

FS102w-2: Academic Discourse II
Odd Fellows 206
MWF 9-9:50

Prof. Ben Slote (bslote; x-3391)
Office: Bentley 201
Hours: T: 10:30-12; 1:30-2:50
Th 2-3:30
F: 2-3; and by appt

Losing the News? The American Newspaper and the Meaning of Its Collapse

The American newspaper business is in big trouble. This is no longer news. In 2009 142 papers closed shop nationwide, about 10% of the U.S. newspaper industry, and almost all others, including flagship papers like *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The New York Times*, made deep cuts in their staff, news coverage, and hard-copy circulation. In both 2008 and 2009 more than 14,000 people in the industry were laid off. The 2010 numbers are better (around 3,000 layoffs), but that may be because the market has reached a bare minimum, a kind of skeletal state.

Is this something we should worry about? This course explores that question. In the process, it's my hope that you will cultivate a heightened and enduring appreciation for well-reported news—that you leave the course a life-long student of current events at the local, national, and global level—and that you become increasingly thoughtful and articulate on the subject of the “fourth estate” and democracy in this country.

Because this is an FS102 course with a “w” designation, it includes other skills-related goals:

- **To help you continue to improve as a writer**, including your ability to
 - write *concisely, clearly* and in a way that is *well-organized* and *grammatically correct*;
 - make your writing particularly *persuasive* (using researched sources and other evidence credibly and effectively, constructing logical transitions, avoiding fallacious thinking, anticipating counter-arguments, and exercising a clear sense of audience)
 - be your own *exacting editor*; and
 - find your own smart, *natural voice*—or voices—on the page;
- **To help you improve as a critical reader**, including your ability to
 - tease out the centrally important assertions of any text
 - discern and assess the strengths and weaknesses of another text's argument
 - recognize the rhetorical and stylistic maneuvers at work in non-fiction prose (non-literary writing)
 - recognize the organizational strategies at play in a text;
- **To help you continue to improve as a public speaker**, including your ability to
 - make an effective, coherent speech *extemporaneously*
 - make the organization of your speech clear to your audience
 - relate information and assertions from other sources accurately
 - use and acknowledge credible sources to support your claims
 - make your speech engaging through analogies, strategic repetition, and other rhetorical tactics

Required texts (available at the college bookstore):

Alex S. Jones, *Losing the News: The Future of the News That Feeds Democracy* (2009)
Elliot King, *Free for All: The Internet's Transformation of Journalism* (2010)
Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference, 6th Edition (new version)*(2009)

Some of the reading will also come in the form of handouts. You will want to find a way to keep these organized as they accumulate across the semester.

Course schedule (subject to minor revisions, as needed):

1/19 Introduction

CRISIS IS NEWSPAPERLAND

1/21 Max Potter (Allegheny '93), "All the News That's Fit to Be Killed" (*5280*, June 2009); "6 Are Held in Attack on Chinese Investigative Journalist" (*NY Times*, Dec. 21, 2010)—*handouts*;
short writing assignment due

1/24 DeFilippo, "What It Means When a City Loses Its Paper" (*SpliceToday*, Nov. 2, 2009); Gitlin, "A Surfeit of Crises: Circulation, Revenue, Attention, Authority, and Deference"—*handouts*

1/26 Jones, *Losing the News*, Prologue, Chapter 1 (pp. xi-27);

1/28 **No class**

1/31 Jones, *LTN*, Ch.7; Jarvis, "Forward" to King's *Free For All*

WHERE THE AMERICAN NEWSPAPER (AS WE KNOW IT) CAME FROM

2/2 Writing the first essay: summarizing a Jones chapter and evaluating his prose;
writing issues

2/4 *LTN* Ch. 6

2/7 King, *Free for All*, Chs. 1-2

2/9 **First essay due; NEWSPAPER READING ROUTINE BEGINS**

2/11 Reading newspapers (visual and content organization, hard news & advertising)

NEWSPAPERS AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

2/14 Reading newspapers (paper as city diary; editorials, letters, audience)

2/16 *LTN* Ch.2; writing issues

2/18 Jones, ch. 2 cont.; **grammar and usage quiz**

2/21 Newspaper speeches

2/23 Investigative journalism: Levy, "Broken Homes" series (*NYTimes*, 2002)--*handouts*

2/25 Levy (cont.); **writing exercise due**

2/28 Newspaper speeches; writing issues

3/2 Investigative journalism: handouts

3/4 Investigative journalism: handouts

3/7 writing issues: preparing for the second essay

3/9 investigative journalism: handouts

3/11 Newspaper speeches

3/14 Discuss *All the President's Men* (screening time tba)

3/16 **second essay due**

3/18 Discuss *State of Play* (screening time tba)

SPRING BREAK

FROM NEWSPRINT TO DIGITAL: LOSING THE NEWS OR JUST EVOLUTION?

