

Course Name: Medical Journalism

Institution: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Instructor: Tom Linden, M.D., distinguished professor; director, medical and science journalism program

Course level: Doctoral and master's-level students and upper-division undergraduates

Audience: Students interested in the craft and art of medical journalism

Semester: Fall 2012

Class schedule: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10-11:15 a.m.

Office hours: Wednesdays, 2-3 p.m. or whenever office door is open

Typical Enrolment: 8-10

Course overview

The purpose of this course is to teach an appreciation of medical journalism and provide you with skills to report on medical and health news for a variety of media, principally print and online, but also broadcast (radio/TV).

As a participant in this course, you'll learn the following:

- How to find news value in medical research reports.
- How to integrate medical statistics from source materials into news reports.
- How to research and write medical and health news stories for popular media.

Required texts and reading

Readings for the course include a text about medical statistics, a classic book on writing well, a case study by a master of medical journalism, a best-selling book about the science behind habits and an anthology and primer about medical and health news writing. Please complete the reading assignments *before* the appropriate classroom discussions. In addition to the list below, I'll supply additional source materials and articles from various publications. The following books are all available at the UNC student store (and on Amazon) and copies of all the books (except *A Field Guide for Science Writers* will be on reserve in the Park Library (second floor) in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication. (Please note the reserve books may not be available until the second or third week of classes.) Students should also consult the *AP Stylebook* for proper style and usage for all written assignments.

1) Blum, Deborah, Mary Knudson & Robin Marantz Henig, editors. [A Field Guide for Science Writers \(Second Edition\)](#), Oxford University Press (paperback), 2005, \$19.95, ISBN: 0-19-5174992.

2) Cohn, Victor and Lewis Cope. [News & Numbers: A Guide to Reporting Statistical Claims and Controversies in Health and Other Fields](#), Iowa State University Press (paperback), Second Edition, 2001, 211 pp., ISBN: 0-8138-14243.

3) Duhigg, Charles, [The Power of Habit](#), Random House, © 2012, 400 pp., ISBN: 978-1400069286.

4) Linden, Tom & the Writers of The New York Times, [The New York Times Reader:](#)

[Health & Medicine](#), © 2011, \$24.95, 292 pp., ISBN: 978-1604264821.

5) Sacks, Oliver, [Awakenings](#), Vintage, 1999, 464 pp., ISBN: 978-0375704055.

6) Zinsser, William. [On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction \(30th Anniversary Edition\)](#), Collins, © 2006, 336 pp., ISBN: 978-0-06-089154-1.

Also, starting with the class for Wednesday, September 12, students should begin reading the **print version** of the Tuesday *Science Times* section of the New York Times. On the assigned dates, students should bring the *Science Times* section to class. Please consult the course schedule below for the exact dates for which the section should be read. Please note that the online version of the New York Times is not an acceptable substitute since the online version lacks some graphics and other key layout features of the print edition. The New York Times is available in the UNC Student Store and is also available at a reduced rate by subscription. To subscribe, you can call 1-800-NYTIMES and ask for college subscriptions. Receiving the print edition by subscription also gives you unlimited online access.

Participation

A working medical journalist typically talks and discusses relevant issues with colleagues and others before preparing his or her report. This class will be no different. I'll expect you to share your thoughts with your peers and with me. Classroom discussion will help clarify your ideas and sharpen your focus. You'll also be posting all written assignments on [Sakai](#) where your classmates will critique your work.

Each student will be responsible for at least two 15- to 20-minute presentations on assigned reading. I'll assign the presentations at the beginning of the second class meeting. As critical thinking and discussion with peers are so integral to the work of journalism, I'll count your presentation(s) as **15%** of your final grade, with an additional **10%** of your final grade based on your classroom participation throughout the semester. I'll base your grades on the quality (not necessarily the quantity) of your discussion. I'll judge quality on principally the following two criteria:

- 1) Whether it's clear that you've read and thought about the readings.
- 2) Your ability to integrate ideas gleaned from both readings and from contributions of your classmates.

After one unexcused absence, each absence will result in a drop of one letter grade. This is a mostly graduate-level seminar, and your presence and contribution are essential. You cannot pass the course with more than two unexcused absences.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment deadlines

To succeed in medical journalism, you must write well. Good writing requires an

understanding of the material and the ability to communicate ideas simply and clearly. To sharpen your writing skills, you'll write a series of stories in various journalistic genres. The writing assignments will count for **75%** of your final grade.

