

Graduate Symposium in Journalism

Professor
**William
McKeen**

Office: 306-B Alden Hall
[704 Commonwealth Ave.]
Email: wmckeen@bu.edu
Office hours: Mondays,
3-4 pm; Wednesdays,
12:10-1:10 pm;
Thursdays, 1-2 pm;
and by appointment
Home page:
williammckeen.com
X / Threads / BlueSky:
[@wmckeen](https://bsky.app/profile/wmckeen)



**Megan
Twohey
(left) and
Jodi
Kantor,**
authors of
She Said,
with
**Stephen
Colbert.**

About this course

This symposium is required for first-semester graduate students in journalism. The goal is to enrich the first semester curriculum by presenting a variety of topics relevant to the field, presented by interesting speakers who are experts in the subject matter. Attendance is mandatory.

Your final grade is based on two short papers inspired by our required books, and from the final assignment, a research project memo. Details to follow.

Your class participation and preparedness for our guest speakers may affect your grade. Poor attendance, disruptive talking, dancing in class and making rude noises will diminish your grade.

We have three required books and one (David Carr) highly recommended:

- David Carr, *The Night of the Gun* (Simon and Schuster, 2008)
- Erin Lee Carr, *All That You Leave Behind* (Random House, 2019)
- Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, *Chasing the Truth* (Philomel, 2021)

Daily reading of *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe* and other news sites is expected.

One last thing: we insist that you have fun.

What you do

You have three major assignments this semester:

The first two are reviews of our assigned books. The third is a memo about the professional project required for graduation.

First, the reviews.

We will read *She Said* by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey and *All that You Leave Behind* by Erin Lee Carr. I don't require, but highly recommend, David Carr's *Night of the Gun*.

I want you to review these books for an audience. *Tell* me the audience you have in mind – is it *The Boston Globe*, public radio, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker* or some site devoted to journalism? I don't expect these to be published or posted for the mass audience because the books have been out for a few years. But you must always have an audience in mind.

It can be in whatever form you want, and can be turned in as a document file, a sound file, a short video, etc. In your review, don't just repeat what the book says. We want your opinion of the work so use judicious examples but don't parrot everything the author says.

Now, for the project memo. This assignment is due in early December.

Completion of a professional project is required for graduation. We ask



Journalist **Jessica Rinaldi** of the *Boston Globe* won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography and was also a finalist that year – to herself.

you to propose a professional project. Do so in a memo addressed to your proposed adviser. But deliver it to me at the end of the semester. Your memo should be 3-4 pages or so and should outline what you plan to do, what form will it take, etc.

This is an exercise, to make sure you are thinking about the project, even though it's a year away.

Things to note:

Project topics must be approved by your professional project adviser. This. Isn't necessarily your faculty mentor / adviser.

All projects must meet professional standards. That generally means that projects are of such a quality that they would be suitable for

presentation or publication by a news organization.

All projects must be supervised by a full-time faculty member. Projects will also be reviewed by a second reader, who must certify that the work is of professional quality.

This syllabus includes three pages about the professional project – which you will be finishing a year from now.

This stuff was written by a committee and it reads like it. Still, it contains a lot of good advice and even suggests a timeline – for those who put things off to the last minute.

So that's the purpose of this assignment – the project memo. I hope that you come up with an exciting and useful topic.

Learning objectives

Students will

- Develop an awareness and appreciation of the foundations of journalism in a free society
- Develop an awareness of the issues facing journalism today
- Develop an understanding of the importance of journalism in its various forms and across platforms
- Develop an appreciation of excellent journalism by taking a deep dive into a couple of major works in the field
- Develop a project conceived and executed in consultation with the instructor.

Grading

The assignments are discussed under the What You Do section of this syllabus.

What you need to know is that we follow the standard grading scale, using A's, B's, C's, etc.

Work that is of professional quality – meaning that it is ready for publication or presentation with only the minimum of editing – earns the student an A-grade.

