

MC 4151 (Spring 2022) – Field Experience, Statehouse Bureau

Instructor: Christopher Drew

Group meetings: On Zoom, 4:15 – 5:15 p.m., Thursdays, before legislative sessions start.

Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom.

Instructor Phone: cell) 973-698-8828 o) 225-578-3984

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Graduate assistant: Drew Hawkins, whawki9@lsu.edu, cell) 504-881-3898

Work hours: During the redistricting session and the regular legislative session, each student will work one or two days a week covering stories. Given the health risks from COVID-19, you have the option of covering stories in person at the Capitol or virtually by watching the official video streams.

Once the semester ends, the Manship School will hire several of you to stay and cover the rest of the session (through June 6) for pay.

Course Overview and Objectives

Since early 2016, the Manship School has been one of the few communication programs in the nation to offer students a chance to cover their state Legislature, get an inside look at how politics works and have their stories published by professional news organizations. It is an amazing opportunity for our best and most ambitious journalism and political communication students. When the Legislature is in session, you will do the same work as reporters from Louisiana's top newspapers and TV stations, covering committee hearings and floor votes and producing news stories on deadline. You will learn how to interview lawmakers and other state officials, zero in on what's new and important at legislative hearings and post stories quickly after votes in both chambers.

We will prepare for the spring session by reporting and writing enterprise stories on politics, health care, education, criminal justice and other topics. We will attempt to look past the political spin on both sides and provide many Louisiana residents with coverage they would not otherwise receive. Budget pressures have forced most of the larger media outlets to cut back on Capitol coverage, and smaller publications never could afford it. As a result, we have the largest Statehouse bureau in Louisiana each spring, and we provide stories for free to news outlets across the state. You can see the stories we have done at manshipxgr.org and the list of the more than 85 news outlets that have published them at manshipxgr.org/news-outlets/.

Learning Outcomes:

- To give students practical experience in reporting, writing and producing breaking news, analysis and other enterprise stories in a fast-paced professional setting.
- To provide journalism and political communication students with an opportunity to study politics and the legislative process in a close and personal way.
- To provide dozens of Louisiana newspapers, digital news sites and TV and radio stations with accurate and objective stories, photos and graphics on the Legislature's hearings and decisions, its interaction with the governor and state agencies, and other political topics.
- To provide a public service by greatly expanding the supply of news for all Louisiana citizens.
- To help students gain day-to-day professional experience and build portfolios of written, audio or video stories that display their knowledge of politics and enable them to get jobs in news and political communication.

Course Prerequisites

This course is mainly for juniors, seniors and graduate students who have had intermediate courses in journalism or political communication or similar experience. Students interested in the course should take a valuable precursor class, MC 4250, Public Affairs Reporting. It is offered each fall to prepare students for working in the Statehouse Bureau. You must obtain my approval to enroll in MC 4151. Undergraduates who have taken MC 4250 and are nearing graduation may use MC 4151 as an alternative to MC 4106, the regular short-form capstone class. with approval from Manship School Assistant Dean Courtni Guidry.

Special Course Requirements

TIME COMMITMENT: To get the most out of this experience, you may have to devote more time to this class than possibly any you have taken. The school generally expects each student to set aside one to two days a week for the work in this course so we can supply consistent coverage to our news outlets. Before and between sessions, we will meet once a week to discuss reporting and writing techniques and your work on the enterprise stories.

ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM: Because your stories will be published, accuracy, fairness and adherence to all journalistic and professional standards are absolutely crucial. Each story will carry a line under your byline saying you work for the LSU Manship School News Service. The reputations of LSU and the Manship School are on the line in everything we do, as are yours and mine. If you keep that in mind, you will put together an enviable collection of stories to help you find internships and jobs. The downside is that any errors will hurt our reputation and your

grade, and any violations of journalistic ethics will be dealt with severely. (See the more detailed sections on professionalism, ethical violations and plagiarism below.) Reporters also must dress in professional business attire when they are at the Capitol. We will discuss appropriate ethical standards and behavior. If you aren't sure about anything or have questions later, ask me right away.

MULTIMEDIA EQUIPMENT: Each student will take photos to accompany his or her stories and create graphics when appropriate. You must bring a camera and a digital recorder to work each day. Smartphones are fine for both functions, though if you have a separate camera with more zooming options, that would be better. Broadcast majors may shoot video news packages that can run on the websites of our news partners. The school will supply the video cameras and mics.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Each student may live-tweet news and revealing quotes from committee hearings and floor debates. We also will tweet links to your stories on our Statehouse Bureau [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) feeds. Both are called @ManshipXGR. (XGR is an old wire-service term for stories from state capitals.)