All assignments are due at the start of class on the dates indicated. Late papers will not be accepted without **prior** permission. Even with prior permission, submission of late papers will result in a 10-point deduction per day. Not turning in a paper within two days of the due date will result in a zero grade. Misspelling of proper names will result in a 10-point deduction per misspelling. Misspelling of other words will result in a two-point deduction for each word misspelled. We'll follow the print style guidelines of the *AP Stylebook*. If you intend to pursue journalism as a career, I strongly encourage you to purchase a copy of the stylebook. As per the usual practice in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, a major factual error will result in a failing grade for that particular assignment. Fabricating sources or quotations or engaging in plagiarism will constitute a violation of the Honor Code (for more information about the UNC Honor Code, go to <http://instrument.unc.edu>).

Exams

There will be no midterm or final exam.

Grading Scale (for undergraduates)

98 - 100 A+
94 - 97 A
91 - 93 A-
88 - 90 B+
84 - 87 B
81 - 83 B-
78 - 80 C+
74 - 77 C
71 - 73 C-
68 - 70 D+
64 - 67 D
61 - 63 D-
60 and below F

Grading Scale (for graduate students)

93 - 100 Honors
74 - 92 Pass
61 - 73 Low Pass
60 and below F

How To Succeed in This Course

- Attend classes consistently.
- Complete readings *before* the appropriate classroom discussions.
- Participate actively in class.
- Ask the Professor questions either during class or during office hours if you're unclear about *any* aspect of the course.
- Turn in stories on time.
- Check online syllabus frequently throughout the semester (preferably before each class) as assignments and topics may change without e-mail notice.

Class schedule

WEEK 1:

AUG. 22: INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL JOURNALISM

Reading:

Linden, Thomas, "Learning [To Be a Medical Journalist](#)," Nieman Reports, Vol. 57, No. 2, Summer 2003, pp.66-67.

Linden, Tom, "[The New York Times Reader: Health & Medicine](#)," foreword, preface and introduction.

WEEK 2:

Aug. 27: A GUIDE TO WRITING NON-FICTION; also, for first 30 minutes of class, guest speaker Karl Bates, director of research communications, Duke University News Service, will talk about the New Horizons in Science 2012 Program in Raleigh, Oct. 28-29

* Learn the basics of writing non-fiction.

Reading:

Zinsser, William, *On Writing Well*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Browse [website](#) of New Horizons in Science 2012 Program to be held in Raleigh, Oct. 28-29 (held in conjunction with the National Association of Science Writers annual conference)

Aug. 29: ETHICS OF MEDICAL JOURNALISM (Kelly)

Fink, Sheri, "Investigations -- The Deadly Choices at Memorial," <http://www.propublica.org/article/the-deadly-choices-at-memorial-826>, published Aug. 27, 2009.

Kirby, Kathleen, RTNDA'S Guide to Health Coverage Under HIPAA:
http://www.rtna.org/pages/media_items/rtnas-guide-to-health-coverage-under-hipaa427.php.

Mar, Andrew M. & Alison Page Howard, "Freedom of the Press: HIPAA & Newsgathering,"http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org//press/topic.aspx?topic=hipaa_news&SearchString=hipaa.

Scanlan, Chip, "The [First Peril: Fabrication](#)," Poynteronline, (Adapted from *Reporting and Writing: Basics for the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, 2000).

SPJ Code of Ethics: <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp?>

Statement of Principles of the Association of Health Care Journalists:
<http://healthjournalism.org/secondarypage-details.php?id=56>

"Aiding Those in Distress," Association of Health Care Journalists,
<http://www.healthjournalism.org/secondarypage-details.php?id=898>

Zinsser, William, *On Writing Well*, Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

WEEK 3:

SEPT. 3: **No class (Labor Day)**

SEPT. 5: INTERPRETATION OF MEDICAL STATISTICS (Courtnei)

Reading:

Cohn, & Cope, *News & Numbers: A Guide to Reporting Statistical Claims and Controversies in Health and Other Fields*, pp. 3-106.

Oransky, Ivan, "How [to avoid 'he said-she said' science journalism](#)," Not Exactly Rocket Science guest blog, February 18, 2010.