Work that needs revision or that has significant stylistic errors earns the student a B-grade.

Work that needs a great deal of revision and which has significant errors earns the student a C or D-grade.

Work that contains errors or fact or severe errors in presentation is considered failing work and earns the student an F-grade.

Schedule

Part 1. Just Us

- SEP 08 **Introduction**
- SEP 15 **Stuff About Storytelling, Part I**
Everything but the kitchen sink
- SEP 22 **Stuff About Storytelling, Part II**
We administer a brain suppository
- SEP 29 **Journalism in Society, Part I**
Why we do what we do
- OCT 06 **Journalism in Society, Part II**
The saga continues

Part 2. Company's Coming

- OCT 14 **Magazines***
Erik Trickey
- OCT 20 **Registration Preview**
Kayla Ring
- OCT 27 **Investigative Reporting**
Brooke Williams
- NOV 03 **Media Disinformation**
Joan Donovan
- NOV 10 **Public Radio**
Phillip W.D. Martin
- NOV 17 **Sports Media**
A. Sherrod Blakely
- NOV 24 **Open**
TBD

Part 3. The Big Finish

- DEC 01 **We Need to Talk**
Storming Our Brains
- DEC 08 **Graduate Showcase**
Time and place TBD

- I. Kantor-Twohey paper due on September 22*
II. Carr paper due on October 31
III. Project memos due on December 10

Your professional project

All candidates for the Master of Science degree in Journalism must complete a professional project. Each student will find a faculty member serve as project adviser. (Your project adviser does not have to be your academic adviser.) Students should begin projects by the start of their final semester, or earlier.

You should also enroll in your project adviser's section of JO 955 during your final semester.

Please take note of these points:

- ✓ Project topics must be approved by your professional project adviser.
- ✓ All projects must meet professional standards. That generally means that projects must be of such quality that they would be suitable for presentation or publication by a news organization.

Some students may choose to write a thesis. These projects must be suitable for publication in an academic journal.

All projects must be supervised by a full-time faculty member. Projects will also be reviewed by a second reader, who must certify that the work is of professional quality.

There are several types of storytelling projects, including: multimedia, text-based or documentary projects.

A few of these options are discussed below. Specifics should be worked out between students and their project advisers.

- **A multimedia project** employs any combination of video, still photographs, audio, writing, and graphics. This project will provide students with the opportunity to tell a compelling story in a variety of media in order to showcase a range of skills required for professional journalism. Ideally this package would be the centerpiece of a student's portfolio. The project should be a single story involving the kind of depth and substance that would allow it to be published on the website of a high-end journalism enterprise.

Your professional project continued

- **A text-based project** can take many forms. For example: a) Two non-fiction articles of professional quality, each about 2,500 to 3,000 words; b) A major article of approximately 5,000 words that explores a single subject, or related subjects, of significant interest; c) A series of articles on a specific subject or related subjects. It is expected that such a series would run approximately four parts, with a total of 3,500-5,000 words; length and content to be agreed upon in consultation with the adviser; and d) An online project, the nature and content of which is to be determined in consultation with the project adviser. In all cases, students will be encouraged to include appropriate multimedia elements such as maps, charts, links, photos, etc (Note: If you submit a piece that was accepted for class, your project adviser may require additional reporting and rewrites.)

- **A series or documentary in a video or audio format.** This project is the culmination of your work in broadcast journalism at Boston University. It gives you the opportunity to showcase what you've learned and to craft a professional project of the highest caliber. You may choose to do one single video or audio documentary of 18-20 minutes in length or several shorter reports that total 18-20 minutes in duration. You may also do a multimedia production that incorporates video and audio within a website. The result should be a professional production of broadcast quality, able to be aired on commercial television or public radio, or on a professional website.

Note: Students who choose one of the above options will be expected to endeavor to sell or place their work with a professional news organization.

