

# NEWSPAPER PRODUCTION SYLLABUS

## Westchester Community College

Fall Semester 2005

**COMM 108 Newspaper Production 3 credits**

Lab experience in the newspaper production process, culminating in assuming responsibility for publication of a section of the student newspaper's final issue of the semester. Students will be regarded as adjuncts to the staff of *The Viking News* and will cover campus beats, report events, take office hour shifts, etc. Class hrs. 3. Grants English or Communications Credit. Not offered every semester.

Section: 7105

Time & Place: T 2-3:50 CLA 204  
TH 2-2:50 TEC 142A

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Office Hours: T TH F 10-10:50 A.M.  
W 5:40-6:30 P.M.  
F 1-1:50 P.M.

Texts: Rene J. Cappon, *Associated Press Guide to Newswriting: The Resource for Professional Journalists*. ARCO Thomson Learning. 2000. \$12.95

Harrower, Tim. *The Newspaper Designers Handbook*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., McGraw Hill, 2002.

*The Viking News Staff Manual*

### Course Description:

Newspaper production is designed to provide practical journalism experience to students through actual production of *The Viking News*. Students will be writing stories, creating artwork, designing pages and handling advertising for this award-winning publication. There are no prerequisites for this class. Students should expect to spend time with editors of *The Viking News* in order to receive and complete assigned stories.

While some theory will provide the foundation for the development of student journalists and those interested in communications and media, this course is designed to be a practical laboratory of the newspaper production process, culminating in the class members assuming responsibility

for publication of a section of the semester's final issue of *The Viking News*. Class members will be regarded as adjuncts to the staff of *The Viking News* and be asked to cover campus beats, report events, and take office hours. Tuesday classroom time will be divided between instruction and working on assignments for the class and the newspaper. Part of each of our Tuesday class meetings will be devoted to critique of the newspaper. Critiques are a part of the learning process and are meant to help staffers learn to avoid common mistakes. Thursdays will be devoted to using the computer lab for story work, layout and design instruction and practice.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- To develop a news concept and the competence to find, gather, and report news of campus life.
- To develop the ability to interview people involved in news events and to write the interview.
- To find events and people that provide the color and spirit of a diverse campus community. To write articles that feature the human interest aspects of campus life.
- To develop editing and proofreading skills.
- To design staffing systems that assure efficient and thorough coverage of student life, that assure responsible managing of revenue and expenses, that assure a responsible editorial, production and business decision making process.
- To develop design and layout concepts. To apply those concepts to *The Viking News*.
- To learn relevant uses of either PageMaker or InDesign and PhotoShop. To apply these skills to the applicable production steps—preparation and editing of copy, page design and layout, scanning, placement of photos, and saving those pages for final presentation to the print shop.
- To consider legal and ethical guidelines for producing a newspaper.

While all students will focus on overall objective of producing a quality newspaper, students will choose a concentration for the semester and break into groups as writers/reporters, business/advertising staff, and artists/photographers/designers. The objectives for each group are:

#### **Writers/Reporters**

- To improve your writing skills
- To give you hands-on experience writing various types of articles
- To increase your portfolio size, diversity and quality
- To have your work published

#### **Business Staff**

- To provide office management and advertising sales experience

- To improve your communication skills
- To increase your understanding of newspaper operations and budgets

### **Artists/Photographers/Designers**

- To help you gain experience in your area of expertise
- To increase your understanding of the role art/design plays in newspaper production
- To provide you with published work for your portfolio

Participation (20%): Regular class attendance, participation in class discussions and activities, regular attendance of *Viking News* meetings, regular keeping of office hours and regular coverage of assigned news beats.

Competency Test (10%) - At the end of the semester, newspaper production students will be given a competency test to aid the instructor in the determination of grades. The competency tests will cover: a) Basic reporting b) Editing according to AP style c) Dummy pages d) Layout production and any assigned reading.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Students are required to attend all class meetings, *Viking News* staff meetings and to give their fair share of time in the newspaper office. Do not schedule interviews during class time or office hours. Missing any combination of six meetings will result in a loss of a letter grade (10%). Missing any combination of twelve meetings will result in a drop of two letter grades (20%).

