

The cool thing about journalism is that it gives you an excuse to ask questions about things that interest you. Whether it's an issue at school, my kids' health or a family trip, I always try to leverage my curiosity into a story. When I was eight months pregnant and broke my ankle on the ice, I remember thinking on the way to the emergency room: This will make a great story. Later that year, I wrote a health story for *The Washington Post* about the impact of pregnancy on your balance and your bones.

Caralee Adams, freelance journalist based in Bethesda, Md. as quoted in Daniel Reimold's book, *The Journalism of Ideas* (Routledge, 2013)

COM 338: The Newsroom

Instructor: Miriam Ascarelli

Email: miriam.f.ascarelli@njit.edu

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays -- 10:00 a.m.-11:15 a.m. and by appointment

Office: Cullimore Hall 410

Phone: 862-576-1256

Course description:

Journalism is an important part of the information landscape. You may not realize it, but you consume – and produce – journalism regularly, maybe without even realizing it. This class will help you become a smarter consumer of information. Over the course of the semester, we'll learn about the current state of journalism, and how we got here. We'll also study the tools and the methods that professionals use – and create some journalism of our own. No matter what your major, being able to communicate effectively and being able to accurately collect and verify information is a potent tool.

This class is also part of an experimental project organized by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in partnership with the AI company, Grammarly. Over the course of the semester, we will be engaging with Grammarly's suite of AI-powered tools in order to reflect on the ways generative AI is changing how we interact with information and with each other. To quote the historian Yuval Noah Harari, "The rise of AI is arguably the biggest information revolution in history." In other words, AI is changing everything, so regardless of how you feel about AI, this is something we all must confront.

Take note:

- This is a journalism class, and, by definition, news is not neat and tidy. It is a process of constant learning and adaptation. Expect surprises and be prepared to roll with them.
- You are encouraged to join *The Vector*, NJIT's student newspaper. Staff meetings are held every Friday from 11:30-1 p.m. in *The Vector* offices on the fourth floor of the Campus Center.

Prerequisites: HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher, and one History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher.

Course objectives:

- Gain an understanding of how communication technology has impacted history, and the role it has played in the development of journalism.
- Engage with Grammarly's generative AI tools in order to reflect on the ways in which generative AI is reshaping the ways in which we think and interact with information and each other.
- Become familiar with the characteristics of news and feature stories, and learn how quality news organizations use labels to distinguish opinion pieces from straight reporting.
- Learn how to deconstruct stories in order to better understand the reporting and writing process.
- Learn how to find sources, conduct interviews, and write stories in a reader-friendly fashion.
- Gain knowledge of some of the ethical issues impacting journalists.

Texts:

- Scanlan, Chip. *33 Ways Not to Screw Up Your Journalism*. Networkling Publishing, 2022. (I've chosen this book because it is inexpensive AND it gives you a window into journalistic thinking. It lists for under \$10 on Amazon.)
- *The New York Times*; to get a free subscription using your NJIT ID, click [here](#).
- *The Wall Street Journal*; to get a free subscription using your NJIT ID, click [here](#).
- Handouts and readings provided by the instructor; these will be posted on Canvas.

Final Grades: A = 90 – 100 B+ = 87 – 89 B = 80 – 86 C+ = 77 – 79 C = 70 – 76
D = 60 – 69 F = 0 – 59

Grades:

- Attendance and participation: 10 percent
- Homework and the beat report: 15 percent
- In-class writing/quizzes: 30 percent
- Original reporting: 30 percent
- Final assignment: 15 percent

There is no final exam in this course!

Also note:

- You cannot make up a missed in-class writing or quiz unless you provide verified documentation to the Dean of Students Office about your absence.
- Tentative assignment due dates are listed on the class schedule, but are subject to change
- I calculate final grades manually at the end of the term. So, while I do post grades on Canvas for individual assignments, you will not be able to see your grade total. However, don't hesitate to talk to me if you have a question about your grades.