- **A traditional master's thesis.** Candidates for the master's degree may choose to write a thesis, under the direction of a faculty member who has the scholarly background necessary to supervise such a project. The master's thesis is a substantial work of original research into a topic involving journalism. A thesis might, for example, explore a topic in the history, law, economics, or professional ethics of journalism. Or, a student might wish to investigate a phenomenon such as the impact of news coverage on a particular audience or outcome. The academic thesis is not a journalistic undertaking but a scholarly one. It must be grounded in the relevant scholarly literature, which the student must master

Your professional project continued

student must master under the guidance of a faculty supervisor. In light of that literature, the student will be expected to formulate an original question that is subject to verification or illumination through research into primary source materials, polling, or similar investigation. Students who wish to pursue this option would be well advised to begin early to find a suitable supervisor and begin the background reading. Students should expect to produce a thesis on the scale of 50-100 pages (complete with full scholarly apparatus), and the thesis should be suitable for publication in an academic journal.

A suggested timetable for professional projects follows. We recommend doing as much as possible in your second semester, so you hit your final semester running.

In your final semester, you should enroll in JO 955 and arrange to meet the following schedule:

- ◆ **Week 1:** Identify your adviser, who may be your regular faculty adviser or a different professor with a special expertise. Your project adviser is your first reader. Meet with your adviser and discuss your topic. Together with your adviser, identify a second reader and seek that professor's willingness to serve. The second reader may be a professor in a different department.
- ◆ **Week 2:** Submit a written proposal consisting of a two-page summary of your idea or ideas, explaining why those ideas are interesting and/or important along with proposed interviews, and presentation format. Identify a market or audience for your work. In some media, other requirements will apply. Check with your adviser.]
- ◆ **Weeks 3-7:** Work on the project.
- ◆ **Week 8:** Interviews, research and shooting should be completed. Writing and editing begin.
- ◆ **Week 9:** First version due to adviser.
- ◆ **Week 10:** Revisions, possible further interviews and/or shooting.
- ◆ **Week 11:** Final edits. Submit full-length project to adviser.
- ◆ **Week 12:** Complete revisions required by adviser. Then, submit to second reader.
- ◆ **Week 13:** Continued editing and / or revision with adviser and second reader.
- ◆ **Week 14:** Secure final sign-offs from both readers. Submit form to Academic Information office, to ensure certification for your diploma. Arrange to archive your work at Boston University.
- ◆ **Week 15:** Submit your work for consideration as part of the Department of Journalism's annual Graduate Showcase.

Six things to know

1. Sexual misconduct. Boston University is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and our school policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which regards sexual misconduct – including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success and we encourage students who have experienced some form of sexual misconduct to talk to someone about their experience, so they can get the support they need. Confidential support and academic advocacy resources can be found with the Center for Sexual Assault Response & Prevention (SARP) at <http://www.bu.edu/safety/sexual-misconduct/>.

2. Equal opportunity. BU has strict guidelines on classroom behavior and practices when it comes to treatment of students and guests on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, mental or physical disability, genetic information, military service, national origin, or due to marital, parental, or veteran status. Discrimination for any of these reasons is prohibited. Please refer to the [Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Policy](#) for more details.

3. A positive classroom. At your discretion, please alert me to anything related to preferred pronouns, preferred name or nickname, or any extenuating circumstances or trigger warnings (personal, medical, etc.) that might impact your classroom experience. I want to make sure you have the most positive experience in the classroom as possible. If work that gets shown in this class, professional or student-generated, offends you in anyway, please mention it in class or talk to us privately about it so that we can all learn from each other. This is not to say we will ever restrict freedom of speech or water down an aggressive or edgy idea, but we want to discuss anything that someone deems troublesome or offensive.

4. Disability and access services. If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the [Office of Disability and Access Services](#) (DAS) at 617-353-3658 to coordinate any reasonable accommodation requests. DAS is located at 25 Buick Street, on the third floor.