3/28 King, *Free For All*, Ch. 5

3/30 Jones, *Losing the News*, Ch. 8

4/1 Letters to the editor: examples, writing your own

- 4/4 King, *FFA*, Ch. 6
 4/6 Jones, *LTN*, Ch. 9
 4/8 blogs that give new journalism a good name: your examples writing issues
- 4/11 King, *FFA*, Ch. 7
letter to the editor due
- 4/13 news sites, bloggers, and aggregators vs. newspaper websites: *thedailybeast.com*, *news.yahoo.com*, *news.google.com*, *dailykos.com*; *rewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/*;
 4/15 about the final speeches and papers

A DIFFERENT (NEUROSCIENTIFIC) PERSPECTIVE

- 4/18 Fuller, fr. *What Is Happening to News: The Information Explosion and the Crisis in Journalism* Chs. 1, 6 (handout)
 4/20 Fuller, Chs. 10, 13 (handout)
 4/22 Preparing for the final essay

STUDENT INVESTIGATIONS

- 4/25 – 4/29 speeches
- 5/2 last thoughts on the final essay

The final essay is due Friday, May 6, by noon, in my office (Bentley 201)

How course grades will be calculated:

<u>Writing*</u>	First essay (2/9)	10%
	Second essay (3/16)	10%
	Letter to the editor (4/11)	10%
	Final essay (5/6)	20%
	Informal writing (quiz, writing exercise, newspaper responses)	10%
<u>Speeches</u>	First speech	10%
	Second speech	15%
<u>Class Participation**</u>		15%

**Please note that you cannot qualify to pass the course unless you complete all the written work*
 ** How I will evaluate class participation is described at the end of the syllabus.

COURSE POLICIES:

Attendance: This class will be discussion-based and collaborative, so you need to be here, ready to contribute. More than two unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade, **and if you have more than six unexcused absences, you cannot pass the course.** If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out from a classmate what work is upcoming and what work you need to make up. If you are an athlete who will miss classes for competitive events, please speak to me near the beginning of the semester and give me a copy of your travel schedule. If you need to miss class due to a religious observance, then please let me know in advance so we can make arrangements to cover material from that day. For further information, see <http://www.allegheny.edu/news/inw/holidays.php>.

Late Papers: The nature and timing of coursework in this class means that *there cannot be late papers*. If foreseeable circumstances prevent you from getting a paper in on time, get it in *early*. Unexcused late papers will be marked down one partial letter grade per class day late. For medical excuses, I need official documentation from the Health Center or your doctor. I'm no good at interpreting symptoms myself. And unless otherwise informed, **essays must be handed in as hard copy in class, not sent electronically.**

Documentation style for your essays: All students should use the MLA style for documenting sources in written work. MLA style is presented in Hacker's *A Writers Reference* and can also be found at <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/resdoc/humanities/english.htm>.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the cardinal sin of the intellectual community. Any writing that makes unacknowledged use of the work of others (their words or ideas or organization), including material from the Internet, will receive a letter grade of F and will be sent to the Honor Committee, as required by the faculty handbook.

The Writing Center: All students—no matter their level of competency as writers—are encouraged to make use of the Learning Commons and the writing consultants there. For details see <http://learningcommons.alleggheny.edu/>

HOW I WILL EVALUATE CLASS PARTICIPATION:

While it is difficult to quantify the success of a student's contributions to class discussion (at our best we all of course contribute differently), here are the general standards I will use to grade participation:

A range: Participation at this level is marked by its active nature, its consistency, and its quality. When A participants read an assignment, they *prepare* to participate in a class discussion; they read assignments fully, carefully, and critically enough to be ready not just to respond to my questions but also to initiate discussion with comments and questions of their own. Such participants will also come to class ready to make and argue assertions about the reading and to think out loud about its implications; they will attend to the comments of others in class, agree, elaborate or *civilly* disagree with them, bring our attention to passages from the reading to make their point, and at times connect such thinking with earlier readings or previous class discussions. In short, students who by their engagement in class discussion throughout the semester show themselves to be true students of the course material--persistently conscientious and inquiring--will get an **A** for their efforts. They will also make the course a lot better. (By the way, substituting quantity of participation for quality will not work.)

B range: Students who come to every class, have almost always done all the reading, and consistently respond to the questions of others in a way that demonstrates their command of the reading will earn a **B** participation grade. What separates this effort from an **A** one is not so much quantity (teachers are remarkably good at detecting bs) as the level of preparation--one's reading and thinking--that has gone on before one gets to class, especially the kind that enables students to *initiate* discussion. But you cannot get a **B** participation grade by just showing up, either, or by talking every once and a while.

C range: A **C** participant comes to almost all the classes, usually has done most of the reading most of the time, but not with the energy necessary to demonstrate through participation their ongoing engagement with the material. Such a discussant contributes infrequently, maybe one time every third or fourth class.

D range: Automatic pilot mode. You were physically there most of the time, spoke a few times all semester maybe, but that was it.

F: Not coming to class is the traditional route. Other variations: sleeping in class, not having your book, being routinely disruptive.