

JOUR 455 AUDIENCE INSIGHT, SPRING 2009

1 credit

Mondays 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Fisk 311

Instructor

Professor Rachel Davis Mersey, Ph.D.

Office location and hours: MTC 3-125, by appointment on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an introductory course in qualitative and quantitative audience research for journalists. It blends background material from the behavioral sciences with techniques used in practice and focuses in three general areas: (1) the logic, implementation and analysis of primary research; (2) the ability to evaluate the quality, usefulness and appropriateness of research and results from other sources; and (3) the applicability of research to the practice of journalism.

The virtuous relationship between community and newspaper use is well established in the literature and commonly accepted in the journalism business. It is based on the fundamental principle that those who read their local newspaper are involved in their communities; and those who are involved in their communities, read the local newspaper. Although of persistent value, this model is dated in today's environment in that it is based on a limited view of community connection and narrow definition of news as only that which is reported in the newspaper. It is clear that both of these constructs have evolved. We will study that evolution and look for opportunities to help journalism, whether it be traditional news or niche lifestyle reporting, survive as a unifying force that serves its community.

An essential element throughout this course will be that individuals define themselves by being members of particular groups and also by not being members of other groups. This means people are defined not only by what they read but also by what they do not read. Could it be that the local newspaper, in some cases, has become "what not to read?" We'll try to understand why this is and what we can do as journalists to reach audiences.

EXPECTED PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE

All students should have a strong journalistic foundation including refined writing and editing skills, an understanding of news values and ethics, and a knowledge of current issues and trends in the field. An appreciation of the importance of factual accuracy, depth of information and quality of analysis in completing assignments is also essential.

Finally, the ability to meet deadlines and follow directions is fundamental in this classroom as well as in the real world.

Do not forget that at its core this is a journalism class. You should be aware of ongoing issues related to news audiences and changing news consumption behaviors. The best way to do this is to read news. I recommend two key sources: The New York Times and Romenesko's blog on Poynter.org. If you have other suggestions, I encourage you to post your recommendation(s) to our blog. You might provide a link to the site and a couple of sentences about the source in general or a specific story.

As a requirement in this course, you will do one additional reading, which will be assigned the second week of class. A full description of this assignment is provided in the graded elements portion of this syllabus.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Classes will be a mix of lecture, open class discussion and hands-on experience. Students are expected to actively participate in class. Assigned readings should be read in advance of the class at which they will be discussed (including the reading for the first day of class). Lectures and class discussions cover material and ideas related to the course readings; they do not repeat reading material.

NEWS 21

Twelve students have been selected to participate in this class as a precursor to the work they will do as Carnegie-Knight News 21 fellows. Their reporting work, which will be conducted during the summer quarter, will be led by professors Bill Handy and Eric Ferkenhoff.

COURSE GRADING

The final grade for this course is calculated on a 100-point scale. Your grade will consist of these components and weighting:

Element	Weighting
In-class and blog participation (individual)	15
Subgroup selection (team)	5
Census report (team)	5
Research evaluation (individual)	15
Supplemental reading write-up and presentation (individual)	10
Product-to-product comparison (individual)	10
Annotated bibliography (team)	5
In-depth interview (individual)	10

See separate descriptions of each element.