

JOU 485-401, COMMUNITY JOURNALISM

FALL 2020

Tuesdays, 5:30 to 8 p.m., 241 Blazer Dining or as announced

Instructor: Professor Al Cross, al.cross@uky.edu

Office: Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, Room 206, BLD

Office hours: 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesdays; face-to-face appointments may be scheduled other days if necessary

Phones: Office 859-257-3744, home 502-223-8525, **cell 502-682-2848 (you may call this number at any time)**

Backup office contact: School of Journalism and Media, BLD 102, 859-257-1730

Prerequisites: Journalism 301 or 302

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course examines various aspects of community news media, including editorial and business operations, and the conflicts that can arise between them, as well as the conflicts between professional responsibilities and personal preferences that must be managed to be successful in the field. It provides practical experience in community journalism through independent, advanced reporting and writing, for online and possible print publication, on public affairs and other topics of public interest in the community of Midway, Kentucky. Student work may also include podcasts, photography and broadcast journalism. Other objects of examination include broadcast stations and online news sites in small towns, suburbs and urban neighborhoods, and newspapers (such as ethnic papers) that serve non-geographic communities of interest. The course emphasizes the editorial side of news outlets, but also deals with managerial and financial issues (advertising, audience development and maintenance, etc.) that can have a more direct influence on community journalists than those at metropolitan media outlets. Guest speakers relate their personal experiences and perspectives as we explore the best way to teach, learn and practice community journalism in a changing news and technological environment, with particular attention to the evolving nature of online community journalism. Students will have a wide variety of choices for reporting and writing stories, some of which may be edited for publication in community newspapers or the websites and blogs published by the instructor in his role as director of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, part of the School of Journalism and Media. See www.RuralJournalism.org.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Understand the different forms of community journalism and their places in the American news media.
2. Understand the differences and similarities in the practice of news gathering, editing, presentation and other facets of journalism at the community level and the metropolitan level.
3. Learn the ethical, communitarian principles that should guide journalists at any level, such as accuracy, fairness, courtesy and diversity, and how those principles can be particularly critical at the community level.
4. Understand the role of community journalism in local democracy.
5. Understand the conflicts between editorial and business operations at community news outlets, the conflicts that practicing good community journalism can cause in a journalist's personal life, and how to manage them.
6. Learn the history of community journalism and explore the currently evolving nature of online community journalism, and how traditional news outlets are adapting to the digital age.
7. Understand the business aspects of community newspapers, including current social, business and technological challenges.
8. Develop standards of excellence by which you can evaluate the performance of community news outlets.
9. Improve your journalism skills through reporting and writing. **This course is platform-agnostic. With approval of the instructor, you may submit assignments as text stories, audio podcasts, TV packages, or photographs with narrative captions.**

MATERIALS AND READINGS

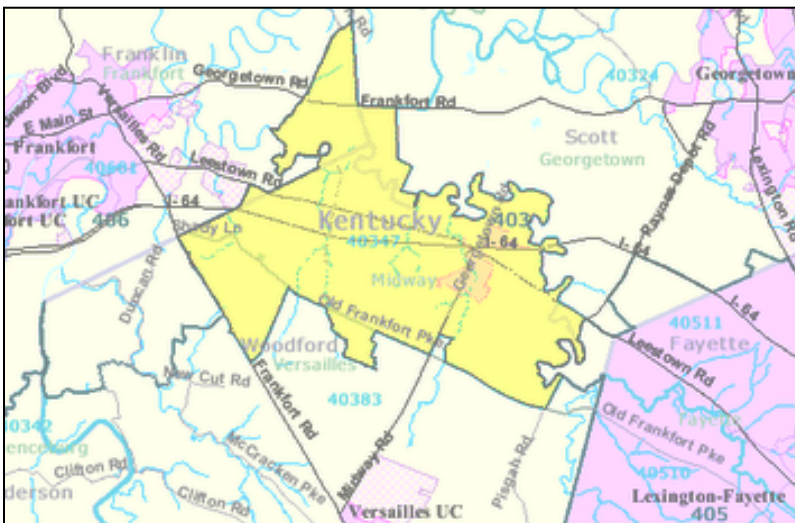
Textbook: None, but students who are serious about community journalism are advised to buy and read Lauterer, *Community Journalism: Relentlessly Local*, third edition; and Abernathy, *Saving Community Journalism*, both published by the University of North Carolina Press.

