

J322J: REPORTING SOCIAL JUSTICE

**School of Journalism
University of Texas at Austin
Fall 2017**



The never-ending process that is the quest for social justice.

Instructor: Erna Smith

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10 a.m.-Noon, BMC 3.340E and by appointment

Class: T/TH 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m., CMA 4.146

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

From banning visitors from six Muslim countries from entering the U.S. to banning transgender people from enlisting in the military, issues of social justice are dominating today's news headlines. But it would be a mistake to view this trend as simply a sign of the times. Journalism has a long, distinguished history of social justice reporting.

For proof, you don't need to look further than a [list](#) of Pulitzer prizes awarded for reporting on issues of social justice and equality. Compiled in 2016 to celebrate the centennial anniversary of journalism's most coveted and respected prize, the articles, series, and editorials might as well have been ripped from today's headlines. By far, the most prizes were awarded for coverage that exposed and denounced racial and religious intolerance, and white supremacy. These issues are sadly echoed in the significant increase in reported [hate crimes](#) since the 2016 election, culminating in the tragic events in Charlottesville, VA.

Although racism and intolerance are recurring topics, they are not the sole focus of social justice reporting. Since social justice is primarily concerned with equality, the topics of

social justice reporting run the gamut. Common topics include the *environment, police brutality, income inequality, gender, sexual orientation, food insecurity, mass incarceration, and healthcare*. The breadth of topics is reflected in commonly referred to subsets of social justice, such as *racial justice, environmental justice, criminal justice and economic justice*. Lastly, quite often, social justice reporting focuses on the *human costs of government or corporate policies, laws, and actions and/or the lack of them*.

The main goal of this course is to help you develop the research, reporting and writing skills and strategies to engage in the rich, storied tradition of social justice reporting in U.S. journalism.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, J322j students will:

- 1) Evaluate news values within the context of the social justice reporting
- 2) Develop research, reporting and interviewing skills to report on social justice issues from a range of perspectives
- 3) Identify, report, analyze and discuss laws, policies and practices that contribute to social inequalities
- 4) Appreciate the importance of social justice journalism in a democratic society
- 5) Engage with the ethics and challenges of reporting across social differences

REQUIRED READING

It is impossible to perform well in this course without staying abreast of current events, in particular as they pertain to social justice issues.

- 1) Readings posted on Canvas and class handouts
- 2) Read, listen and watch news on various platforms: digital, hard copy newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Sign up on Twitter for news alerts about topics related to social justice and follow established news media outlets on social media, including The Washington Post, The Guardian, Vox, The Daily Texan, and the Austin American-Statesman. (Note: If you don't have a subscription to the Washington Post, I highly recommend you purchase one for the semester.)

The school has an account to the digital version of the Austin American Statesmen.

<http://nieonline.com/austin/studentconnect.cfm>

User name: utjourn0

Password: utjourn0

REQUIRED VIEWING

Students are required to watch and answer discussion questions about three documentary films either in class or on their own at home.

- 1) **13th**, a 2016 documentary by director Ava DuVernay that explores intersection of race, justice and mass incarceration in America.
- 2) **The New Muslim Cool**, a 2009 documentary directed and produced by Jennifer Maytorena Taylor, follows the life of Hamza Perez, a Puerto Rican American rap

artists who converted to Islam and started a new religious community in Pittsburgh only to be confronted by the realities of a post 9/11 world.

- 3) **Finding Samuel Lowe: From Harlem to China**, a 2014 documentary that follows Paula Madison's search for her Chinese grandfather's descendants in China. Madison is a former NBC News journalist and executive who now owns The Africa Channel. *Note: Madison will speak to class via Skype.*

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Eighty-five percent of your grade will be based on story assignments and the class project; the remaining 15 percent consists of homework assignments, story pitches, rewrites, writing drills, and class participation. Participation means regularly contributing to class discussions and being responsible, punctual and proactive in collaborating with your colleagues on the class project. Regular attendance is required and **more than two unexcused absences** may result in up to 5 points being deducted from your final letter grade.

Grading

Your work will be evaluated based on professional standards, including newsworthiness; research and original reporting; story structure; and grammar, spelling and punctuation, and AP Style. Grading rubrics will be posted on Canvas. This course uses plus and minus grades, following this range:

A 94-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D 60-69
A- 90-93	B 84-86	C 70-76	F 59 and lower
	B- 80-83		

STORY ASSIGNMENTS

Note: All assignments will be discussed in class; additional instructions, story pitch forms, and grading rubrics are posted on Canvas. Students can rewrite and re-submit most stories based on instructor feedback for additional credit of up to 3 points. Story assignments comprise 80 percent of the final grade.

Story 1: Spot News (10 percent). Attend a rally, march, demonstration, meeting, speech or panel discussion about a social justice issue. The story should demonstrate that you understand how to cover a spot news event, including those who planned the event and those for whom the event is planned. In addition to the main speaker(s), the story should quote event planners, reaction from relevant audience members and outside voices needed to make the story fully dimensional. If the event is a rally, the story should also include estimated crowd size and/or attendance from a credible source and anecdotes that give the readers a sense of being there. No pitch required for this story.

