

COMM 3301-900, Reporting

Spring 2024 • Texas A&M University-San Antonio

Department of Sociology and Communication

9:30-10:45 a.m. Tuesday, Room 321 of CAB

Instructor: Teresa Talerico, clinical assistant professor of communication

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Office: Room 319B, Central Academic Building. Office hours: by appointment.

Theory and practice in news gathering, reporting and writing: Teams of students will collaborate on in-depth stories that explore news and issues 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 student-produced news outlet that covers the city of Castroville.

Objectives

- Build on the principles and skills acquired in 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: [“Inside Reporting, 3rd Edition.”](#) by Tim Harrower

Free online access to [“The AP Stylebook, 56th Edition: 2022-2024”](#)

EVALUATION

30% — Mesquite stories

25% — Non-Mesquite homework

10% — Quizzes

10% — Discussions

10%—Peer Reviews

15% — Final exam

ASSIGNMENT CATEGORIES

Story Assignments

Team Story: Groups of four reporters will collaborate on in-depth stories. Topics might include:

- Students with children, including campus resources for them
- the state's new law that prohibits diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives at public universities
- the new federal financial aid form
- The city of Castroville's Castroville Dreamin' project to shape the city's future

DEADLINES: FEB. 19 and MARCH 4

Super Tuesday Coverage: Reporting students will cover the March 5 primary election in which voters choose their party's candidates for U.S. president, Congress and other federal and state seats. Reporting could include interviews with voters at polling places, social media posts and coverage of concession/victory speeches.

DEADLINE: MARCH 5 AND 6

Dynamic Duo News Story

DEADLINE: April 1

Dynamic Duo News Story Revisions

DEADLINE: April 8

Competitive Meeting Story: Students will sign up to cover a meeting that works with their schedule. Up to three students can cover the same meeting. The best story is eligible for publication. Campus meetings include Faculty Senate and the Student Government Association. Off-campus meetings include city council and school board meetings in Castroville.

DEADLINE: April 22

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

Non-Mesquite Homework: This will include a "License to Snoop" assignment in which students look up information on city or county databases and a court exercise in which students watch a hearing on YouTube and then critique an Express-News story that covered the hearing. It also includes two of three reflections required by the university for this experiential course:

1. PRE-FLECTION ON PREREQUISITE, COMM 2311, MEDIA WRITING
2. MIDTERM REFLECTION: CHALLENGE AND SUCCESS

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.

Self and Peer Reviews: Students will evaluate team members and themselves for the major class assignments.

Final Exam: The online final will review what we learned throughout the semester.

It will include the last of three reflections required for this experiential course:

FINAL REFLECTION: Describe your performance and growth in this course. What was a particular challenge at the start of the semester? Interviewing? News writing? Story structure? AP Style? Objectivity? Something else? How did you improve by the end of the semester? Provide a specific example of that growth and what you learned. Also, tell me something you did to get out of your comfort zone in 2311. How will you apply these new skills and knowledge to future courses, jobs or internships?

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. Students **must** sign in when they get to class. 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

DO NOT SUBMIT PDFS UNLESS I SPECIFICALLY REQUEST THEM. DO NOT SUBMIT TEXT ENTRIES IN BLACKBOARD.

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 tjtaleric@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.

We may include an assignment in which we **examine** and analyze tools such as ChatGPT. But please remember they are not a substitute for human creativity, originality or critical thinking. It's important for you to develop your own voice as a writer and communicator. However, we also must learn to understand such programs as we enter this new world.

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: Jan. 16

Course Overview. Icebreaker. Join our Slack workspace. Discuss Team Stories.

Homework:

- Join Slack by Jan. 17.
- Student Schedule and Form due Jan. 19
- Quiz 1 on "Seven Deadly Sins" due Jan. 22
- Pre-flection on Prerequisite: Media Writing, due Jan. 22

Week 2: Jan. 23

Team Story: Research and Readership

Research your news topic. Identify your readership. Who are your readers? How can your story inform them?

Homework:

- Quiz 2: Reporting and Google Drive, due Jan. 29
- Team Story: Research and Readership, due before class Jan. 30

Week 3: Jan. 30

Team Story: Identify and Contact the Experts

Who are some good sources? Contact them to request an interview.

Homework

- Quiz 3: Interviewing and Mesquite Handbook due Feb. 5.
- Team Story: Identify and Contact the Experts due by end of class Jan. 30.
- Follow-up Reach-outs to Experts due before class Feb. 6

Week 4: Feb. 6

Team Story: Progress Reports and Interview Questions for Experts.

Homework

- Quiz 4: Writing and Submitting/Sharing Stories in Blackboard, due Feb. 12
- Team Story: Interviews due by Feb. 13.
- Discussion 1: Progress Reports due by end of class Feb. 6

Week 5: Feb. 13

Team Story Lab: Finish up interviews or start typing up interviews. Start working on graf for story.

Add your information to the Mesquite Directory under Mesquite Resources.

