

# Introduction to JOURNALISM

JO 100, Fall 2014

Professor  
**WILLIAM  
McKEEN**

**Office**  
131 COM

**Phone**  
617.353.3484

**Email**  
wmckeen@bu.edu

**Office hours**  
Tuesdays, 2:30-4 pm  
Wednesdays, 10 am -  
noon and by  
appointment

**Home page**  
williammckeen.com

**Twitter**  
@wmckeen



## About this course

This is a two-credit course for students who are curious about the world of journalism.

Consider this class a table of contents for the journalism curriculum — or for a career in journalism.

Our purpose is to help you decide if this is what you want to do with your life.

Journalism requires a great commitment — and a dedication to fairness and accuracy.

We revere storytelling, so a love for language and respect for the people we write about — and for — is expected.

If we help you decide that journalism is *not* what you want to do, then we have done our job. If we in some way inspire you to follow this path, then we have also done our job

Here is the required reading for the course:

- Rick Bragg. *Somebody Told Me* (Vintage, 2002)

- Ira Glass, editor. *The New Kings of Non-Fiction* (Riverhead, 2007)

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

### ALSO:

Read the articles posted on the department's Facebook page (Boston University Journalism Department), as well as my week-by-week postings on Blackboard Learn.

# Grading and academic honesty

We have two multiple-choice examinations. You will also write a short (3-5 page) paper, based on your required reading. Details will follow. We may also have a few other short in-class writing assignments.

Since this is designed to be the first course in the Department of Journalism, we hold your paper up to extremely high standards.

A note on behavior: It should go without saying that I expect you not to talk, dance or make rude noises while I am trying to lecture. Any sort of disruptive behavior will be damaging to your grade.

We follow the standard grading scale for the tests and the paper:

- 93 and above A
- 90 to 92.99 A-
- 87 to 89.99 B+
- 83 to 86.99 B
- 80 to 82.99 B-
- 77 to 79.99 C+
- 73 to 76.99 C
- 70 to 72.99 C-
- 67 to 69.99 D+
- 60 to 66.99 D
- 0 to 59.99 F

Cheating of any kind will not be tolerated and will be considered grounds for expulsion. Be familiar with the university's policy on academic honesty.

The College of Communication policy on plagiarism reads as follows:

“Plagiarism is the act of representing someone else’s creative and/or academic work as your own, in full or in part. It can be an act of commission, in which one intentionally appropriates the words, pictures or ideas of another, or it can be an act of omission, in which one fails to acknowledge/ document/ give credit to the source, creator and/or copyright owner of those works, pictures or ideas. Any fabrication of materials, quotes or sources, other than that created in a work of fiction, is also plagiarism. Plagiarism is the most serious academic offense that you can commit and can result in probation,



Cary Grant (left) and Rosalind Russell in “His Girl Friday” (1940), a classic screen portrayal of journalism.

suspension or expulsion.”

In short, do good things and

don’t do bad things. Today’s journalism demands unflagging honesty.

## Outline

*The class will follow this general outline, in three distinct sections. We will try to stick to this schedule, though occasionally Acts of God intervene. Listen in class and check your email for updates.*

CLASS	SUBJECT
-------	---------

01	Introduction
----	--------------

### Part I: DEFINITION OF TERMS

*Basic theories of communication and a brief survey of the news media -- how information is gathered and what obstacles hinder gathering. We discuss storytelling across media.*

02.	Basics of Communication
03.	The Language
04.	Telling True Stories

### Part II: FIRST PERSON

*Journalists with a wide variety of experience talk about their work.*

05.	A Reporter Visits
06.	A Web Producer Visits

*Continued on next page*

# 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 books include: *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), *Literary Journalism: A Reader* (Wadsworth, 2000) and *Rock and Roll is Here to Stay* (Norton, 2000).

My more recent books include:

## Outline continued

- 07. **Test No. 1**
- 08. A Photojournalist Visits
- 09. A Broadcast Journalist Visits

### Part III: TAKING ACTION

*Some stuff you need to know before you leave.*

- 10. **Term paper due**
- 11. The Audience
- 12. The First Amendment, Part I
- 13. The First Amendment, Part II
- 14. **Test No. 2**

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

I'm married and have seven children — Sarah, a designer with Pentagram Studios in New York; Graham, an environmental officer for Indiana University; Mary, nightlife impresario in Chicago;

Savannah, 18, a senior at Cohasset High School; Jack, 12, and Travis, 11, and Charley, 9, all young scholars in the Cohasset school system.

