

VNN's Citizen Journalism

Project for Underrepresented

Community Members

The CJP curriculum is currently divided into a 6-week program. Each week includes a 2-hour in-person learning class and 1 hour of virtual work.



Class 1 Hour 1: Introduction To Journalism

Class 1 Hour 1 introduces participants to the fundamentals of journalism. The session begins with the essence of journalism, including its principles of accuracy, fairness, impartiality, and independence. Participants explore the evolving landscape of news, from traditional media to citizen journalism, and learn to differentiate between journalism and non-journalism, such as misinformation and commentary. The class examines the historical context of mass media, emphasizing the significant milestones from the Gutenberg Press to social media. Discussions encourage participants to consider the impact of citizen journalism on society and its benefits and challenges.

Class 1 Hour 2: Impacts of Mass Media

Participants explore the multifaceted impacts of mass media on culture and community. The session begins with a definition of mass media, encompassing television, radio, newspapers, and social media. The class discusses the positive effects, such as global connectivity and awareness of cultural issues, alongside negatives like misinformation, reduced critical thinking, and cultural homogenization. Discussions delve into the roles of advertising and public relations in shaping media content, the pervasive influence of social media algorithms, and the implications for news coverage and public perception. The class ends with a discussion on the responsibilities of citizen journalists in navigating and counteracting these influences.

Class 2 Hour 1: Media Representation

Our class hour on Media Representation examines the state of underrepresented groups in media, discussing the impact of stereotypes, discrimination, and lack of diverse portrayals. Participants explore disparities in how different demographics are depicted in TV, film, and news, noting the frequent misrepresentation of BIPOC, women, and low-income individuals. The session covers the composition of the news media workforce and ownership, highlighting the dominance of white men and how this influences content. The discussion emphasizes the need for diverse and accurate representation to build trust and reflect the true diversity of society.

Class 2 Hour 2: Literacy and Reporting

Literacy and Reporting covers both media and news literacy, emphasizing critical thinking and the evaluation of information sources. The class discusses how to identify media types and understand their messages, applying critical thinking skills to analyze media content critically. It introduces the SMART Check for evaluating news sources and explores different types of bias. The session includes exercises on identifying false news, understanding responsible reporting practices, and adhering to ethical standards like the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. The class also covers the roles of traditional, non-traditional, and citizen journalism, highlighting the importance of the editing process in ensuring accuracy, clarity, and legality in news reporting.

Class 3 Hour 1: News Life Ins and Outs

Class 3 Hour 1 describes the life cycle of a news story from conception to publication, emphasizing the importance of research, interviews, and promoting the story. It explores using social media to find stories and revisits the criteria for newsworthiness. The class distinguishes between opinion and factual news, explains advocacy journalism, and discusses maintaining integrity while reporting. It also delves into conducting research, verifying sources, and fact-checking. The session highlights the importance of investigative journalism and the legal rights and risks journalists face, concluding with a discussion on participants' questions and interests in journalism.

Class 3 Hour 2: The Art of the Interview

The Art of the Interview focuses on the essentials of planning, scheduling, and conducting interviews for news stories. It emphasizes the importance of interviewing as a primary method of gathering stories and facts, outlining steps for identifying potential interviewees, conducting thorough research, and crafting effective, open-ended questions. It includes guidelines for scheduling interviews professionally, either in-person or virtually, and provides tips for the actual interview day, such as arriving early and ensuring a quiet environment. The session concludes with practical advice on handling spontaneous interviews, maintaining professionalism, and an interactive interviewing activity for participants.

Class 4 Hour 1: Intro to News Writing

Participants learn the fundamentals of writing news stories, emphasizing the importance of crafting compelling and clear narratives to connect with audiences. The class covers the basics of journalism, including presenting facts objectively, avoiding personal opinions, and ensuring all relevant viewpoints are included. This class highlights the necessity of making the story's significance clear to the audience and introduces Associated Press (AP) Style for consistency and accuracy. The session also discusses structuring stories using the inverted pyramid and hourglass formats, writing effective headlines, and the importance of cultural sensitivity and accuracy when reporting on sensitive topics like suicide and children. Finally, it stresses the importance of prompt and transparent corrections to maintain journalistic integrity.

Class 4 Hour 2: Bringing It All Together

Class 4 Hour 2 focuses on the multifaceted role of multimedia journalists (MMJs), who handle every aspect of storytelling from pitching to publishing. The session highlights the impact of multimedia on storytelling, offering tips for safe and effective fieldwork, photography, and videography, including the rule of thirds, proper lighting, and shot variety. It emphasizes ethical considerations in photojournalism and the essentials of equipment and editing software. The class also provides guidance on publishing through the VNN app and promoting work on social media and other platforms to build an audience and foster engagement.

Class 5 Hour 1: Safety and Self Care in Journalism

Our final learning hour covers the critical topic of safety and self-care in journalism, emphasizing the multi-faceted risks journalists face, including physical, psychosocial, and digital threats. It includes practical advice for risk assessment and creating safety plans, particularly for female journalists who face higher rates of online abuse. The session also addresses self-care strategies to manage the mental health challenges associated with covering distressing stories, advocating for regular breaks, therapy, and activities that promote well-being.

Class 5 Hour 2 is one hour of participant preference. Options include mock interviewing, further discussion of topics, and brainstorming story ideas.

Participants utilize **Class 6 Hour 1 and Class 6 Hour 2** to produce their citizen journalism stories.