### **1. Attend all staff meetings.**

Staff meetings are conducted by the editors. They are essential for coordinating the efforts of all staff members.

### **2. Meet all assigned office hours.**

### **3. Meet all deadlines that apply to you.**

Deadlines are critical. There will be penalties for not turning in stories on time.

Up to 1 day late -40 pts

Up to 2 days late -60 pts

More than 2 days late -100 pts (0 for the story)

Situations beyond your control may occasionally prevent you from completing the story on time. Contact your section editor as far in advance as possible, and they *may* or *may not* grant you an extension. You must write a letter explaining the reason for requesting an extension and have it signed by the section editor or advisor to provide proof of an accepted extension. Staple the signed letter of extension to your article before submitting it for a grade.

The publication schedule and deadline dates are posted in *The Viking News* room.

**4. With the editors and adviser, write a contract for the contribution you plan to make to the newspaper.**

- Reporters should complete at least two major stories for each issue of the paper. Four news briefs or rewrites may be substituted for a single original story.
- Your contract should include some contribution to distributing the newspaper as well as producing it.
- Photographers, artists, editors, advertising people and other non-reporters should make equivalent contributions in the currency of their respective skills.

The adviser and/or editor(s) will issue progress reports during the semester. These will evaluate your performance on individual issues of the newspaper.

**5. Keep a portfolio of your *Viking News* work during the semester.**

This portfolio will begin your professional portfolio that you will send to prospective employers when you start looking for internships and your first job in journalism. Please organize your portfolio this way:

- a. Place your contract for the course on the first inside right-hand page of your scrapbook.
- b. Place clippings from *The Viking News* on the left hand side of a spread in your scrapbook. Be sure to include the folio line from the newspaper page with each clipping.
- c. On the right hand page of the same spread, place a hard copy of the story you submitted to the editors for publication.
- d. If you are a photographer, artist, ad person or editor, place tearsheets of your work on the left hand page of a spread. On the right hand page of the same spread, place a comment sheet describing your contributions to the work shown in the tearsheets.
- e. After entering all your published work for each issue, you may attach any unpublished stories, art, photos, etc. that you want me to see when I evaluate your performance.
- f. Sometimes stories don't get published. Put submitted-on-time-but-not-published work in your portfolio so I can give you credit for doing the work.

**Portfolios will be collected at the midterm and after the final issue of *The Viking News*.**

Schedule a short conference period with me when you turn in your portfolio. We will discuss your contribution to the newspaper, progress in the class, strengths and weaknesses, and determine a letter grade for the evaluation period.

**6. Submit to your editor(s) error-free news copy (or ad copy, feature stories, photo captions).**

Nobody expects you to be a brilliant writer at this stage in your career. You should, however, be an accurate writer. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, names of sources or persons in photographs,

addresses should be verified after the story (or photo caption, or ad copy) is written and before it is placed in the editor's directory. **Accuracy is your responsibility.**

Since participation can take so many forms, it is hard to give specific performance criteria for each student in the class. Obviously, business staffers and photographers will be doing different tasks and will be evaluated differently. The criteria common to all students are these:

- Are you contributing a reasonable quantity of work to the paper? Are you sticking to the terms of your contract with the editor and adviser? Do you have clips in your book?
- Are you constantly striving toward a "zero-error" newspaper? The clips in your book should show gradual improvement throughout the quarter. "Always make new mistakes." Be prepared to learn from your mistakes and avoid making the same error twice.
- You should always be looking for ways to improve your own performance and to make *The Viking News* a better newspaper and its office a better place to work. Do you meet your office hours as agreed?

### ***Grading Components—Writers***

Naturally, writing newspaper articles is the most important aspect of the course for the writing staff, which is why two-thirds of the point total is allocated to that writing. You will write 11 stories; the lowest score will be dropped.

A lengthy, high-quality investigative piece may be given credit for two stories, with consent of the instructor.