Browse the web sites of the World Health Organization's [International Clinical Trials Registry Platform \(ICTRP\)](#) and the National Institutes of Health's [clinicaltrials.gov](#).

WEEK 4:

SEPT. 10: INTERPRETATION OF MEDICAL STATISTICS (cont.) (Jaya)

Reading:

Cohn & Cope, News & Numbers: A Guide to Reporting Statistical Claims and Controversies in Health and Other Fields, pp. 107-181.

Kolata, Gina, online at "[Forty Years' War -- Advances Elusive in the Drive to Cure Cancer](#)," also in New York Times Reader, pp. 156-162.

de Lorgeril, Michel et al., "Cholesterol Lowering, Cardiovascular Diseases and the Rosuvastatin-JUPITER Controversy," Arch Intern Med. 2010;170(12):1032-1036 (June 28, 2010).

Meier, Bary, "[A Clash Over a Spine Treatment](#)," New York Times, September 5, 2012.

Ridker, Paul et al., "Rosuvastatin to Prevent Vascular Events in Men and Women with Elevated C-Reactive Protein," N Engl J Med 2008;359:2195-2207 (Nov. 20, 2008).

SEPT. 12: NEWS STORIES (Patrick); Guest speaker at 10:45 a.m.: [Stephanie Brown](#), Director, Park Library

Reading:

Browse [online resources](#) from the JOMC Park Library.

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 1, pp. 7-24.

Blum et al., editors. A Field Guide for Science Writers, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6.

Assignment #1: News story due Wednesday, Sept. 19.

WEEK 5: SEPT. 17: NEWS STORIES (cont.) (Dan)

Reading: Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 2 & 3.

SEPT. 19: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #1

Assignment #1 due today.

WEEK 6:

SEPT. 24: MEDICAL CASE HISTORY AS NARRATIVE

Reading: Sacks, Awakenings, pp. 3-115.

Assignment #2: Rewrite of Assignment #1 due Wednesday, Oct. 3.

SEPT. 26: INVESTIGATIVE & PERSPECTIVE STORIES View "Awakenings" documentary.

Reading:

Lesser, Wendy, "Television/Radio: [Seeing 'Awakenings' With Its Real-Life,](#)" New York Times, January 21, 2001. Click on "Single-Page" icon to see full text.

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 4 & Chapter 8, pp. 162-182.

WEEK 7:

OCT. 1: EXPLANATORY STORIES

Reading:

Blum, Deborah & Mary Knudson, editors. A Field Guide for Science Writers, Ch. 17 (pp. 111-117), Ch. 20 (pp. 132-137).

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 7, pp. 120-155.

OCT. 3: PROFILES - REPORTING FROM THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT - Medical Journalism Program Guest Lecturer: Judith E. Tintinalli, MD, MS, Professor, Dept. of Emergency Medicine, UNC-CH. **Please meet at Starbucks Cafe located in the lobby of the UNC Cancer Hospital.**

Assignment #2 (Rewrite of Assignment #1) due today.

Reading:

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 5 & 6, pp. 92-119.

Assignment #3: 900-word profile from the UNC Emergency Department due Wednesday, Oct. 24.

WEEK 8:

OCT. 8: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #2

OCT. 10: OBITUARIES, PROFILES, HISTORICAL STORIES & NARRATIVES (Nancy)

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 9 & 11, pp. 183-197, 222-243.

Also, review Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 5 & 6, pp. 92-119.

WEEK 9:

OCT. 15: COMMENTARY: COLUMNS & ESSAYS

Reading:

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 12 & 13.

Thomas, Lewis, The Medusa and the Snail, chapters entitled "The Medusa and the Snail," "The Wonderful Mistake," "Ponds," "To Err Is Human" and "On Cloning A Human Being" (all chapters found in electronic link in Resources folder in Sakai)

Berger, Marilyn, "Lewis Thomas, Whose Essays Clarified the Mysteries of Biology, Is Dead at 80," New York Times, Dec. 4, 1993.

OCT. 17: NARRATIVE NON-FICTION (Karen)

Reading:

Duhigg, The Power of Habit, pp. 1-126.

"Science Times" section from Tuesday, Oct. 16, New York Times

WEEK 10:

OCT. 22: BLOGS - guest speaker: Bora Zivkovic, blog editor, [Scientific American](#)

Reading:

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 14.