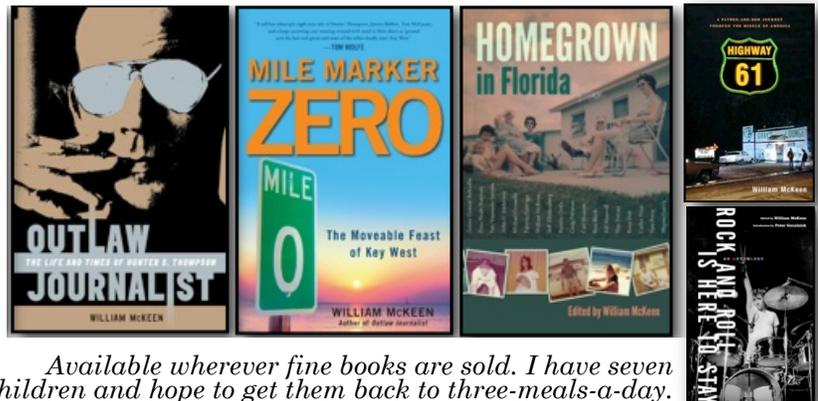
It goes without saying that my wife, Nicole, is a saint. She is a midwife, which makes dinner time conversation interesting.

Before becoming professor and chairman of the Boston University Department of Journalism, 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 hope you enjoy the course.



## SHAMELESS PLUG



*Available wherever fine books are sold. I have seven children and hope to get them back to three-meals-a-day.*

# Some words about journalism

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 ever taught*

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

**A. WHITNEY BROWN**  
*author and former writer and performer on 'Saturday Night Live'*

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

**G.K. CHESTERTON**  
*English novelist and essayist*

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*

The job of the newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

**FINLEY PETER DUNNE**  
*early 20th century journalist*

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*

I would be a journalist if for no other reason than I would rather drink with journalists than 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**  
*retired basketball coach*

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

**MAYA ANGELOU,**  
*speaking at President Clinton's first inauguration*

Journalism keeps you planted in the earth.

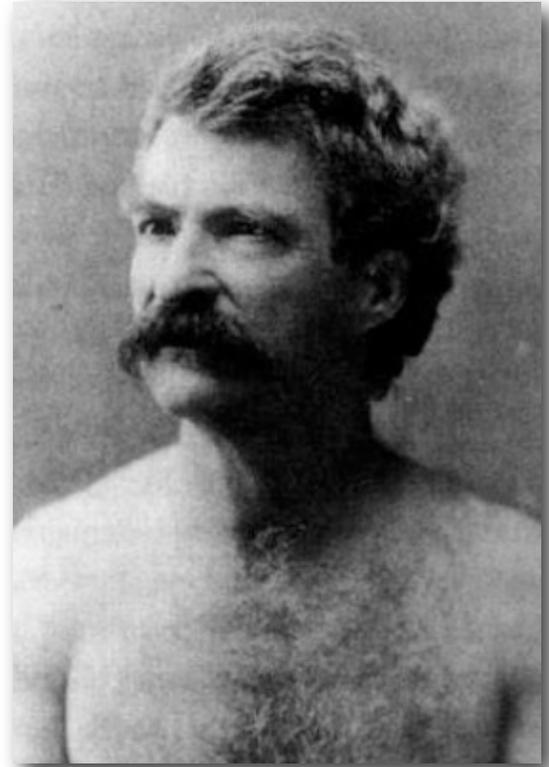
**RAY BRADBURY**  
*novelist and essayist*

If journalism is good, it is controversial by its nature.

**JULIAN ASSANGE**  
*of Wikileaks*

Journalism is more addictive than crack cocaine.

**DAN RATHER**  
*formerly of CBS News*



Mark Twain (above) near the beginning of his career as a journalist, when he wrote for the Virginia City (Nev.) Territorial Enterprise. His name was Samuel Clemens, but he wrote under a pseudonym, so as not to embarrass his brother, the territorial secretary. The name he chose came from the old river term "mark twain," which meant "safe water."

## 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 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.