5. Student athletes. All student-athletes should be provided with a sheet from Student-Athlete Support Services regarding absences throughout the semester. These sheets should be handed in as soon as possible to avoid potential conflicts and so arrangements can be made to provide for missed lecture notes, classwork, or discussion.

6. Academic code of conduct. All BU students are bound by the [Academic Conduct Code](#). Please review to ensure you are acting responsibly and ethically in regard to your academics.

Additional resources

In addition to the resources listed above, please know that we are here to help you find the resources to help you get through stressful times.

Support services

<https://www.bu.edu/com/resources/current-students/student-support/>

COM Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

<https://www.bu.edu/com/about-com/diversity-equity-inclusion/>

Newbury Center for First-Generation Students

<http://bu.edu/newbury-center>

COM Writing Center

<https://www.bu.edu/com/for-current-students/the-com-writing-center/>

Dean of Students office

<https://www.bu.edu/dos/>

Note: Any student who is experiencing food or housing insecurity and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. In addition, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable us to provide any resources that we may possess.

Words about journalism

Some favorite fancy-pants or funny quotes

The purpose of journalism is to irritate, infuriate and inform.

Jess Lewis Gardner III

Student in the first class I taught

Ninety percent of journalism is saying "Lord Jim Dies" to people who didn't know Lord Jim was alive.

G.K. Chesterton

English novelist

Journalism keeps you planted in the earth.

Ray Bradbury

Author and screenwriter

The principal difference between a horse and a man is that you cannot rely on a horse to gather news.

Mark Twain

who needs no introduction

The past actually happened, but history is only what somebody wrote down.

A. Whitney Brown

Author and comedian

It is not death or torture or imprisonment that

threatens us as American journalists. It is the trivialization of our industry.

Ted Koppel

Formerly of ABC News

I would be a journalist if for no other reason than I would rather drink with journalists than

History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.

Maya Angelou

Poet

Good Reading

Start to build a journalism library



David Carr

Author of
The Night of the Gun



Erin Lee Carr

Author of
All That You Leave Behind



Jodi Kantor & Megan Twohey

Authors of
She Said

any other people on Earth.

Hunter S. Thompson

Gonzo journalist

Reporters aren't very bright as a general rule. I mean, most of us learn to write when we're kids. Then we go on to other things.

Bobby Knight

Basketball coach

Some final words

Consider this syllabus a contract. I've made some promises I intend to keep. By not dropping the class, I assume you accept the conditions.

There are two guiding philosophers in my life: Elvis Presley (who said, "If this ceases to be fun, we will cease to do it.") and my dear, late mother (who said, "If we all liked the same thing, it would be a pretty dull world.") Those two great thinkers shape my approach to this course.

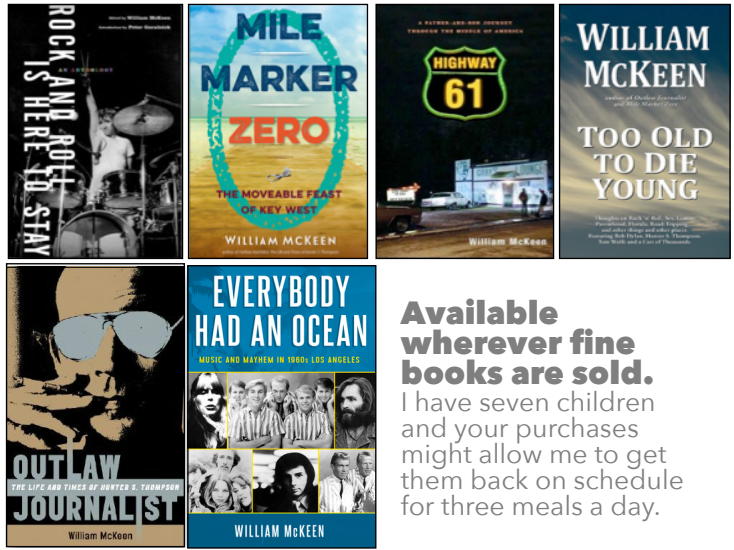
I hope this course deepens your interest in journalism and helps you understand its legacy. **WM**

Be good

The code of academic conduct can be found at: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

There, you will note that: "Academic misconduct is conduct by which a student misrepresents his or her academic accomplishments, or impedes other students' opportunities of being judged fairly for their academic work. Knowingly allowing others to represent your work as their own is as serious an offense as submitting another's work as your own."