Story Due: Sept. 26 by 10:59 a.m.

Length: 500-700 words

Story 2: Profile With Photo (15 percent) Profile an advocate for social justice. This person need not be famous nor even part of an organized group. Possible candidates could range from a long-time and well-regarded volunteer at a social justice organization to an attorney who advocates on behalf of undocumented immigrants. The story should demonstrate that you understand how to report and write a profile. Story pitch required. Don't forget to take a photo of the person you are profiling.

Story 2 Pitch Due: Sept. 28 by 10:59 a.m.

Story Due: Oct. 15 at 11:59 p.m.

Length: 600-800 words

Story 3: Data Visualization (10 percent) You have two options to complete this assignment:

- (1) Using the data you and your classmates collect on college hate/bias incidents, produce a data visualization of the overall findings, or of some aspect of the findings that interest you. For example, what were the most and least common motives for bias –race, religion, gender identity, disability, etc.
- (2) Using data from credible sources, produce a data visualization of a social justice issue in Austin. The assignment assumes students are keeping abreast of social justice issues in Austin, such as affordable housing, access to healthcare, food insecurity, policing practices, gentrification, etc.
Gentrification, for example, could be illustrated with a map of neighborhoods that have experienced significant declines in African American and Latino residents and significant increases in white residents over a 10- or 20-year period. Tips: See [Top Ten Demographic Trends in Austin](#).
Graphs, charts, tables, timelines and/or illustrations may also be submitted, and should include a headline of no more than five words and a caption of no more than 25 words that summarizes the information.

No pitch required for this assignment.

Story Due: Oct. 19 by 10:59 a.m.

Story 4: Feature (20 percent) Your assignment is to report and write a news feature about a social justice issue of interest to you. The story should be *timely, include data, statistics, and appropriate background material*, and *at least five interviews* with stakeholders in the story and experts on the subject. The feature could be a:

- 1) **Human Interest** story that focuses on people—*Example: How Dreamers are coping with uncertainty over DACA.*
- 2) **Backgrounder** that focuses on a social justice issue or event in the news—*See Vox Explainer feature for examples.*
- 3) **Trend** story that focuses on the intersection of social justice and popular culture—*Examples: Creative protesting, such as Quinceanera protest against SB 40. Best-selling T-shirts for the Resistance. The relationship between punk music and Antifa.*

A trend story could also simply be about any new trend related to social justice, such as the recent decision by the Justice Department to stop monitoring troubled police departments.

- 4) **Flashback** story that commemorates an historic event related to social justice.
Example: The upcoming 50th anniversary of the death of Che Guevara, the iconic, Marxist revolutionary hero of Cuba

Pitch due: Nov. 2 at 10:59 a.m.

Story due: Dec. 5 at 10:59 a.m.

Story length: 650-850 words

Story 5: Class Project (25 percent) documenting hate crimes and/or bias incidents at public universities in Texas with the highest enrollments. Data will be collected for 16 universities.

This is a multi-part assignment with different deadlines for different steps in the process. Students will be assigned two grades: one for their individual work and one for overall project quality.

Each student is required to contribute one story and one visual or multimedia element.

The project will be posted on a blog created by the class. Stories can only be posted after the instructor approves them.

- (1) Data collection: Each student will be assigned to collect data from one school and to present and share her/his results with classmates. **Deadline: Oct. 5 by 10:59 a.m.**
- (2) Data analysis: After the results are presented, students will identify patterns in the data and develop story ideas. The instructor will facilitate this process in class. By the end of the week of Oct. 10, each student should have a story idea and be assigned to write a pitch.
- (3) Project story pitches: **Deadline: Oct. 26 by 11:59 p.m.**
- (4) Brainstorming site design, organization and CMS protocols will take place during class times
- (5) Project story with visual or multimedia element: **Deadline: Nov. 21 at 10:59 a.m.**
- (6) Final rewrites, edits and posting will take place during the final week of class.

FILING YOUR STORIES

- Stories are usually filed as Canvas assignments, with limited windows for submission.
- Assume all story assignments are for publication and public consumption. DON'T tell sources that your story is "only" for class and DON'T cut deals with sources by promising story won't be published.

COVER SHEET

Graded story assignments must be accompanied with a **cover sheet** (sample is on Canvas). The cover sheet includes:

- Your name, the story assignment and the date
- Story slug (one- or two-word description used by newsrooms to distinguish stories)
- The "budget line" or a one- or two-sentence description of the story
- A list of source names (quoted and unquoted), phone numbers and e-mail addresses
- A notation of how you found the source and why the source is credible and relevant

- A list of websites (or other sources) used/consulted for the story

ETHICAL ISSUES

In regard to J322j, the following issues are particularly important to avoid:

1. Conflicts of Interest

Avoid conflicts of interest – in which you have a vested interest in the people, groups, events or organizations that you might cover – and what could be perceived as conflicts of interest. Do not pitch stories that potentially contain a conflict of interest. Potential conflicts of interest include (but are not limited to):

- School of Journalism and Moody College of Communications instructors, professors, administrators, staffers, and undergraduate and graduate students;
- friends, family members and their friends, roommates, suitemates,
- boyfriends and girlfriends; former boyfriends and girlfriends,
- sorority/fraternity sisters/brothers
- bosses and former bosses, co-workers and former co-workers;
- people you know socially, regularly attend church with
- people you are suing or have sued you ...

2. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty

- Plagiarizing or using someone else's material, another media source, student work or yourself (in part or in whole) and representing it as new for this class.
- Pitching or turning in an assignment from a previous class without instructor permission.
- Making up quotes, sources and facts.
- Not interviewing people who appear in your stories.
- Not giving appropriate attribution or citation of a source or background information.
- Cheating during a quiz or any assignment, graded or not

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• **TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE**

- *subject to change depending on speaker availability, events and/or class progress*
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WEEK	TUESDAY	THURSDAY
1) Sept. 5 and 7	Course assignments explained.	13 th film discussed Writing drill assigned. Due: By 11:59 p.m. Sept. 10 Story 1 oral pitch due by class time Tuesday
2) Sept. 12 and 14	Moody Writing Center Tweetdeck Story 1 oral pitches Data collection assignments Homework: Read and review ProPublica's Documenting Hate project. Come to next class prepared to ask questions.	Report on SPJ/NAHJ convention from Ala'a and Briana Guest speaker: <i>Rachel Glickhouse, partner manager for ProPublica's Documenting Hate project.</i> Homework: 1) Read sections on hate crimes in College Crime Report posted in HATE folder under FILES on Canvas. 2) Prepare list of possible sources of information on hate/bias incidents at your assigned school.
3) Sept. 19 and 21	In-class: Brainstorming data collection.	Research and reporting day No class
4) Sept. 26 and 28	How to report and write a profile story How's it going: Oral updates on data collection Story 1: Spot News due	Guest speaker: <i>Shako Liu, video producer, NBC News</i> Note: Read her resume on Canvas. Also review her stories. Story 2: Profile pitch due Homework: Bring two copies of your pitch to the next class session.
5) Oct. 3 and 5	Feedback on Story 1: Common strengths and weaknesses Peer review of profile pitches	Class project data collection due. Each student presents his/her findings in class.
6) Oct. 10 and 12	In-class: Brainstorming story ideas based on the data. Do we have enough? What more do we need? What should we call this project?	Stories and roles assigned for class project on hate/bias incidents on Texas college campuses. Story 2: Profile due Sunday, Oct. 15 at 11:59 pm

7) Oct. 17 and 19 Story 2: Profile due by 11:59 p.m., Oct. 15	Research and reporting day: No class meeting	In class, we will watch, <i>The New Muslim Cool</i> Story 3: Data visualization due
8) Oct. 24 and 26	Guest speaker: Jennifer Maytorena Taylor, producer and director of The New Muslim Cool Homework: Bring two copies of your class project story pitch to share with your colleagues Thursday.	Organizing and structuring feature stories Peer review of project story pitches Story 5: Class project story pitch due
9) Oct. 31 and Nov. 2	One-on-one meetings with students	One-on-one meetings with students. Story 4: News feature pitch due
10) Nov. 7 and Nov. 9	The fault lines of social justice journalism: who controls the narrative.	Reporting day. No class meeting.
11) Nov. 14 and 16	In class, we will watch <i>Finding Samuel Lowe</i>	Guest speaker: Paula Madison, producer, Finding Samuel Lowe and majority owner of the Africa Channel
12) Nov. 21	Happy turkey day, no class meeting. But be sure to post Story 5 to Canvas by 10:59 a.m. Story 5: Class project story due	Thanksgiving-no class
13) Nov. 28 and Nov. 30	In-Class: Project editing and production	In-class: Project editing and production
14) Dec. 5	Last day of class Story 4: News feature due	

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COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- Taking care of your general well-being is an important step in being a successful student. If stress, test anxiety, racing thoughts, feeling unmotivated or anything else is getting in your way, there are options available for support.
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- For **immediate** support:
- - Visit/Call the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): M-F 8-5p | SSB, 5th floor | [512-471-3515](tel:512-471-3515) | cmhc.utexas.edu
- - CMHC Crisis Line: 24/7 | [512-471-2255](tel:512-471-2255) | cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html
- **CARE Counselor** in the Moody College of Communication is: Abby Simpson, LCSW
- - |CMA 4.134 | [512-471-7642](tel:512-471-7642) (Please *leave a message* if she is unavailable)
- **FREE Services** at CMHC:
- - Brief assessments and referral services
- - Mental health & wellness articles - cmhc.utexas.edu/commonconcerns.html
- - MindBody Lab - cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html
- - Classes, workshops, & groups - cmhc.utexas.edu/groups.html

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL): If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or instructors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): **512-232-5050**. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Again, call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

Evacuation Information

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when an alarm or alert is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside, unless told otherwise by an official representative.

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police

Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency