COMM 3301-001, Reporting: 202610

Fall 2025 • Texas A&M University-San Antonio Department of Sociology and Communication 9:30-10:45 a.m. Monday, Wednesday: Room 321 of the Central Academic Building

Instructor: Teresa Talerico, clinical assistant professor of communication

Email: <u>ttalerico@tamusa.edu</u>

Phone: 210-784-2810 (office) or 805-448-7844 (cell)

Office: Room 319B, Central Academic Building. Office hours: 11 a.m.-noon Wednesday, 10

a.m.-noon Thursday or by appointment.

Theory and practice in news gathering, reporting and writing: Students will cover news beats on campus and in the surrounding area. The strongest work will be eligible for publication in The Mesquite, a student-run news site, or The Cypress, a news site that covers Castroville.

Objectives

- Build on principles and skills from COMM 2311, Media Writing and COMM 2305, News Editing.
- Explore advanced reporting and writing such as beat coverage, profiles, localizations, investigative journalism and data reporting.
- Practice a digital-first journalism philosophy in a deadline-driven environment.
- Cultivate campus sources and story ideas as a beat reporter.
- Understand methods and practice of community engagement.
- Consider and apply ethics in web-based storytelling as it relates to fairness, accuracy and truth-seeking in a digital age.
- Uphold accuracy, fairness and other ethical standards prescribed by the Society of Professional Journalists.

Required Course Materials

Free digital textbook: <u>"Inside Reporting, 3rd Edition,"</u> by Tim Harrower Free online access to <u>"The AP Stylebook, 57th Edition: 2024-2026"</u>

Evaluation

40% — Mesquite stories 5% — Quizzes

20% — Non-Mesquite homework 10% — Beat Exercises

10% — Discussions 15% — Final Exam and Presentation

ASSIGNMENT CATEGORIES

Mesquite or Cypress Story Assignments

Story	Word count	# of sources	Description	Deadline
Story 1: Beat News Brief	200-400	At least one	Short story such as an advance or small bit of news	Sept. 21
Story 2: Beat News Story	600-800	At least two	Longer news story	Oct. 12
Social Media Post	See Blackboard	Something newsworthy about your beat for social media.	Examples: photo/graphic and text for Instagram or a video for an Instagram reel.	Nov. 2
Story 3: Meeting Story	600-800	Multiple	Cover a meeting	Nov. 9
Story 4: Beat In-Depth	800-1,000	At least three	Profile or localization	Nov. 23

Stories that demonstrate solid interviewing, reporting, writing and fact-checking, with only minimal revisions necessary, will be eligible for publication on The Mesquite's or the Cypress' website. The student will receive extra credit for the revisions.

Non-Mesquite Homework: Includes a "License to Snoop" assignment using online databases and a court exercise in which students watch a hearing and then critique an Express-News story that covered it. It also includes two of three reflections required by the university for this experiential course:

Beat Exercises: They include weekly beat check-ins with sources, follow-ups, reach-outs and other evidence of effort, persistence and ingenuity.

Quizzes: Quizzes will primarily cover handouts, the 3301 Refresher and AP Style. **Online Discussions:** Students will post an answer to a discussion question and respond to at least one classmate.

Final Exam and Presentation: The online final will review what we learned throughout the semester. It will include the last of three reflections required for this experiential course. Presentations will explore the student's experience covering a beat.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance and Etiquette

Show up to our class meetings on time and stay the whole period. Each class meeting will be a combination of a lecture, class exercise and a news lab. Punctuality and attendance are crucial in journalism. Those arriving more than 20 minutes late are counted absent. Those who leave early are counted absent.

I will allow four absences for any reason. I will drop your letter grade by 5 percent for each additional absence.

Read this course syllabus closely. You and the instructor must follow it as a legal contract. Knowing its contents will greatly enhance your likelihood of success. If you have questions or need help, contact me by email or phone. Follow assignment directions to the letter.