Necessary tools: A reporter's notebook, steno pad or legal pad for reporting, a pencil (pens don't work well in the rain), a pen and a reliable audio recording device to ensure accurate quotations and context in your articles. The recorder should produce digital files that can be transferred and have an input jack for feeds from telephones, public address systems and so on. Digital recorders should be available at reasonable prices. If you forget your recorder or it malfunctions, the Voice Memos function on an iPhone or similar applications on other phones can be used, but iPhone microphones do not produce quality audio unless close to the sound source. You must NOT rely solely on an iPhone or similar device.

References: A good dictionary and thesaurus; the *Associated Press Stylebook* (you will be expected to follow AP style); and *The Elements of Style*, by Strunk and White, still the best guide to writing for publication.

Regular reading: The Kentucky Kernel; the Lexington Herald-Leader; and (**this is mandatory**) the Midway Messenger blog, <http://midwayky.blogspot.com>. The blog and its parent site, www.MidwayMessenger.org, will be publication outlets for some class assignments and quiz questions. The Woodford Sun, the weekly newspaper that covers Midway and the rest of Woodford County, will be discussed in class. **Other readings will be assigned.**

REPORTING AND READING ASSIGNMENTS



Reporting and writing assignments in this course will be primarily in the community of Midway, with emphasis on the City Council and the Nov. 3 election for council and perhaps state legislative seats. **Midway is 15 miles from campus. You should NOT remain in this class unless you have a usually reliable way to get to and from Midway.**

(Map: Yellow is the Midway ZIP code, which is the Messenger's coverage area. The gray lines are county lines, showing that the Midway ZIP code is primarily in Woodford County, where the city lies, but also extends into Franklin and Scott counties. The city limits are in orange.)

First assignment, first story: During the first class, students will watch a recording of the Aug. 17 City Council meeting and discuss the newsworthiness of each topic discussed. You will write a story of at least 500 words about the meeting, due the next day at 9 a.m. You will be given an opportunity to rewrite this story, with *only the rewrite grade counting*, by 6 p.m. On most if not all *later assignments*, the rewrite will count at least three-fifths of the grade.

Second assignment: Read your instructor's essay, "Extension Journalism: Teaching Students the Real World and Bringing a New Type of Journalism to a Small Town," and "From the Reader's Perspective: Exploring How a Student-Produced News Website Has Affected a Small Town," by Rachel Aretakis. Both will be emailed to you, and will be much of the material for a **quiz** that will follow, because one of the primary responsibilities in this course is covering Midway, and these readings will help prepare you.

Third assignment, second story: We will watch, live on Zoom, the Sept. 8 City Council meeting, and write a story in class. You will be given the opportunity for a rewrite by 6 p.m. Sept. 9. **NOTE:** *This council meeting is*

on a Tuesday because of Labor Day. All other council meetings are on Mondays at 5:30. Any student may cover any of these meetings; if there are no volunteers, one or more will be assigned. One reporter may be assigned city government as a continuing responsibility. Other beats may be assigned. If you are interested in a beat,

Fourth assignment, third story: You will write ~~a story~~ two stories of approximately ~~1,000~~ 750 words each about ~~one of the~~ candidates for City Council in the Nov. 3 election. ~~One or more of y~~ You will be assigned to write two ~~of these~~ stories because there are 10 candidates. One will be about an incumbent and one about a non-incumbent. One student will be assigned to write a story about the two candidates for the Woodford County school board from the Midway district. One student may also be assigned to write two stories about races for the state House and Senate in the districts that include Midway. The stories must be submitted by Oct. ~~1214~~ for editing and rewriting by Oct. ~~1719~~, because they will be packaged in a print edition of the Midway Messenger that will be distributed ~~about a two~~ weeks before the election. Also, one or more students will be assigned to cover a council candidate forum on Oct. 8.

Fifth assignment, perhaps fourth story: Suggest three ideas for stories, based on your reading of the Midway Messenger blog for the last year. Pick stories that you are willing and able to do; you will probably be assigned to do one or more of them.

Other reporting opportunities

The **Woodford County Economic Development Authority**, which owns and manages the Midway Station industrial and commercial park, meets monthly, usually on the fourth Friday, at 8:30 a.m. Any of these meetings are open for coverage, but may not produce enough news for a full-scale story; in such cases, partial story credit will be given, and additional reporting may be done to earn full credit.