Grammarly & the AI Pilot Project

As stated above, this class is also part of an experimental project organized by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in partnership with the AI company, Grammarly. Some may be previously familiar with Grammarly because of prior use as a writing assistant. Grammarly also has generative AI capability and, functionally speaking, is similar to ChatGPT. All students enrolled in the course will receive free access to the full suite of Grammarly's tools and we will use it for a variety of evolving purposes.

AI Policy

Obviously, we will be engaging with AI tools as part of this pilot project. However, that does not mean you will have unrestricted use of AI tools; rather for each assignment, I will outline specific guidelines about AI usage. Integrity is crucial; always adhere to the guidance or ask questions if you are unsure. These conversations will enable us to work together to ensure that we are using these tools in productive and ethical ways.

Late assignments:

Late work on reporting assignments will automatically be downgraded by five points for each day late. Assignments that are more than a week will not be accepted. (TBH: We devote a lot of in-class time to getting traction on these assignments, so there is really no reason for work not to be turned in on time.)

Late homework: Homework is due on Canvas at the start of class. You will have up until the next class period after the original due date to turn in missed homework, but the work will automatically be downgraded to the equivalent of a C. After that, late work will not be accepted.

Revisions:

Reporting assignments may be revised, but only if they were turned in on time to begin with. Revisions must be submitted within a week after the assignment has been returned. The final grade for the assignment will be an average of the original grade and the grade for the revision.

Incomplete grades:

In accordance with the provost's directive, an incomplete will only be issued only in **rare instances** where a student, and for **documented (by the Dean of Students) reasons**, could not complete parts of the work of the course.

Tying up loose ends at the end of the semester:

All required work must be submitted prior to the date established for turning in final grades. In other words, when the course is over, the course is over. You cannot turn in outstanding work after the semester has ended.

Attendance:

You may miss two classes without penalty. Every subsequent *unexcused absence* will result in a reduction of half of a letter grade on your final course grade. If you are absent for legitimate reasons (family emergency, illness) you **must** submit official and verifiable documentation to the Dean of Students related to the absence within two weeks. More than six *unexcused* absences (three weeks of the course) will result in the automatic failure of the course.

- **Please, note, however, that even if there are legitimate reasons for missing class, excessive absences put you at risk for failing the course.**
- **Per university policy, students who expect to miss class for religious observances must submit to me a written list of dates that will be missed by the end of the second week of classes.**

Tardiness:

Please note that you are also expected to come to class on time. Chronic tardiness is disrespectful both to me and your fellow students, and it will hurt your grade. (Two lates = one absence).

How to reach me:

Email is my preferred method of communication. I will respond to your emails within 48 hours, and more likely sooner. Please remember to maintain an appropriate tone in all school-related correspondence and include a SUBJECT line and your NAME.

Academic Integrity:

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found

at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing, or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

All assignments submitted shall be considered "graded work" and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Code on Academic Integrity. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

Special Needs:

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me as early in the semester as possible to discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact Student Disability Services at 973-596-3420.

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center (Ground floor of the Central King Building, room G17) is available for 45-minute individual and group appointment with professional writing tutors online. This resource is indented to

help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors and help with planning assignments, improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, or other communication-based needs. For more information, please visit <https://www5.njit.edu/writingcenter/>.

RESOURCES AND EVENTS

Join us for the first annual Community Media Project Summit

The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium invites you and your team to join us on Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at The College of New Jersey for our first annual **For the Love of Local News: Community Media Project Summit**. This conference is free of charge.

Date: Wednesday, February 12, 2025

Time: 8:30 am - 6 pm

Location: The College of New Jersey, Education Building 212
2000 Pennington Rd, Ewing, NJ 08618

REGISTER TODAY!

We will bring together supporters and advocates of quality community news and information – a broad stakeholder coalition of grantees, funders, partners, residents, universities, journalists, lawmakers, community groups, and other leaders – to discuss transforming New Jersey's media ecosystem.

We will review progress, share learning, and workshop new theories of change for continuing to build a more functional, resilient, and inclusive information space for all residents of the Garden State, both in print and digitally.