Buttry, Steve, "What's the difference between a columnist and a blogger?" [Oct.18, 2012](#), The Buttry Diary.

Zivkovic, Bora, "Blogs: face the conversation," Blog Around the Clock, [July 29, 2011](#): Scientific American.

Zivkovic, Bora, "Science Blogs: definition, and a history," Blog Around the Clock, [July 10, 2012](#): Scientific American.

Zivkovic, Bora, "The line between science and journalism is getting blurry... again," Observations, [Dec. 20,2010](#): Scientific American.

OCT. 24: IN-CLASS CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #3

Assignment #3 due today.

Assignment #4: Rewrite of assignment #3 due Monday, Nov. 5.

WEEK 11:

OCT. 29: **No class** -- Students are encouraged to attend the [annual meeting](#) of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing at the Raleigh Convention Center. (Registration is required and closes on Oct. 10.)

OCT. 31: NARRATIVE NON-FICTION (cont.) (Elizabeth)

Reading:

Duhigg, The Power of Habit, pp. 127-274.

WEEK 12:

NOV. 5: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #4 - guest critique: [Dr. Judith Tintinalli](#), professor and chair emeritus, Department of Emergency Medicine, U. of North Carolina School of Medicine

NOV. 7: MEDICAL COMMUNICATIONS AS A CAREER - guest speaker: Anton Zuiker, co-founder of [ScienceOnline](#) and director of communications, [Duke University Department of Medicine](#)

Reading:

Take 15-20 minutes to browse <http://news.medicine.duke.edu/>, the site that Anton has developed to reflect the activities of the Duke Department of Medicine. Think about the opportunities and challenges faced by a department with 700 faculty physicians and 1000 staff members.

Read two of Anton's blog posts:

<http://mistersugar.com/article/4214/when-blogging-face-the-conversation>

<http://mistersugar.com/article/4611/thinking-places-or-i-am-before-i-am>

Read Atul Gawande's commencement speech:

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/05/atul-gawande-harvard->

[medical-school-commencement-address.html](#)

WEEK 13:

NOV. 12: REPORTING FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Reading:

Linden, Tom, "Medical Reporting for the Electronic Media," in Barbara Gastel's Health Writer's Handbook (Second Edition), chapter in Sakai's "Resources" folder.

Assignment #5: Next story assignment due Wednesday, Nov. 28.

NOV. 14: WRITING THE TELEVISION SCRIPT (Natalie - "Science Times")

Reading:

"Science Times" section from Tuesday, Nov. 13 New York Times.

WEEK 14:

NOV. 19: WRITING THE TELEVISION SCRIPT (cont.)

Reading:

Handout on television script writing tips (in Resources folder of Sakai)

Blum, Deborah & Mary Knudson, editors, A Field Guide for Science Writers, pp. 35-38, 39-44, 73-78.

NOV. 21: **No Class (Happy Thanksgiving)**

WEEK 15:

NOV. 26: RADIO DOCUMENTARY [Listen](#) to "My Lobotomy."

Reading:

NOV. 28: IN-CLASS CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #5

Assignment #5 due today.

WEEK 16:

Dec. 3: CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN SCIENCE COMMUNICATION -- guest speaker: [David Kroll, Ph.D.](#), director of science communications, Nature Research Center, North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences

Reading:

Browse David Kroll's [Terra Sigillata](#) blog.

Browse David Kroll's other blog, [Take As Directed](#) on Forbes website.

Kroll, David, "[iAroma synthetic marijuana and the loss of Max Dobner](#)," July 16, 2011, post from "Terra Sigillata."

Kroll, David, "[Trine Tsouderos on This Week in Virology: When do you fact-check article content with sources?](#)" post on Take As Directed, Sept. 19, 2011, PLoS blogs.

Dec. 5: Class wrap-up and evaluation

The Honor Code

The Honor Code is in effect in this class and all others at the University. I am committed to treating Honor Code violations seriously and urge all students to become familiar with its terms set out at <http://instrument.unc.edu>. If you have questions, it's your responsibility to ask me about the Code's application. All work for this class must be submitted with a statement that you have complied with the requirements of the Honor Code.

----syllabus revised November 6, 2012