The **Midway Business Association** meets each first Wednesday at 9 a.m. During the pandemic, it has been meeting outdoors at the Mezzo restaurant. These meetings also can be sources of information about developments in the business community, and lead to feature stories about businesses.

The **Versailles-Midway-Woodford County Planning Commission** and its committees occasionally deal with matters of interest to Midway, such as zoning changes and permits.

Midway University, since becoming a coeducational institution three years ago, has increased its enrollment and is expanding its facilities, and occasionally produces stories.

Special assignments: One student with proven InDesign skills will assist with production of the print edition of the Midway Messenger at the end of the semester. One student may be assigned to be primarily responsible for photography or video coverage, though all students will be expected to take still pictures and video.

Guest speakers: You may write a story about a guest speaker, if you implement additional reporting before or after the speaker's class presentation to make it more like a feature story.

You must write a minimum of six stories totaling approximately 5,000 words. If you write more than six, your story grade will be based on the **six best grades** on those stories, as long as you are showing progress. So, you are encouraged to write more than six stories, in order to get the best possible grade. As indicated below, writing and reporting are 75 percent of the course grade; quizzes are 15 percent and your class participation and progress, including production of story ideas, are 10 percent.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS applying to assignments:

Text stories will be submitted by email. *You are responsible for ensuring that I have received your work.* I will send you a reply, and you must remain online – or check back online or by phone – to get my reply and make sure I received your email. If I do not reply promptly, you must call me or send a text message to my cell phone. On the very rare occasions that I am not available by phone, send me a second email marked “highly

important.” If technical obstacles force you to file by hard copy and I am not in my office, ask a member of my staff to record the time and date your work is delivered.

Precise **deadlines** will be set for each assignment. ***One percentage point will be deducted*** for each major portion of an hour that an assignment is submitted late.

For video packages, a script must be submitted for approval and possible rewrite before production.

Form of story submissions:

- Text stories must be written in Microsoft Word, 12 point Times New Roman, and double-spaced.
- In the upper left corner of the first page, single-spaced, put your name, the course, the date of submission (remember to change this on revisions) and the assignment or suggested headline.
- At the end of each submission, include the statement required by the Integrity section below.

Your instructor will mark up your stories in Track Changes mode, with marginal comments and a headnote, and return them to you with an initial grade and an assigned deadline for the rewrite. You should view it in All Markup mode, then work from a clean, unmarked copy that includes any instructor’s edits.

You may propose topics for your assignments by e-mail, but telephone or in-person consultation may be required for approval. Do not hesitate to call me to discuss an assignment or an idea. ***Think of yourself as a reporter and me as your editor***, in a real newsroom. Students in this class are expected to show initiative and be consultative, and will be rewarded for doing so.

GRADING

You will be graded on the quality of your research, reporting and writing, including the adequacy of sources and background, accuracy, adherence to grammar and Associated Press style, clarity, completeness, organization and fairness. University policy says a grade of A “represents exceptionally high achievement as a result of aptitude, effort and intellectual initiative.” Generally, to get an A on written assignments in this course, you must submit work worthy of publication in a well-edited daily community newspaper during an internship. The university says a B represents high achievement as a result of ability and effort. Generally, a B on written assignments in this course will require work worthy of publication in a community daily or well-edited weekly. Work of lesser quality will earn you a grade of C, which the university says represents average achievement; a D, which is the minimum passing grade; or an E, which represents failure. The following grading scale will be used: A, 92-100; B, 82-91.99; C, 70-81.99; D, 65-69.99; E, below 65. There will be no final examination, and the last assignment is due by the final class meeting, Nov. 17. A rewrite may be submitted by Nov. 24.

Accuracy, grammar and style: If your work includes a factual inaccuracy or misquotation, 2 to 20 points will be deducted from your grade, depending on the seriousness of the error. Each error in grammar, spelling and style will cost you up to 4 points, depending on seriousness of the error. You will also be penalized for wordiness, lack of clarity, misuse of words, failure to attribute information, unsupported opinion, overlong paragraphs, typographical errors, redundancy, unnecessary repetition and other shortcomings. If wordiness gets you to a prescribed story length, you may be penalized not only for wordiness but for not writing the assigned length. Admission to this course presumes you know English grammar, including the parts of speech, their purposes and proper use; and are familiar with the AP Stylebook rules of style and punctuation. You will be expected to have a command of grammar and style, because those principles are more important than ever; in an age of self-publishing and reduced resources, today’s journalism gets less copyediting before initial publication, and adherence to such standards is a mark of professionalism in a world with more and more amateurs. In this course, you will be expected to measure up to professional standards.