Journalism is a deadline-driven business. Meeting deadlines is extremely important. I deduct 10 points a day for late assignments.

Submitting Assignments

<u>DO NOT SUBMIT PDFS UNLESS I SPECIFICALLY REQUEST THEM. DO NOT SUBMIT TEXT ENTRIES IN BLACKBOARD.</u>

For non-Mesquite homework, use Microsoft Word or Google Docs. Upload the file or link to the Google Doc in Blackboard.

For Mesquite stories, always use a properly slugged copy of the story template in your personal folder in our 3301 Google Drive folder. Mesquite stories are submitted in Blackboard, stored in your personal class folder in Google Drive **AND** shared with tjtalerico@gmail.com. Grades consider AP Style, content, word usage, mechanics, spelling, grammar, clarity and thorough reporting. Proofread your work with care.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE / ChatGPT

COMM 2311 assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

In other words, **just don't.** Writing, analytical and critical thinking skills are the backbone of our communication courses. All writing assignments must be prepared by students in their own words. Developing strong competencies in this area will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Look at it this way: You are learning to be a professional communicator. Writing is the bedrock of this profession, whether it's a news article, photo caption, radio spot, press

release, narrative of a TV story or film script. If you can't write, why should an employer hire you when they can just use ChatGPT? Therefore, submissions generated by ChatGPT or other AI composition software are not permitted in my courses. I reserve the right to ask to see evidence of your original drafts, rewrites, etc.

The bulk of your work will comprise news stories that include **original** interviews and legitimate information from human sources on campus. You will need to provide a source list with the dates and locations of your interviews. You will need to attribute other information to whatever website, news article or other source that you used in your reporting.

COMM 3301 assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Students should follow the Student Rights and Responsibilities and Student Code of Conduct available here. I will follow procedures in the code. Do not plagiarize. Your work shows your character. Make it your own. The instructor does not allow students to:

- use cell phones/personal electronics for non-academic use in class.
- work on anything other than class material during course time.

Anyone who fails to observe these will receive a warning and an absence for the first occurrence. Further violations may result in the student being asked to leave class and/or to drop the course.

TENTATIVE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

We may deviate from this schedule depending on breaking news and other stories that take priority.

Week 1: Aug. 25, 27

Day 1: We will review the syllabus and handle some housekeeping before we kick-start a semester of beat reporting. Icebreaker: Campus Scavenger Hunt Day 2: Journalism lab.

Homework

- Student Schedule and Contract due Aug. 25 in class
- Join Slack by Aug. 26
- Expect your beat assignments by Aug. 31 through JagWire email.
- Quiz 1 on "Seven Deadly Sins" and Beat Resources Aug. 31

- Pre-flection on Prerequisite due Aug. 31

Week 2: Sept. 1, 3

This week we will discuss beats and news values.

Day 1: Review News Values. Work on Beat Reach-Outs in class. Discuss Phone Folos.

Day 2: Journalism lab

Homework

- Beat Reach-Outs due today.
- Phone Follow-Up I
- Phone Follow-Up II
- In-Person Follow-Up
- Quiz 2: Review "Reporting" section in the 3301 Refresher and watch the Google Drive video.

Week 3: Sept. 8, 10

Day 1: Continue to review policies and tips for journalists, including some that apply specifically to reporting for The Mesquite. Traditional News Ledes. Finding Sources and Stories.

Graded class discussion: Discussion 1: Beat Reach-Outs, due by the end of class Day 2: Journalism lab. Spreadsheet: First Beat Interviews: This helps me keep track of your progress.

Homework

Beat Research and Report: deadlines vary. Quiz 3 due Sept. 14. Read Harrower "Print to the Web," "Multiple Platforms" and "Social Media, pages 158-163 and Mesquite Handbook pgs 22-32: Social Media Policy, Communication. Beat Interview 1 and 3 Story Ideas due Sept. 14

Week 4: Sept. 15, 17

Day 1: Discuss social media, beat work. Day 2: Journalism lab: Story 1 and submit Story 1 photo request.

