

Note: This is a sample of an introduction to a Citizens' Journalism course, in this case at our community college. It can be used as a news story in the local news media: yours. The facilitator should be from the top of your staff: publisher or managing editor. If you have prominent news media figures in your community outside you staff, recruit them.

— ***Frank Garred***

Journalism literacy is not for Journalists, but is for critical readers, viewers and listeners willing to examine our national, regional and local news media. Thus is born one of the new non-credit courses offered at Peninsula College's Port Townsend campus this spring under the guidance of retired Leader publisher-editor Frank Garred.

"Citizens' Journalism" becomes the newest of a growing catalog of community courses at the local college campus. Garred, a Journalism instructor at the PC's Port Angeles campus, created the new course to explore and critique the news media, their credibility and reliability.

"We hope to evaluate not just the nightly news programs on TV, or the New York Times credibility in reporting on national affairs, but also just how credible and reliable are our regional and local news media: The Leader, Sequim's Gazette, the Forks Forum, the Peninsula Daily News, the Sun of Bremerton and the Seattle Times, PI, plus the news programs on regional television and radio," Garred offers.

The class meets from 6 to 8 p.m. five alternating Thursdays starting April 10 at the Fort Worden Peninsula College campus. Following the introductory session that first date, "students" explore the content, examine and evaluate the reliability and credibility of the news media with the people who are the news, already critique the news and those who report the news.

"We've billed this course as one for skeptical cynics and cynical skeptics: those who value news accuracy, fairness, balance and thoroughness," Garred said. "This is a class for news illiterates and the news' literate; a class for those who need or want to discover how and why news is valuable to an engaged – or even an unengaged – citizenry. We want to examine what makes news relevant to news consumers, from teens to seniors."

There are no textbooks, no quizzes, no final exam for the course, though students are required to read newspapers, watch and listen to television news, hear radio news broadcasts, read news magazines, explore and read on-line news publications, even select and examine reliable news blogs on line, then discuss what they've seen, read and heard.

"What is described as 'mass media' is becoming personal media: news on cell phones and podcasts," Garred notes, adding that those resources, too, are part of the class's news media mix.

New technology isn't the focus here, Garred states, but it becomes "the catalyst for examining a new era of news consumers, their attitudes and expectations for and about their news values."

Contact Garred at fpg@olympus.net or 385-3313 for Citizens' Journalism course details; class size is limited.

The retired publisher in recent years has taught advanced reporting at Western Washington University and beginning news writing and reporting at Peninsula College. He currently serves as adviser to the college's student newspaper, The Buccaneer. Off campus he is the Governor's appointee to the state Sunshine Committee (Public Records Exemptions Accountability Committee), which is charged with evaluating and, as determined, changing or eliminating exemptions to the Public Records Act. He is former executive director of the Washington Coalition for Open Government.