Course grades: As mentioned above, 75 percent of your grade in this course will be based on your reporting, writing and photography; 15 percent will be based in quiz grades; and 10 percent will be based on your progress and participation, including initiative shown by story ideas.

ATTENDANCE

This is mandatory. Your presence or absence will be noted at the beginning of each class, and if you are tardy, it is your responsibility to make sure I have counted you as present. **Unexcused tardiness or departure totaling more than 30 minutes during the semester will be considered an unexcused absence.**

Unexcused absences will result in a pro-rata deduction from your grade, but one such absence may be made up by extra work approved by the instructor. Excused absences may also require makeup work, or documentation of serious illness, illness or death of immediate family member, university-related trip, major religious holiday or other circumstances that I find to be reasonable grounds for absence. If you anticipate an absence and believe it should be excused, you should contact me by telephone or e-mail, then provide documentation.

The University Senate Council, the faculty's central governing body, has interpreted excused absences for the Fall 2020 semester to include an excuse from required in-person interactions if the student has been directed to self-quarantine by the University, a medical professional, public health professional, or government official.

Religious Observances: Religiously observant students who wish or need to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify the instructor in writing at the beginning of the semester and discuss, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence.

Disabilities: Any student with a disability who is taking this course and needs an accommodation to complete the course requirements should discuss the matter with me. Your appeal is to the associate dean and director of the Disability Resource Center at (859) 257-2754.

For the above and below, read and observe Student Rights and Responsibilities, Section 5.2.4.2.

INTEGRITY

Integrity and honesty are essential to journalism, so any form of lying (orally or in writing, by omission or commission), plagiarism, fabrication or cheating (looking up answers during a quiz, for example) will result in a failing grade. Under the university's policy on academic integrity, you also can be expelled or suspended. If you face a crisis in living up to this requirement, please talk with me rather than compromise your integrity, embarrass yourself and risk your future. For definitions of cheating and plagiarism, refer to Student Rights and Responsibilities, Section 6.3.1. If you think you are close to the line on plagiarism, you should consult me.

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work without attribution. It and other forms of cheating are serious breaches of academic conduct, which is governed by the Student Rights and Responsibilities code. It says all academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research or self-expression. When a student submits work purporting to be his or her own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgement of the fact, the student is guilty of plagiarism. The definition of plagiarism includes, but is by no means limited to, reproducing someone else's work and misrepresenting it as your own. It also includes the practice of employing or allowing another person to revise the work that a student submits as his or her own work, no matter who that person may be. That is also cheating.

Any assignment you submit may be tested with an electronic database to check for plagiarism. If you copy material, make a note to yourself about its source so you can avoid inadvertent plagiarism. (And remember, when doing research, Wikipedia can be a path, but not a destination.)

Each of your assignments must include this Integrity Statement: *I affirm that this material is the result of my own work, and that I have properly and completely attributed any and all information that comes from research, reporting or writing done by others.* Your work will not be graded unless it includes this affirmation.

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

- The University requires students to wear UK-approved face coverings in the classroom and academic buildings. If UK-approved face coverings are not worn over the nose and mouth, students will be asked to leave the classroom.
- You should complete your daily online wellness screening before coming to campus and class.
- You should not move chairs or barriers in classrooms, and should socially distance at all times, leaving a six-foot radius from other people. Masks and hand sanitizer can be found in BLD if needed.
- You should leave enough space from others when entering and exiting a room. Do not crowd doorways at the beginning or end of class.
- The instructor may choose to remove a facial covering when necessary for instruction at the front of the classroom and behind a clear barrier.

BEHAVIOR and APPEARANCE

Classroom behavior is an increasing problem on college campuses, including this one. This university, this college, this school and this instructor are committed to respect the dignity of all persons and to value differences among members of our academic community. Discussion and debate are essential to academic discovery, and all have the right to disagree from time to time. Students have the right to take reasoned, respectful exceptions to the opinions of other students and the instructor, but not to engage in personal attacks or statements that denigrate other persons on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national or regional origin, or other irrelevant factors.