Homework

- First part of team stories due Feb. 19: Nutgraf, paraphrases and quotes from experts
- Read Features, Generating Story Ideas, Feature Style/Structure, pages 116-125 in Harrower.
- Discussion: N is for No. 1 due Feb. 20

Week 6: Feb. 20

Team Story: Humanize. Identify two sources who can share their personal experience.

Team Story: Numbers. Track down data that helps tell the story.

Homework:

- Read Harrower "Print to the Web," "Multiple Platforms" and "Social Media, pages 158-163

and Mesquite Handbook pgs 22-32: Social Media Policy, Communication.

- Continue work to interview “humanize” sources and track down numbers.
- Discussion O is for OK, due Feb. 27

Week 7: Feb. 27

Discuss pre-election reporting. Students receive election assignments for Super Tuesday.

Homework:

- Add anecdotal or scene-setting ledes plus “human” interviews and numbers to team stories, due March 4.
- Quiz: P is for p.m., due March 4

Week 8: March 5

Super Tuesday coverage

Homework:

- Read "Incorporating "Links" pages 170-171 in Harrower for next week.
- Texas Public Information Act quiz, due March 18
- Midterm Reflection: Discussion due March 19

Spring Break: March 11-17

Week 9: March 19

Assign Dynamic Duo News Stories.

Homework:

- Read “Covering Meetings,” pages 108-109 and “Press Rights,” 140-141 in Harrower for next class.
- Quiz: Q is for queen; R is for reign/rein due March 25

Week 10: March 26

Discuss meeting coverage and press rights, pages 110-111. Watch the highlights of a recorded city council meeting and examine ledes from various news outlets.

Homework:

- Texas Open Meetings Act Quiz, due April 1
- Dynamic Duo News Story due April 1
- “Top ‘O The Meeting Story” assignment due April 3

Week 11: April 2

Investigative Reporting: How can you track down information online? This week we will discuss database journalism. Investigative Reporting: Submitting an open records request or FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request.

Homework:

- "License to Snoop" assignment, due April 8
- Discussion: S is for semesters, due April 9

- Read "Covering Accidents, Disasters, Fires," pages 98-101

Week 12: April 9

In class: Review examples of breaking news coverage in The Mesquite and other news outlets.

Homework:

- Read "Covering Crime," pages 102-103 and "Incorporating Multimedia," pages 172-173 in Harrower.
- Discussion: T is for ...

Week 13: April 16

In Class: Crime and Police Reporting. Police scanners. Class Exercise: Listen to Bexar County law enforcement scanner.

Homework:

- Read "Covering Courts," pages 104-105 in Harrower.
- Quiz 9: U is for ...

Week 14: April 23

In class: Covering courts

Homework:

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

Week 15: April 30

Obituaries

Homework:

- Obit assignment
- W is for -ward discussion
- Discuss final exam.

I will post the final exam by 11:59 p.m. TK 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.

Final exam due date: 11:59 p.m. TK

Week 16: Final Exams

Important Dates:

Jan. 23 Last day to register
Jan. 31 Census Date

March 11-17	Spring Break
March 29.	Study Day. No Classes.
April 13	Last day to drop with an automatic W
April 20	Last day to withdraw from university
April 29	Last day of classes
April 30	Study Day. No Classes
May 1-7	Final exams
May 13	Grades due by noon

The complete academic calendar is available online:

<https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/academic-calendar/index.html>

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Accommodations for Persons 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, please contact Disability Support Services in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210, or at (210) 784-1335 or visit <https://www.tamusa.edu/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 and their instructors 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/or 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.

Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 (after-hours select option '2'). For more information and self-help resources, please visit www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling

Emergency Preparedness: 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/campus-information/safety/university-police-department/documents/emergency-operations-plan.pdf> and

<https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/campus-information/safety/university-police-department/documents/emergency-action-plan.pdf>

Download the SafeZone App 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 the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend 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://bit.ly/WLDCCenter>.

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 contact the Dean of Students (DOS@tamusa.edu) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources they may possess.

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to communicate, in advance if possible, and special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployment, drill requirements, disability accommodations). You are also encouraged to visit the Patriots' Casa in-person 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 an opportunity to make up any

examination, study, or 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.

The Six-Drop Rule: 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.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of 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 within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should 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, gender identity, gender expression, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

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, 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 or sexual violence, or other related 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 reasonable accommodations to pregnant students that would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition and 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.

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, 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 student 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, University Catalog and to comply with them, as well as 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 an environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notification.

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. Behaviors that infringe 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](#).

NOTE: Guidance for how to cite AI-generators, like ChatGPT, can be found here <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

Important Dates:

January 16	First day of class
March 11-17	Spring Break – No classes
March 29	Study Day – No classes
April 13	Last day to drop with an automatic “W”
April 20	Last day to drop a course or withdraw from the University
April 29	Last day of classes
April 30	Study Day – No classes
May 1-7	Final exams

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