Shameless plug



Available wherever fine books are sold.

I have seven children and your purchases might allow me to get them back on schedule for three meals a day.

Instructor biography

I worked for newspapers and magazines before starting my teaching career. My first job, at *The Courier-Tribune* in Bloomington, Ind., lasted until that fine little newspaper went out of business. I was at *The Palm Beach Post* briefly and then joined *The American Spectator*, then served two years at *The Saturday Evening Post*. While at the *Post*, I helped edit a couple of books, including an anthology called *The American Story*.

Since I started teaching, I've taken several short term jobs – sometimes in the summers, sometimes night work on the copy desk during the school year – on *The Norman* (Okla.) *Transcript*, *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Ky.), *The Tampa Bay Times* and *The Gainesville* (Fla.) *Sun*. I've written reviews and features for *The Orlando Sentinel*, *The Tampa Bay Times* and *The Boston Globe* fairly regularly since 1989. I'm also book editor for an alt weekly called *Creative Loafing*.

I earned a bachelor's in history and a master's in journalism from Indiana University, writing a historical survey of the portrayal of journalists in popular culture. I earned my Ph.D. in education from the University of Oklahoma, though that was largely a history degree. My major professor was a historian and my dissertation was a historical account of a riot at that university.

I have an interest in political reporting and for four years managed a news bureau at the Oklahoma capital, covering state government. I've also covered the Democratic and Republican national conventions, so this course has a political bent.

My semi-scholarly books are: *The American Story* (Curtis, 1975, edited with Starkey Flythe, Jr.), *The Beatles: A Bio-Bibliography* (Greenwood, 1989), *Hunter S. Thompson* (Twayne, 1991), *Bob Dylan: A Bio-Bibliography* (Greenwood, 1993), *Tom Wolfe* (Twayne, 1995), and *Literary Journalism: A Reader* (Wadsworth, 2000).

My mass-market books include:

- *Rock and Roll is Here to Stay* (W.W. Norton, 2000), is an anthology tracing the history of popular music.
- *Highway 61* (W.W. Norton, 2003) a memoir of a 6,000-mile road trip with my eldest son.
- *Outlaw Journalist* (W.W. Norton, 2008), my biography of Hunter S. Thompson.
- *Mile Marker Zero* (Crown Books, 2011), a narrative about the writers, artists, actors and musicians who found their artistic identities in Key West.
- *Homegrown in Florida* (University Press of Florida, 2012), a collection of stories about growing up in Florida.

- *Too Old to Die Young* (Dredger's Lane, 2015), a collection of articles, reviews, recipes and memoirs. Available only as an e-book.

- *Everybody Had An Ocean* (Chicago Review Press, 2017), a nonfiction narrative about the crossroads of music, murder and mayhem in 1960s Los Angeles

I have seven children – Sarah, a designer in New York; Graham, chief environmental officer for the Indiana University system; Mary, who works for non-profit in Chicago; Savannah, a nurse in the Boston metroplex; Jack, an artist in residence at my residence; Travis, a college student and baseball player in New Hampshire; and Charley, captain of the football team at Cohasset High School. I also have five magnificent granddaughters, Mabel, Pearl, Rose, Myer and Vivienne, and one grandson, West.. I'll be happy to share pictures.

Before coming to Boston University, I taught at Western Kentucky University for five years, the University of Oklahoma for four years, and the University of Florida for 24 years, the last dozen as department chairman. I served 13 years as department chairman here..

I sincerely hope you enjoy the course. From my side, I can tell you that teaching it is a privilege and a pleasure.

Wm. McKeen