This course requires civil, attentive, respectful and collegial behavior. *That means you should use a computer or other device in class ONLY when authorized by the instructor to do so. Violation will hurt your grade.*

Because this course involves field reporting in a community, your behavior on assignments must reflect a professional attitude, including attire that blends in with the community. When you go to into the field for this class, consider yourself to be at work and follow appropriate behavior for the workplace and community in which you are working. Make an effort to understand and appreciate the community and always remember that you are a representative of the University of Kentucky and its School of Journalism and Media and the College of Communication and Information. Misbehavior will count against your grade for progress and participation.

DIVERSITY

Diversity is at the core of our country's ideals, as expressed in the freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition in the First Amendment to the Constitution. As a craft expressly protected by the First Amendment, journalism should advance diversity of all kinds, recognizing that it is part of the journalists' mission to tell the truth as fully as possible. This requires respect for each individual and an appreciation of diverse points of view. People of all ages, ethnicities, races, religions, gender orientations, sexual identities, geographic backgrounds, socio-economic circumstances, abilities, talents, occupations, political persuasions and beliefs have much to share with us, as we have much to share with them. Our lives are made fuller, and our society stronger and more just, by such mutually beneficial encounters. Every community is diverse in some way, so you will be expected to produce stories reflecting that.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE and other events of interest

Our schedule is tentative because we will be engaging in some experimental activities and must fit in the work schedules of guest speakers and the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues.

Because this class offers options to students and some guest speakers have not been scheduled yet, the week-by-week class schedule may be adjusted, and the actual course of instruction may be revised in response to events in Midway.

To give you a general idea of the subjects that will be addressed, following is an outline of the course, in more or less chronological order. Some meetings will have guest speakers, who may or may not be directly related to the topic of the evening.

Aug. 18: Review of syllabus; discussion among students and instructor about their backgrounds, interests and reasons for enrolling in the class; brief discussion of community journalism as a concept and an institution; discussion of the history of the Midway Messenger; watch recording of Midway City Council meeting and **submit a story for editing, no later than 9 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 19.** Only the rewrite, due at 6 p.m. Wednesday, will be graded.

Reading assignments for next class: The Midway Messenger blog; your instructor's essay, "Extension Journalism: Teaching Students the Real World and Bringing a New Type of Journalism to a Small Town," and the paper by Rachel Aretakis, "From the Reader's Perspective: Exploring How a Student-Produced News Website Has Affected a Small Town." The essay, the paper and material in the first two or three class meetings will form the basis for the first **quiz** in the course.

Aug. 25: FIELD TRIP TO MIDWAY (weather permitting). Arrive at Northside Elementary School parking lot, 500 Northside Dr., **no later than 6 p.m.** We will drive from there to several locations in the city, so you can familiarize yourself with Midway. Elements of the reading assignment will be discussed. *If rain is likely, the field trip may be postponed to the following week, and we will meet in BLD 229 for instruction in the material listed for Sept. 1, below.*

Sept. 1: (*Rain date for field trip; see above*) Discussion of City Council stories and three reading assignments.

Differences and conflicts: Community journalism differs from metropolitan journalism, primarily in the size of the news outlets, and recently in its more limited embrace of the Internet, but also in the relationships that community journalists have with their subjects, sources and readers (or viewers and listeners). Those relationships are closer and more continuing, and that creates conflicts between journalists' personal and professional interests. But the decline of metropolitan newspapers, and the increasing emphasis on local news, suggests that community-journalism principles can be useful in metropolitan news media. In community journalism, the personal constantly conflicts with the professional, and management of that conflict is the key to real success in community journalism.

Sept. 8: City Council meeting starts at 5:30; we will watch it live in class and you will **file a story by 8 p.m.** It will be graded, and you will be given the opportunity to rewrite it by 6 p.m.

Sept. 15: QUIZ on reading assignments and information presented at first four class meetings. *Assignments will be made for profiles of City Council candidates, due Oct. 14.*

Defining Community Journalism and its Local Landscape: Where community news outlets fit into the national and Kentucky picture: numbers, chain and independent ownership, trends in the trade, community journalism's greater reliance on printed products than other news media, differences within community news outlets based on circulation, content and online presence, the two main criteria for identification as a community news outlet. Examples from Kentucky and other states will be discussed, as will a possible redefinition of community journalism to include most U.S. newspapers. We will discuss various types of community-journalism outlets, including the Kentucky Kernel.

Sept. 21: City Council meeting, open to coverage by any student.