This is your opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals dedicated to promoting civic engagement and local news in New Jersey. Whether you're looking to learn, share ideas, or explore potential collaborations, this event is the perfect setting.

* * * * *

A Student Journalist's Code of Ethics

Note: This document, from the San Francisco State Dept. of Journalism, is an excellent summary of do's and don'ts that are applicable to any journalism student anywhere in the country. All I did was insert NJIT, where relevant.

What to do:

- **Be professional.** Always represent yourself as New Jersey Institute of Technology journalism student, particularly before an interview. This can be tricky in social situations where conversation is casual. There have been instances when people have revealed things not realizing they were speaking to a journalist. If such a situation occurs and what's revealed to you may be important for a story, tell the person who you are and that you want to use the information in a story. Remember you are representing not only yourself, but also the department. Make us look good.
- **Dress appropriately when on assignment.** A guide to use is dress as your interviewee will dress -- business attire if you're interviewing a business person or public official, more casual clothing in a less formal setting.
- **Always strive for accuracy and fairness.** It is difficult to be completely unbiased, but your safeguard against bias is checking with a variety of sources. Get outside of your circle and make sure you talk to people other than the usually cited experts or sources. Look for the shades of gray, for those are usually the most interesting places to dig into a subject. Go out of your way to check, then check again, then check one more time.
- **Ask, don't assume.** Don't be afraid to ask what may seem to be an "obvious") question.
- Journalists can sometimes get into trouble because they assume rather than ask. Better to ask than to print or produce the wrong information.
- **Correct your errors.** We all make mistakes, but the best journalists admit to them and correct them publicly. Check with your professor to find out how best to proceed.
- **Expose injustice, and give voice to those who rarely have one.** This is the motto of some of the best journalists in the profession.
- **Be careful about pitching the same story** to multiple publications or classes unless it's clear such a practice is allowed. When in doubt, ask your professor or editor.

What not to do:

- **Do not fabricate anything.** If you do, ultimately you will be caught and the fall will be mighty and great. If you are caught, you will receive an F on the assignment. But worse than that, such behavior will call suspicion on all of your work, and you will be tainted as a liar and a fake. Usually, people get themselves in these situations because they are unprepared and deadline pressure weighs on them. Don't corner yourself.
- **Prepare for interviews ahead of time.** Do your research ahead of time. Locate sources ahead of time. If you have trouble with any of these things, I am ready and happy to help.
- **Do not plagiarize.** This is another self-destructive path because you will get caught. Assignments found to have copied work without citation of the source will receive an F. But again, if you are caught, you have made an unattractive reputation for yourself. People get themselves in this situation for a variety of reasons. Sometimes students) think it's OK to copy

and paste from the Internet if it's common knowledge. The best practice to follow: Whenever in doubt, cite the source and if you want some guidance, ask your professor.

- **Do not cheat.** We expect academic honesty. Check with me about what exercises and assignments are for your eyes only.
- **Avoid conflicts of interest.** These conflicts include but are not limited to preparing journalism assignments on subjects or institutions in which the student has a financial, family, or personal involvement, or a personal stake in the outcome. Do not become part of the story. In some cases the appearance of a conflict is just as problematic as an actual conflict of interest. When in doubt, ask me. Disclose all potential conflicts to your professor or editor before you begin your assignment.
- **Do not engage in conduct unbecoming** of the department during class, while online or while on assignment. Such misconduct includes but is not limited to disruptive behavior, physical or verbal abuse, property damage, theft, lewd or obscene behavior, and discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or place of origin.



