

*Note: This is an example of what your class syllabus (description, process, objectives-outcome) might contain. Considering the variety of topics we visit in our communities, focus issues should not be difficult to select. Resources should include all relevant media, and people related to those issues. Our discussions were always lively; you need a good facilitator to keep the class on point*

— *Frank Garred.*

**Port Townsend Leader  
Citizens' Journalism  
Evaluating Our News Media  
Instructor: Frank W. Garred**

**Jefferson County Library  
Port Hadlock**

**Class Syllabus**

**March 28, April 11, 25, May 9, 23 — 9-11:30 a.m.**

We've heard and read about the effects news media have on society, but who's challenging the Journalists preparing and delivering that news?

What information can you trust, and what is suspect? We have access to information around the clock, so who checks the traditional and new order of Journalists?

Journalists, by nature and learning, are curious and skeptical about the issues and people they cover. Even the President doesn't always tell the whole truth. Neither does the Superior Court Judge, or the accused defendant in a criminal trial. So who holds these and other newsmakers accountable?

The Journalist?

You?

Both!

News is the truth of the moment; the truth as the Journalist learns it. That truth can change with tomorrow's story, or from a television news account at 6:30 p.m. to the one at 11 p.m.

News is the first blush of recorded history. As new facts, new truths develop, that "history" is amended, updated, corrected, changed.

Professional Journalists are trained by an academic discipline along with a heavy dose of practical experience. Journalists are guided in their professional conduct by accepted ethical standards, one being the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics.

Such ethical codes, however, are not a pledge or sworn promise. They are “understood” guidelines most all professional Journalists accept as they go about the work of gathering and delivering the news.

Sometimes ethics rules are violated, ignored or simply forgotten. They are, however, an integral segment of a professional Journalists academic program. Accredited programs must prove they are teaching these ethical standards. . . the ethics of Journalism.

And professional news media hold their news reporters to the highest ethical standards. At least that’s their assurance.

So to what standards are bloggers, citizen journalists, or those who choose to write letters and essays to print news media held? None, by themselves, though the news media is responsible for what they choose to broadcast or print. One area where all standards are erased, for now, is where anonymous or pseudonymous writers participate in rants and raves at websites hosted by news media, or that merely invite such commentary without review (editing, oversight for libel/slander, or fact checking).

This class takes on the challenge of examining news media credibility with the same curiosity and skepticism we’d expect from the professional Journalists who produce the news content for their respective medium.

You become the editors — the adjudicators — for accuracy, fairness (balance), thoroughness, reliability (responsible, accountable and verifiable sourcing) and objectivity. You are the Truth Cops.

Not many citizens want to become journalists, but more and more are becoming “citizen journalists” spawned by the World Wide Web and Internet. News consumers are participating in the development and dissemination of content for newspapers, magazines, television, radio, independent news websites, cable news channels, and even personal radio, web, and podcasts. It’s all out there for your participation and critical evaluation.

We’ll spend most of our class time discussing your evaluations of news events and their coverage. We’ll start locally, expand regionally, browse nationally and examine globally. You’ll first become news consumers before you matriculate to news adjudicators.

We must keep in mind that while Journalists serve the public and are protected in that practice by the First Amendment to our Constitution, press freedom in all its guises belongs to you, the citizens.

### **Course Description**

This course helps news consumers to evaluate and adjudicate today’s news media in the traditional and emerging technology. Emphasis is on content measured against professional Journalism standards and consumers’ expectations: the credibility and reliability of news.

### **Prerequisites (Student Qualifications)**

Students should have a general understanding of what the news media is. While no prior college-level class is required, students should be curious, skeptical, opinionated, reflective; determined to learn how news media functions and affects consumers; able to accept others opinions and conclusions on news coverage; able to listen, read and view news media, being objectively critical of content.

### **Instructor**

Frank Garred has spent the past 49 years as a practicing professional Journalist. He has served professionally as a reporter, editor, publisher, newspaper owner; has served numerous state, national and international journalism organizations as director and officer; has served as director of Washington's special interest coalition advocating for government transparency (public records and public meetings access; accountability of public officials to the constituency they serve); is currently a member of the state Public Records Accountability Committee, appointed by the governor; earned numerous writing and photography awards, and taught advanced reporting with the Journalism Department at Western Washington University before coming to Peninsula College as an adjunct instructor in the Journalism program and adviser to the student newspaper, *The Buccaneer*. He earned his BA degree in Journalism from the University of Washington in 1958, served in the U.S. Army as an infantry officer before joining the *Aberdeen Daily World* as a reporter in 1960.