Sept. 22: Editorial Basics of Community Journalism: Public service, holding local officials and institutions accountable, holding up a mirror to the community, giving people the information they want (obituaries, sports and other school news), as well as the information they need – and making them want the information you think they need. The “three As” that, in combination, distinguish community journalism: accuracy, accountability and accessibility.

Reading for next class: *“A Good LCNI Newspaper,” the booklet that guides the editors and managers of Landmark Community Newspapers Inc.*

Sept. 29: Editorial Leadership in Community News Media: Discussion of how to cover the news and offer commentary in ways that advance the public agenda. How to play an institutional role while being neighborly about it. This focuses primarily on newspapers, with attention to editorials and columns, but most of the principles apply to broadcasting and online. **Guest speaker:** John Nelson, executive editor, Landmark Community Newspapers.

Optional assignment: Guest speaker story, with additional research.

Reading for next class: *Research paper, “Keeping Quiet or Taking the Lead? A Study of Editorial Pages in Kentucky Newspapers,” to be distributed.*

Oct. 5, 5:30 p.m., City Hall: City Council meeting, open to coverage by any student.

Oct. 6: We will discuss the reading above and your profiles of City Council candidates, which will be due Oct. 14.

Guest speaker: Jennifer P. Brown, publisher of the Hoptown Chronicle and former editor of the Kentucky New Era in Hopkinsville.

Optional assignment: Guest speaker story, with additional research.

Oct. 8: Midway Woman’s Club forum for City Council candidates. We will probably be involved in drafting and/or posing questions, and one or more students will be assigned to write a story.

Oct. 12: Midterm of the semester. Deadline for candidate stories.

Oct. 13: QUIZ on material presented in previous class meetings. Will count toward your midterm grade.

Public records, paid and not paid: A significant share of community-newspaper revenue comes from advertising placed by government officials, under rules set by state or local laws that may be weakened because of pressure from local and state officials. But newspapers can also benefit, and help their readers, by publishing many other forms of public records in their news columns. We will also discuss the print edition of the Midway Messenger and perhaps finish the layout.

Materials: Pages with legal ads, handout on Records You Can and Should Publish in Your Newspaper

Oct. 14: City Council candidate profiles due.

Oct. 19: City Council meeting, open to coverage by any student.

Reading for next class: *Instructor’s research on circulation patterns of Appalachian weekly newspapers, article on Kentucky news media ownership and circulation.*

Oct. 20: The Digital Challenge: Many community news outlets, especially rural newspapers that are independently owned, have refused to go digital or have done so with great caution and/or reluctance. Weeklies don’t want to cannibalize their print circulation, but there are ways to avoid doing that (social media play a role) and still maintain a newspaper’s local-news franchise as the number of independent,

online news outlets increases. Material from new book, *Saving Community Journalism*, by Penny Abernathy. **Guest speaker: Judy Clabes**, publisher of KyForward and the NKyTribune.

Oct. 27: Courage in Community Journalism: It's more difficult to do a good job in community journalism, for a host of reasons. We will study examples of community journalists who have not only shown courage, but the integrity and tenacity it takes to keep fighting the good fights. **Guest speaker:** Ryan Craig, Kentucky Kernel adviser and owner, Todd County Standard, judged best small weekly paper in Kentucky 12 of the last 13 years. **Optional assignment:** Guest speaker story, with additional research. **Reading for next class:** Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, www.spj.org/ethics.

Nov. 2: City Council meeting, open to coverage by any student.

Nov. 3: Election Day. Material to be announced.

Nov. 10: Tough Ethical Calls: Suicides, accident photographs, bad language, advertiser requests, personal conflicts of staff members, disclosure of such conflicts. And more. Application of the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics to community journalism situations. **Guest speaker:** Tom Eblen, president, SPJ Bluegrass Chapter. **Optional assignment:** Guest speaker story, with additional research.

Nov. 16: City Council meeting, open to coverage by any student.

Nov. 17: QUIZ on material presented since midterm. Other discussion to be announced; may have a guest speaker. Last class meeting.

Nov. 24: Class will not meet, but this is the DEADLINE FOR ANY INITIAL SUBMISSIONS of stories. Rewrite deadlines will be assigned individually, but see below.

Dec. 1: No rewrite will be accepted after this date. There is NO FINAL EXAM.

Dec. 8, 5 p.m.: Deadline for instructor to submit your grades.

This syllabus may be revised.