Part of improving your writing skills will consist of critiquing the work of others. You will need to write critiques of other newspaper articles and also write critiques for two full newspaper issues. At the end of the course you will be required to assemble all of your work in a portfolio which can be shown to potential employers.

### **Grading Breakdown**

11 stories @ up to 5 pts each (drop lowest score) 60 pts

2 Newspaper Reporting/Story Critiques @ up to 5 pts each 10 pts

1 Competency Test up to 10 pts

Participation up to 20 pts

Total 100 pts.

### **Grading Policies/Procedures for each Component**

#### Story Critiques

Examining the strengths and weaknesses of others' writing is an important part of being able to improve your own self-critiquing process. Over the course of the semester you should be looking at your peers' articles in a critical fashion. For the course requirements, you will also need to write out four one- to two-page critiques of articles published in *The Viking News* and be prepared to discuss those critiques orally in class the week following their publication.

## Newspaper Critique

As a midterm and final exam, you will take a closer look at the big picture, how the newspaper succeeds and fails as a whole. You will write a full critique of two issues of *The Viking News*.

## Portfolio

At the end of the semester you will turn in a portfolio of the stories you have written. This should be a professional-looking collection that you could show potential employers

## Stories

The guidelines outlined below will be used when assigning story grades. Everyone can meet these expectations, regardless of their journalistic expertise.

Grading: A=Publishable quality; B=Publishable with editing; C=Substantial editing needed; D=Marginal quality; F=Unacceptable See portfolio evaluation form.

### *Number of sources per article*

The heart of good newspaper writing is good research. People and paper sources from all sides of the issue being covered help (but don't guarantee) completeness, fairness and objectivity. For the purposes of this course, a story must cite **three** appropriate sources of information (minimum two people sources) in order to receive an A. For each source under three, 20 points will be deducted from the story's score (Ex: a one-source story will receive a 40 pt. deduction).

Occasionally, for some stories—especially columns, and to a lesser extent, editorials—this three-source rule may not be appropriate. In these cases, consult the instructor about the number of sources required.

Please realize that having three sources only meets the *minimum* requirement. For most stories, you will need to contact more sources in order to write a well-balanced, well-researched, objective piece.

## **Artists/Photographers Grading Breakdown**

26 photos or 16 graphics 60 pts

(photos, artwork, stories, designed pages)

2 Newspaper Photo/Art/Design Critiques @ up to 5 pts each 10 pts

1 Competency Test up to 10 pts

Participation up to 20 pts

Total 100 pts.

## **Grading Policies/Procedures for each Component**

### Newspaper Art/Design Critiques

You will also need to write two, three-page critiques of the artwork/design/photo features of an issue of *The Viking News* and discuss them with the class.

### Artwork/Photos/Page Design

See the number of required pieces outlined above. Complex graphics may count as two pieces with consent of the instructor.

The guidelines described in the writers' section apply to the art staff, as well. Misspellings in cartoons, graphics or captions will lower your score, as will missed deadlines.

### **Grading Components—Business Staff**

The business staff will be evaluated based on criteria and sales productivity goals established by the office manager and advertising manager at the beginning of the semester. Business staff is required to keep a minimum number of office hours each week to be determined by the office/business/ad manager(s). Mid-semester performance reviews made by the office manager and ad manager will be especially critical in the assessment of the business and advertising staff.

## PORTFOLIO EVALUATION FORM

### Ideas/Story Planning

*Reporting*       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

*Sources*       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

*Details*       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

*Quotes*       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

*Accuracy*       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

### Writing

Focus       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

Style Guide       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

Leads       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

Organization       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

Creativity       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

Pacing/Flow       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

Clarity       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

**Quality**       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

**Quantity**       Exceptional  Above average  Average  Below average  Unacceptable

### Strengths

### Weaknesses

**Grade** \_\_\_\_\_

Grading Key:

A=Publishable quality; B=Publishable with editing; C=Substantial editing needed; D=Marginal quality; F=Unacceptable