Course Schedule

In addition to your reporting, writing and multimedia work, I will provide the class with instruction in key areas. We will read model stories, and we will talk about what you should take away from them to improve your own work. Among the topics:

- Ethics, Style and Grammar. Talk about balance and fairness. Review AP Style and grammar rules.
- How to scope out and report enterprise stories.
- Interviewing on the Fly. How to approach legislators before and after hearings and in the hallways and get past the canned spin to something more candid. How to combine note-taking and digital recording to capture precise quotes quickly.
- Advanced Interviewing. Assessing sources' motives and persuading them talk. When off-the-record conversations are desirable and when they are not.
- Covering Committee Hearings and Floor Debates. How to prep for them, spot the most newsworthy item and write stories on deadline.
- Covering A Beat. How to develop expertise in an area – like criminal justice, health care or coastal restoration – and find stories beyond the committee room. Discuss how to reach experts and activists -- academics, public-interest groups and lobbyists – who work with legislators and can help supplement your coverage.

- Writing Political Analysis Stories. How to step back and assess whether legislative actions will solve the problems they are meant to address and what controversial votes might mean for the legislators who make them.

- Campaign Finance. How to take your analysis one step farther by using campaign-finance records to show how certain individuals and industries might have influence with legislators on critical issues.

Assignments, Deadlines, Multimedia and Editing

Assignments come about in three ways. Either you or I will propose a story, and I will assign it to you with a deadline that you must meet (at least with a first draft). Stories on breaking news, such as when you cover a hearing or a floor vote, typically range from 400 to 800 words in length and will be due the same day the news occurs. We also would like to do profiles, analysis and enterprise pieces, and they could range from 900 to 1,300 words and have longer lead times. You will team up on some stories to cover more ground or dig more deeply. You are responsible for informing me if you run into any problems as you work on a story. I will edit the stories through a shared Google document so you can follow along.

Grading

I prefer to treat students in advanced courses like young professionals in a newsroom, and I expect you to be as engaged and diligent as you would be on your first job. One of the keys to success is consistent effort, and I expect each of you to turn in a reporting memo or one or more stories each week. I will grade each of these memos and stories based on their quality and thoroughness, including any revisions you need to make, and these scores will total 50 percent of your final grade. If you don't turn in a solid memo or a story during a week, you will receive a zero for that week.

Just as teams of you gained expertise in different aspects of redistricting in MC 4250, you will each have primary coverage areas, or beats—like health care, education, budget and taxes etc.—once we get into the regular session (while also being ready to cover breaking news in other areas on days that you are working). I expect you to suggest your own story ideas as much as possible. Your initiative and originality will constitute 20 percent of your grade.

Attendance, class participation and meeting deadlines are imperative and will represent 10 percent of your final grade.

Many of you will work at times with a partner or two, so 10 percent of your grade will be based on how cooperative you are within your group and if you handle your appropriate share of the work. Irresponsible teammates can sink stories, but I will not let them sink the grades of students who are working hard. Each student will receive an individual grade for this part of the class, so if you miss classes and meetings and do not do your fair share, expect a lower final grade than your reporting partners.

The final 10 percent of your grade will come from my overall assessment of the output and quality of work. Some students might work mostly on a string of breaking news stories or features, while others might work mainly on a long-range project. Both tracks are acceptable and can earn top marks in this category if you work consistently and in a cooperative manner and meet deadlines.

Grading Scale

97 and above	A+
94.00--96.99	A
90.00--93.99	A-
87.00--89.99	B+
84.00--86.99	B
80.00--83.99	B-
77.00--79.99	C+
74.00--76.99	C
70.00--73.99	C-
67.00--69.99	D+
63.50--66.99	D
60.00--63.99	D-
59.99 and below	F

Possible Grade Reductions

Absences

Please note that LSU requires students to attend all scheduled meetings. This semester, all the meetings will be on Zoom at times based on your schedules. I expect to see you at all the classes, group and instructor meetings and work periods for which you are scheduled unless you have a university-approved excuse such as an illness with a doctor's note. Whether you have a valid excuse or not, I expect you to email me in advance if you will be absent (or shortly thereafter). More than one absence or tardiness will result in grade markdowns on assignments as well as a loss of part or all of the 10% of your final grades for attendance, participation and team cooperation.

Meeting Deadlines

Writing for publication is serious business. You will lose 10 points on each assignment for each day that you are late in turning it. Repeated failures to meet deadlines will result in grade markdowns on assignments as well as a loss of part or all of the 10% of your final grade for attendance, participation and team cooperation.