NEED HELP? KNOW WHO TO CALL

Please note following important numbers that will come in handy in case of emergency:

EXTERNAL RESOURCES	AVAILABILITY	CONTACT NUMBER
Suicide Prevention	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 623-2323 (University Hospital-Newark)
Drug/ Alcohol Addiction	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(877) 630-8262
Crime Victim Compensation Office	Monday – Friday 8 AM – 8 PM	(877) 658-2221
Rape Care Center	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(877) 733-2273 (Essex County)
Sexual Assault Hotline	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(800) 656-HOPE (National)
Psychiatric Emergency	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 924-7416 (Newark Beth Israel Hospital)
NJIT RESOURCES	AVAILABILITY	CONTACT NUMBER
NJIT Public Safety	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 596-3111 (Emergency) (973) 596-3120 (Non-Emergency)
Dean of Students (TITLE IX – Sexual Misconduct Report/Response)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM	(973) 596-3466
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 5 PM	(973) 596-3414
Student Health Services (SHS)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM	(973) 596-3621

Spring 2025 schedule*

This is my best guess for how the semester will unfold, but do note: the schedule is subject to change. Because of this, please rely on Canvas for up-to-date information about assignments. And, of course, feel free to email me if you have questions!

Class meets from 11:30-12:50 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesday in room 124 of the Central King Building

	Monday	Wednesday
Week 1 Welcome!	Jan. 20 NO CLASS – MLK Day	Jan. 22 Intros and class overview; make NYT and WSJ account + upload a selfie & introduce yourself to class Reading: “AI is unavoidable, not inevitable” (Marc Watkins) + “Get Ready for the AI-driven world of News” (Gina Chua)
Week 2 Crash course: History (Where are we going, where have we been?)	Jan. 27 In-class: Letter to your instructor What is news – and what does AI have to do with this class + Why was the printing press a big deal? HW: Read “Tools of the Mind” (Nicholas Carr)	Jan. 29 Discussion
Week 3 Crash course: History:	Feb. 3 In-class writing #1 Are we in the midst of a new information revolution? HW: “The New Members: How Computers are Different than the	Feb. 5 Discussion + a look at algorithms and how they work HW: Scanlan book: Intro + Being Human + “Bad Attitude’ + Letting Objectivity Reign” + “Unforced Errors” (xi-14) + “The role of the student press” + “Covering a Campus” (excerpts from <i>The Student Newspaper Survival Guide</i>)

	Printing Press” (Yuval Noah Harari)	
Week 4 Crash course: What does journalism look like?	Feb. 10 Film: Spotlight	Feb. 12 Film Spotlight + discussion of journalism’s essential value HW: Scanlan book: lesson 5 (Letting Fear Stop you”, #6 (“Distrusting the Process”) #7 (“Stumbling on the steps of effective interviewing”); Lesson 8 (“Iceberg Right Ahead”); Lesson 9 (“Bloated Quotes) ; Lesson 12 (“Tuning in to USuck FM); Lesson 13 (“Revision Rejection”)
Week 5 Crash course: Journo Basics	Feb. 17 In-class writing #2 Anatomy of a news story: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of news • The five 5’s • Parts of a story Intro beat report assignment	Feb. 19 Fieldwork for beat report; due at 11:59 p.m. HW: Checkology.org exercise: Practicing Quality Journalism
Week 6 Crash course: Journo Basics	Feb. 24 How are stories made: Reverse engineer stories	Feb. 26 Possible guest speaker? Checkology.org exercise: Information zones
Week 7 Crash course: Journo Basics	March 3 What is a proposal? What can you write about?	March 5 In-class writing #3

Week 8 Crash Course: Journo Basics	March 10 Interview practice with a fellow student	March 12 Discussion: rule of the game re: transcripts + using AI for summaries, selecting quotes, etc
Week 9	March 17 SPRING BREAK	March 19 SPRING BREAK
Week 10 Welcome back! Make your own journalism	March 24 In-class work on story pitch	March 26 Story proposal due at midnight!
Week 11 Make your own journalism	March 31	April 2
Week 12 Make your own journalism	April 7 LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW FROM A CLASS	April 9
Week 13 Make your own journalism	April 14 Story due!	April 16
Week 14 Wrap up	April 21 Introduce final assignment	April 23
Week 15 Wrap up	April 28	April 30
Week 16 Wrap up	May 5– Last day of class! Final assignment due!	May 7

