A collage of people looking at a camera

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**Welcome** to COMS 404. This is the class where we boost our professionalism and look for the fun in the practice of reporting, editing and media production. You’ve come a long way since your first reporting classes.

**Now it’s time to:**

* Extend your skills in the practice of journalism – accuracy, news judgment, deadlines, objectivity and fairness.
* Build on your writing skills – spelling, grammar, Associated Press style, attribution, story organization, pacing, crisp and compelling leads, and the use of quotations.
* Practice basic reporting techniques – primary and secondary research, including interviews, observation, social media reporting, research and other sources to ground your news articles
* Gain experience with field reporting, writing and producing

**Educational theory:**

Most of your previous classes used a Behavioristic model: Perform -> Get a grade.

There are two other models in educational theory:

Cognitive: You take stock of what you have learned and what you still need

Constructivist: You build a learning program for yourself.

Since you are advanced students, there is no reason we can’t use a mixed cognitive / constructivist model based around sets of seminars. This will need to be discussed, with individual plans agreed on in the first week of the semester.

**Class details, times & places:**

COMS 404 Jan 16 – May 2, 2024.

T-Th 3:30-4:45 Hemphill Hall Rm 1005  
 or synchronous zoom as needed

 Students are informed of zoom sessions and links via university email 

Instructor: Prof. William (Bill) Kovarik, PhD  <https://billkovarik.com/bio/>     
School of Communication, Radford University

Email: wkovarik@radford.edu

Instructor office hours:  Zoom M-W 9 – 11 pm or by appointment

Class Web page: [https://revolutionsincommunication.com/journalism](https://revolutionsincommunication.com/journalism%20law)

**OLD Catalog description:** Four hours lecture and laboratory. Prerequisites: COMS 104, COMS 204, COMS 130 (with a grade of "C" or better), and COMS 330 (with a grade of "C" or better), or permission of instructor. Strategies for computer assisted reporting, practice in gathering information from first-person participants and expert sources, and experience in writing investigative and exploratory articles and/or documentary scripts. The course concentrates on several themes evident in journalism today, including diversity reporting, community journalism, financial reporting, reporting for the web, international issues and others.

**2. Objectives: This course will**

Students will learn standard library and electronic database research techniques applicable to a variety of sources. The course also may include discussions of relevant topics and ethical situations in journalism. Students will also be introduced to rapidly changing global technologies which are affecting news reporting and research.

* Extend skills in the practice of journalism – accuracy, news judgment, deadlines, objectivity and fairness.
* Develop writing skills – spelling, grammar, Associated Press style, attribution, story organization, pacing, crisp and compelling leads, and the use of quotations.
* Practice basic reporting techniques – primary and secondary research, including interviews, observation, data mining, social media reporting, Internet research and other sources to gather background material for stories and find information.
* Gain experience with field reporting, writing and producing different stories.
* Gain experience in investigative reporting.
* Practice reporting and producing for multiple platforms.

**3. Special focus**

This class will provide a special focus on developing community journalism as a news, business and technology model as needed and appropriate for advanced students. This will mostly involve discussions and readings as assigned.

**4. Class resources**

**A web site** located at[www.revolutionsincommunication.com](http://www.revolutionsincommunication.com)/journalism  
 (This is actually a copyrighted book in progress).

Here you will find:

* Readings in the wide variety of journalism topics
* Exercises to generate story ideas
* Updates, links for further reading, and additional historical insights

**The Learning Management System** at RU, called Brightspace D2L. You can access this through a web browser, and you probably already know how to log in.

* + **Exercises:** 10 story starters (20 points each).
  + **Stories:** 6 required (100 points each)
  + **Project:** 1 major portfolio project (200 points)

**You are the resource: Build your own course (constructivist options)**

* Skill-sharing sessions (20 pts COMS 404; 50 points 204 class)
* Improve the exercises: Propose substitutes for the Story Starters (20 points each)
* New business model / new technologies / readings (20 points)

**5. Keeping track of story assignments (Google Doc)**

[**https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11skhrWRoinnJYZfMnSF4Z4tECyR2v9AWToeUZ6T6Byg/edit?usp=sharing**](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11skhrWRoinnJYZfMnSF4Z4tECyR2v9AWToeUZ6T6Byg/edit?usp=sharing)

**6. New River Daybook**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uPH9xJ_amzx9ldLBEktb0WXUjfZ-Xlh1egPbSyEjvGQ/edit#heading=h.cqeoso66cheq>

**7 Class Policies**

**Ethics:** We follow the SPJ code of ethics, which means seek the truth and report it, act independently, minimize harm, and be accountable.

**Deadlines** are critical in the news business. You will be graded down substantially for reports turned in past the deadline, and any article that contains a factual error or misspelled proper name.

**Originality:** Students must turn in original reporting and writing for COMS 404. You may not get credit for work produced for another course. Outright plagiarism on any paper will result in an automatic F for the course and will be reported as an Honor Code violation.

**Conflicts:** Professional journalists use objective methods. For that reason it presents a conflict if you report on or about your friends, family or organizations in which you participate. You have to get comfortable approaching and interviewing strangers. Do not interview your professors or people in your social circle for articles for this class.

**Professional submission styles:** All exercises and research papers should be turned into Assignments (drop box) in the LMS / D2L system.  (We will also be sharing drafts via email, but final versions need to go into D2L). The file name and story contents should be professional. Papers should have your name in both the name of the document and inside the document.  So you would turn in a file with the name Smith.Research1.docx  or Jones.Assignment1.txt Also, at the beginning of that document, you should also have your name and the name of the exercise in the upper left hand corner.

For more information: <https://revolutionsincommunication.com/journalism/turning-in-stories/>

**8 University policies**

**Academic integrity**, as pointed out in the Standards of Student Conduct, prohibits falsification, cheating, forgery and other dishonest academic practices. Students who have problems in this area will fail the course and be reported to the dean’s office.

*Honor Code: By accepting admission to this university, each student makes a commitment to understand, support and abide by the honor code without compromise or exception.*

You've probably already read the applicable university policies on student conduct:    <http://www.radford.edu/content/dam/departments/administrative/policies/StudentAffairsPoliciesandProcedures/SA-PO-1300_StandardsofStudentConduct.pdf>

**Confidentiality** — Discussions about your grade or other aspects of your life at RU are kept in strict confidence under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99). This means that the instructor will be happy to talk with your mom or dad, but only with your permission.

**Disabilities —**If you are seeking academic accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act at Radford University, you are required to register with the Disability Resource Office (DRO).   To receive academic accommodations for this class, please submit your documentation to the DRO in the lower level of Tyler Hall Suites 54-69, by fax to 540-831-6525, by email to dro@radford.edu. After submitting documentation to the DRO, you will set up an interview with a Disability Services Specialist to discuss accommodations. You will be notified via email once your accommodation package is complete and ready to be picked up. Once you have picked up your accommodation package, you will need to meet with each course professor during their office hours to review and discuss your package.  For more information and/or for documentation guidelines, visit [www.radford.edu/dro](about:blank) or call 540-831-6350.

**Additional Support:** The Learning Assistance and Resource Center (LARC), located in 126 Walker Hall, is open to all students Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Certified, trained tutors provide help with basic study skills, writing, reading, and content-specific mate- rial. An appointment is necessary and can be made by stopping by Walker 126, calling 831-7704, or IMing “rularcappt”.