Adherence to AP Style, Grammar Rules and the Manship Essentials:

All courses within the Manship School focus on the importance of writing, and all of our news outlets use AP Style. As a result, I will deduct points from your assignments for repeated grammar and AP Style errors. All assignments should be free of inaccuracies, weak thinking, typos, spelling errors and grammatical problems. Please consult the most recent MC 2010 cheat sheets on grammar and AP Style and the Manship School Writing Essentials. I have attached all three and posted them on Moodle. You also will receive significant reductions points in your grades for stories in which you make mistakes that damage our credibility and require our news partners to publish corrections.

Students must adhere to the strictest standards of ethical journalism. We will discuss all the ethical norms and boundaries in class early in the semester, and any ethical infractions will result in a zero for that work and possible removal from the class. I will report any serious ethical violations to the Manship School's dean and others at LSU for possible further action.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

Students must adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty. Unless otherwise noted, you are expected to complete all homework, assignments, projects, and exams by yourself. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses punishable under the academic dishonesty provisions of the Code of Student Conduct. Plagiarism is "the unacknowledged inclusion of someone else's words, structure, ideas, or data, failure to identify any source (including interviews, surveys, etc.), published in any medium (including on the Internet) or unpublished, from which words, structure, ideas, or data have been taken" (LSU Code of Student Conduct). Plagiarism includes presenting work created for another course as original work created during this course. Professors who suspect students of cheating or plagiarism are *required* to report such indiscretions to the Dean of Students. Instances of plagiarism and cheating will automatically result in the failure of the assignment, failure in the course and possible expulsion from the university. Please read the LSU Code of Conduct at [http://appl003.lsu.edu/slas/dos.nsf/\\$Content/Code+of+Conduct?OpenDocument#5.1](http://appl003.lsu.edu/slas/dos.nsf/$Content/Code+of+Conduct?OpenDocument#5.1) for specific information.

Other Rules of the Road

Grade Appeals

24/7 Rule: I use the "24/7 Rule" for all discussions regarding grades. This rule requires that students:

1. Must wait a minimum of 24 hours after they receive a graded assignment before contacting the instructor to discuss a grade.
2. After the initial 24 hours, students have one week to meet with me to discuss the grade, or I will consider the matter closed.

Class Discussions Are Off the Record

All lectures, conversations and comments in class, including those by guest speakers, are off the record and provided only for your education. Do not post them on social media or anywhere else. You are NOT allowed to make video and/or audio recordings of ANY class content without written permission from the instructor.

More on Professionalism

Professionalism indicates responsibility taken for one's own intellectual development. Professionalism encompasses everything that you do in this class. This includes the following: content mastery, communication skills, interaction (including constructive criticism), creativity (going beyond the assignment given), enthusiasm and interest. I expect extra effort put into assignments, and will not tolerate a lack of professionalism, such as constant excuses regarding assignments, failure to participate, and failure to communicate with the professor or teammates and other unprofessional behavior. If you are being unprofessional, your grade may suffer, and you may be asked to leave the class.

LSU Statement on Diversity

The pledge of the Manship School of Mass Communication is to establish an intellectually diverse environment and an educational experience designed to cope with and improve an interconnected, modern world. Through its students, faculty, curriculum, and culture, the school will create, maintain, and support a supportive climate for learning and working among faculty, students, and staff who are diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, spirituality, socio-economic status, disability, family status, experiences, opinions, and ideas.

STUDENTS: We will develop a diverse student body that brings a broad range of backgrounds, goals, points of view, and learning objectives to the program.

FACULTY: We will actively seek out, hire, and support a faculty with strong academic and professional credentials with an emphasis on diversity.

CURRICULUM: We will facilitate conversations about diversity both inside and outside the classroom to further an understanding and tolerance among students, faculty, and staff.

CULTURE: We will establish a culture of diversity to supplement and inform the Manship curriculum and personnel.

Students with Special Needs

If you know of any type of disability or barrier to your success in this class, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments is requested to contact the Office of Disability Services and the instructor, as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please contact the Office of Disability Services, 112 Johnston Hall, 225-578-5919. More information about the University's policy and procedures can be found online at <http://appl003.lsu.edu/slas/ods.nsf/index>.

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Professor Christopher Drew

Contract with the Professor

I, _____, have read the class syllabus carefully. I hereby agree to all of the requirements in it about the class and assignment schedule, grading, attendance, class and group participation, and strict adherence to all journalistic and academic ethical standards and other university rules.

I also acknowledge that, given the health risks from COVID-19, I am not required to leave campus, and I have a choice about whether to do interviews and cover hearings and floor action in person or virtually by watching the video streams. If I choose to travel back and forth to the Capitol, I recognize that I am commuting at my own risk, just as if I were going to school or a job, and I will not hold my professor or LSU responsible if I have any problems or accidents.

Signed: _____

Date: _____