Homework

- Story 1: Beat News Brief due Sept. 21
- Story 1: Photo Request due Sept. 18
- Quiz 4 due Sept. 21

Week 5: Sept. 22, 24

Day 1: Review and edit news briefs.

Day 2: Journalism lab. Discuss ideas for Story 2: Beat News Story. Beat Reach-out 2.

Homework:

- Beat Reach-out 2
- Read Features, Generating Story Ideas, Feature Style/Structure, Writing Profiles, pages 116-125 in Harrower.
- Discussion: N is for No. 1.

Week 6: Sept. 29, Oct. 1

Day 1: Explore personality profiles and localizations so you can decide which one to write this semester.

Day 2: Journalism lab. Continue with Story 2. Mine a source on your beat.

Homework:

- Class Exercise: Profile or Localization?
- Discussion O is for OK
- Read Chapter 7 of Harrower.

Week 7: Oct. 6, 8

Day 1: Discuss public information. Review public information guiz.

Day 2: Journalism lab. Work on Story 2 and photo request.

Homework:

- Quiz 7: Texas Public Information Act.
- Story 2 due Sunday
- Read pages 108-109 of Harrower.
- *Are you writing a profile for Story 4? You should have your subject nailed down and agree to be profiled NOW.

Week 8: Oct. 13, 15

Day 1: We will discuss covering meetings. From student clubs to the San Antonio City Council to the Texas A&M System Board of Regents, meetings are where actions are taken and policies are made.

Day 2: Journalism lab. In-class meeting exercise.

Quick review of meeting coverage, with a meeting story due by Nov. 9.

Homework:

Quiz 5, Texas Open Meetings Act. Read pages 44-51 of Harrower.

Week 9: Oct. 20, 22

Day 1: Nontraditional ledes and nutgrafs. Day 2: Journalism lab.

Homework:

Quiz P is for p.m.

Discussion: Midterm Reflection: Challenge and Success

Week 10: Oct. 27, 29

Day 1: Social media posts. Track down a national association related to your beat or Story 4.

Day 2: Journalism lab.

Homework:

- Track down a national association, due Wednesday
- Quiz: Q is for queen; R is for reign

- Social Media Post, due Sunday.

Week 11: Nov. 3, 5

Day 1: Investigative and Database Reporting. Review a few social media submissions.

Day 2: Journalism lab

Homework:

- "License to Snoop"
- Read "Covering Accidents, Disasters, Fires" pages 98-101 and "Covering Crime" 102-103 in textbook.
- Discussion: S is for semesters
- Story 3: Meeting Coverage

Week 12: Nov. 10, 12

Day 1: Discuss Story 4. Review an example of breaking news coverage in The Mesquite.

Day 2: Journalism lab

Homework:

- Photo Request for Story 4 due Thursday, Nov. 13.
- Discussion: T is for TK due Wednesday, Nov. 19

Week 13: Nov. 17, 19

Day 1: Journalism lab: Story 4. Day 2: Journalism lab: Story 4.

Homework: Story 4: In-depth Profile or Localization due Sunday, Nov. 23. Quiz: U is for U.S.

Read "Covering Courts," pages 104-105 in Harrower.

Week 14: Nov. 24, 26

From OJ Simpson and Jeffrey Dahmer to Jodi Arias and Derek Chauvin, courtroom trials can be some of the most riveting news coverage. This week we will discuss covering courts, including my own "baptism by fire," the Branch Davidian trial.

Day 1: Covering Courts

Day 2: Journalism lab: Story 4 edits

Homework:

- Quiz 10: V is for versus
- Court homework assignment TK
- Read the obituary section in our Harrower textbook.

Week 15: Dec. 1, 3

Day 1: Discuss obit writing. Discuss final exam.

Day 2: Presentations

Homework:

- Obit assignment
- W is for -ward discussion

I will post the final exam by 11:59 p.m. Dec. 1 in Week 16 of Blackboard. You will have a week to complete it, but it shouldn't take that long. The exam will include: multiple choice, true/false and short-answer questions on what we have learned this semester, such as types of stories, AP Style, ledes, gathering information and more. It is an open-book final exam.

Week 16: Final Exam and Presentations

Dec. 8: More presentations

Final Exam: due at 11:59 p.m. Dec. 8

Important Dates:

Sept. 1	Labor Day. No classes.
Sept. 2	Last day to register
Sept. 10	Census Date

Nov. 14 Last day to drop with an automatic W Nov. 25 Last day to withdraw from university

Nov. 27-29 Thanksgiving holiday. No classes.

Dec. 4 Last day of classes
Dec. 5 Study Day. No Classes

Dec. 6-12 Final exams

Dec. 17 Grades due by noon

Dec. 19 Grades available in JagWire

The complete academic calendar is available online: https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/academic-calendar/index.html

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, Disability Support Services is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us https://www.tamusa.edu/Disability-Support-Services/index.html or email us at dss@tamusa.edu. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all

currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the Tools section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing

tutoring@tamusa.edu, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202. Counseling/Mental Health Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors

interfere with your academic performance and negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the

Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120. All mental health services provided by the SCC are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information on SCC services visit http://tamusa.edu/studentcounseling

Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331. Additionally, the TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources to including support for in the moment distress, an anonymous peer-to-peer support network, mental health screenings, podcasts, and articles to improve your mental wellbeing.

<u>Emergency Preparedness:</u> JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: https://tamusa.bbcportal.com

More information about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found here:

https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/emergency-management/

Download the SafeZone App (https://safezoneapp.com/) for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. Non-Emergency (210) 784-1900.

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended by the published Census Date (the first week of class). Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend prior to the published Census Date (the first week of class) will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses

and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at https://www.tamusa.edu/academics.

Meeting Basic Needs: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to submit a CARE referral (https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-

Rights-and-Responsibilities/file-a-report.html) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources.

Office Hours: All faculty with teaching assignments should include regularly scheduled office hours on each syllabus in addition to "by appointment." Please review your appointment letter for the number of weekly office hours you are expected to set. Regularly scheduled office hours should also be posted outside your office door (where applicable).

<u>Military Affairs:</u> Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any question involving federal or state VA Education Benefits. Visit the Patriots' Casa building, room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided with an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or course work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

<u>The Six-Drop Rule</u>: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

<u>Statement of Harassment and Discrimination:</u> Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equal opportunity, and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual on our campus and within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees are to be based on

applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the University's Civil Rights Officer at 210-784-2061 or titleix@tamusa.edu.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking based on sex, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other related sex-based misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator (titleix@tamusa.edu, 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students: Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide such reasonable modifications to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with temporary medical condition that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a

leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures

for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status (titleix@tamusa.edu; 210-784-2061; CAB 439K). Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources. Young Jaguars: can support parenting students with daycare who meet this criteria: Must be enrolled in

classes at TAMUSA in the current semester. Must be Pell eligible or a single parent. They serve children ages 3 to 12-years-old. Children must be enrolled in Pre-K-3 through 6th grade. youngjaguars@tamusa.edu (210) 784-2636

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country. Students' Rights

- 1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
- 2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and pregnancy/parenting or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
- 3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
- 4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university students' rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities

- 1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and administration.
- 2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, Student Code of Conduct, on our website, and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with federal, state, and local laws.
- 3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
- 4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning.
- 5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notifications.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or disability. Conduct that infringes on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt,

which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct.

For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the Student Code

of Conduct (https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-andresponsibilities/documents/Student-Handbook-2022-23.pdf) or visit the resources available in the OSRR website

(https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academicintegrity.html).

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