AP style review, interviewing & leads (Inside Reporting Ch. 3, 4 & 6; review all of AP Stylebook); also review 4-year career plan and the resume’ guide found at the Whitworth University Career Services Web site, then turn in two copies of a completed résumé by Friday, 9/16; query letters

9/19-23  Ways to tell stories, audiences, research (Inside Reporting Ch. 3 & 8); two story memos due Monday, 9/19 (first six memos 10 pts. each) first in-class interviews next week

9/26-30  Public records (Inside Reporting Ch. 6); query letter (10 pts.) due Monday, 9/26 for final story with copy of info from Writer’s Market or online writer’s guidelines for publication. Note that no sources for that final story may be associated with Whitworth University (students, faculty, staff or alums); political story due Friday, 9/30

10/3-7  Speeches and meetings (Inside Reporting Ch. 5); third and fourth story memos due by Monday, 10/3

10/10-14  Math (Inside Reporting Ch. 4; all of Math Tools for Journalists) Political story revision (attach graded original and post on blog) due Friday, 10/14

10/17-21  Color, personality & observation (Inside Reporting Ch. 6); fifth and sixth story memos due by Friday, 10/21

10/24-26  Press conference prep & review – press conference w/Erica Salkin’s class Tuesday evening, 10/25; no class Friday, 10/28 or Monday, 10/31

11/2-4  Roundups & sidebars (Inside Reporting Ch. 6) public records story (w/photocopies of records or links to them) due Wednesday, 11/2

11/7-11  Broadcast reporting (Inside Reporting Ch. 9)

11/14-18  More online (Inside Reporting Ch. 8); public records story revision (attach graded original and post on blog) due Wednesday, 11/16
11/21 Alternative storytelling (*Inside Reporting* Ch. 6); Thanksgiving break

11/28-12/2 Law and ethics (*Inside Reporting* Ch. 7) in-depth story with sidebars due Friday, 10/2

12/5-9 Business, science & technology; catch-up

12/12 Answer submitted questions; final professional stories due

**Thursday, 12/15, 1-3 p.m.:** Five-minute presentation of your story package to class – what you did and how you did it. (10 points)

Websites:
http://www.journaliststoolbox.org/

http://www.journaliststoolbox.org/category/crime/?platform=hootsuite

**Quantity of time for class preparation:**
The time spent in class preparation may be just as important as the time spent in class itself, and each class is a valuable part of your education. Therefore, expect to average six to nine hours each week for preparation time and homework for a three-credit course. The syllabus outlines due dates for assignments. Please schedule your prep time anticipating that items for this class may come due at the same time as items for other classes. The quantity of time spent preparing for each class generally correlates to the final grade earned.

**Special needs:**
Whitworth University is committed to providing its students access to education. If you have a documented special need that impacts your ability to learn and perform to your potential in the classroom, you will need to contact the Educational Support Office in Student Life to identify accommodations that are appropriate.

**Contact Information**
Craig Chatriand, Associate Dean of Community Standards and Compliance
Phone: 509.777.4655
Email: cchatriand@whitworth.edu

**Title IX:**
Whitworth University faculty members are committed to the well-being of each student. It is common for students to discuss non-course related issues with faculty and, when possible, faculty will keep such conversations strictly confidential. However, because federal law views faculty members as mandated reporters of any incidents of sexual misconduct, if a student informs a faculty member of an issue of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or discrimination, the faculty member is required by federal law to bring it to the attention of the Title IX Coordinator, Rhosetta Rhodes. The Title IX Coordinator will make the student aware of all options and resources available to them under Whitworth University policies and under the law.
There are Whitworth University employees whom federal law does not view as mandatory reporters, to whom a student could speak without the conversation being reported to the Title IX Coordinator. These include Pam Oswald (counselor and Whitworth first responder), other counselors in Counseling Services, and any of the university chaplains on the staff of Campus Ministries.

Contact Information
Rhosetta Rhodes, Title IX Coordinator, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students
Phone: 509.777.4238
Email: titleixcoordinator@whitworth.edu

Pam Oswald: 509.777.4778; poswalt@whitworth.edu; Schumacher 105

Counseling Center: 509-777-4450; Schumacher Hall.

Campus Ministries: 509-777-4345; Seeley G. Mudd Chapel

Non-discrimination:
Whitworth University is committed to delivering a mission-driven educational program that cultivates in students the capacity to engage effectively across myriad dimensions of diversity. Whitworth University is committed to the fair and equal treatment of all students in its educational programs and activities. The University does not discriminate against students based on race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability and complies with all applicable federal or state non-discrimination laws in its instructional programs.

Fair and equal treatment:
Whitworth University professors strive to treat all students fairly and equally, applying the same rigorous standards and expectations to each of our students and working to invite students from all backgrounds into the challenges and rewards of our academic disciplines. Students who have concerns about classroom fairness should contact Dr. Randy Michaelis, McEachran Hall 218, 509.777.4402, rmichaelis@whitworth.edu.

Safety:
Whitworth University cares about your welfare in the event of an emergency. During the first week of this course, please familiarize yourself with the safety information posted in this classroom.

Why is this syllabus so long? Should it be longer? Read this before you decide:
Grading/editing abbreviations:

If something is underlined on your paper, it is especially well done. If something is circled, there’s a problem. Below are editing/grading abbreviations I use, and what they mean. Please keep this list in your folder so you can refer to it with each assignment. If the problem (or how to fix it) still isn’t clear after you check this, please talk to me or the TA – the idea is to make your class experience better, not more complicated.

**AP:** Associated Press style error

**att:** attribution problem (something is attributed incorrectly, in wrong place, or not at all)

**awk:** awkward phrasing – restructure the sentence

**cont:** contraction (usually avoided w/print news, except in direct quotes)

**cs:** comma splice

**d/h:** dash used in place of hyphen, for vice versa – hit the hyphen key twice to create a dash, which is longer than a hyphen

**fe:** factual error – a big deal

**gr:** grammar problem, such as verb-subject agreement

**graf:** paragraph

**ip:** inanimate possessive (such as “Whitworth’s”), generally avoided in print news style

**mfe:** major factual error, such as a misspelled name or wrong address (a very big deal)

**p:** punctuation error (most commonly an extra or missing comma, or punctuation outside of quotation marks when it should be inside)

**p/a:** pronoun doesn’t agree with the antecedent (ex: company referred to as “their”)

**pv:** passive voice – watch out for “is,” “was,” “are,” “were,” “will be”

**sf:** sentence fragment (incomplete sentence)

**sp:** spelling error

**stet:** ignore the correction, or leave it the way you had it the first time

**s/v:** subject/verb disagreement (ex: “The class meet regularly.” “If Jack or Jill fall down, their parents will sue.”)

**th:** improper/inappropriate use of “this” or “these” (usually use “the,” “that” or “those”)

**tr:** transition missing or awkward

**1p:** improper/inappropriate use of first-person term (I, me, my, our, us, we)

**2p:** improper/inappropriate use of second-person term (you, your)

#: number error

?: meaning is unclear