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### **Process**

This course examines the variety of established news media, their standards and reliability. We'll measure content by its worthiness to the community it claims to serve, and its reliability to the professional standards it claims to adhere. You'll read newspapers, watch cable and broadcast television news, listen to radio newscasts, read magazine and visit web-based news sites. The we'll evaluate the presenters to see if we're getting the whole, accurate, reliable story.

### **Outcome**

By course end students should understand the mission and purpose of professional journalism, but most important they learn and exercise their right and responsibility to demand from the news media accountable and reliable information.

### **Suggested Class Resources**

News Reporting and Writing (The Missouri Group)

Inside Reporting (Tim Harrower)

Media Impact (Eighth Edition) by Shirley Biagi

Best Newspaper Writing 2008-2009 (The Poynter Group)

*The New York Times*

*The Peninsula Daily News*  
*The Seattle Times*  
*SeattlePI.com*  
*The Sequim Gazette*  
*The Port Townsend and Jefferson County Leader*  
Crosscut.com  
National Public Radio  
Public Broadcasting System (Channel 9)  
KING, KOMO, KIRO, CNN, FOX television news and documentary broadcasts  
Selected radio and cable news channels (NPR in particular)  
Webcasts  
Blogs  
Podcasts  
Newsletters  
DVD documentaries  
Instructor's topical essays and summaries

### **Course Changes**

This syllabus is intended as a general guide to the course, and it may be revised or changed at any point during the quarter that support the purpose and objectives of the course. Any changes will be announced in class.

### **Class Schedule**

Students meet with instructor Saturdays, 9-11:30 a.m. at the Jefferson County Library, Port Hadlock.

Professional Journalists, public officials, citizen activists supplement the classroom discussion topics either in person, via webcast or interactive audio/video.

***NOTE: The first hour of each class is devoted to the discussion topics; the second hour-plus is used for panelists-student dialogue. The instructor/facilitator should have a clear outline of the forum topic, should advise panelists before their appearance of a range of questions, and should prepare students with ranging questions of their choice. It is critical to have your "students" prepared with topic/issue background. We attempted to select issues that were critical to our community, and that had at least two "sides:" Point, counter-point. Our students were primed to be critical evaluators: no question, regardless of temper or tenor, were discouraged.***

— *Frank Garred*

### **Week 1**

Introduction to course; assign reading/viewing/listening.

Discussion Focus:

What is news? Who are Journalists?  
Sourcing News; Journalism in a Democratic Society  
What is Citizen Journalism  
The rules, ethics of Journalism

- specific
- Special assignments (may include listening to, reading and viewing news media; specific text readings; specific topical research/written assignments or other projects directed by instructor)
- Week 2** **Panel: Holding Local Government Accountable; Leader Reporters Barney Burke, Allison Arthur; County Commissioner, Mayor of Port Townsend, Port Commissioner (invited)**  
 Discussion Focus:  
     Sourcing, Reporting News  
     Verifying, Attributing Information  
     News Media Law  
     Writing Style  
     Editing, Selecting News: Is this censorship?
- Special assignments (see Week 1)
- Week 3** **Panel: Objectivity/Bias (Fred Obee, PT Leader; Ross Anderson, Seattle Times-retired, invited)**  
 Discussion Focus:  
     Determine Content: Newspapers, Magazines  
     Determine Content: Broadcast News  
     New News Media: Content and Technology  
     News Stories, Columns, and Editorials. News Analysis
- Special assignments: (see Week 1)
- Week 4** **Video Presentation: News Media Credibility and Responsibility**  
 Discussion Focus:  
     Who Determines The News (Content)  
     Discovering Your News Niche  
     News Media Ownership  
     International Journalism: What's The Difference
- Special assignments: (see Week 1)
- Week 5** **Panel: Ken Bunting, Seattle PI; Mike Fancher, Seattle Times; David Ammons, NPR, invited**  
 Discussion Focus:  
     The First Amendment and You: Is it Relevant  
     Access to Information — Government Transparency  
     Journalism and Privacy
- Course summary; participants' evaluation  
 Special presentation