

Journalism in China

Other items here could include:

Course number
Term (Fall/Spring + Year) Fall 2010
Course time: Thursday 1630h
Course location

Instructor Contact Information:

Edward A. Gargan
edgargan@hotmail.com
edgargan@post.harvard.edu
m +86.1380.101.9575

Course Description:

This course is a practicum in which students, through a mix of lectures, briefings and discussions, will delve into nature of reporting in China. This course is intended to stimulate students to think about how one reports about a country like China. This means understanding what reporting is, how journalists decide what to report, how they decide how to write about a subject, and how an image of China is reflected in a body of reportage.

Students are expected over the course of the semester to read every China story in the four major American newspapers, The New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and Wall Street Journal. We will examine how western correspondents in China write about this country, interview several correspondents and engage in some journalism of our own. We will also examine how Chinese journalists write about their own country, and discuss the differences between journalism in China and western journalism.

Journalism is about writing and the students in this course are expected to write a reported piece of journalism (800 – 1,000 words) weekly. We will read each other's work and discuss it in class with the same verve we discuss the work of western correspondents based here. While the emphasis will be on the print media, there will be guest lecturers who will discuss documentary film making and television journalism in China.

Students will take on one major project this semester. It should be either a major piece of reporting or feature writing (all subject to discussion), or a research paper on journalism in China.

This course will be conducted in a seminar format, which means we will take turns leading the discussions of the readings. This course is intended to be fun, immediate and challenging. Come prepared to talk, to read, and to write.

Course Outcomes:

Hopefully, students will have a deeper understanding of how journalists cover China, and over the course of the semester will make some efforts of their own to do original journalism.

Through their reading, discussions and interviewing conducted for their own writing, students should develop a tactile sense of China (through the lens of Beijing primarily, but also through the two required field trips on the Silk Road and to Guilin) in a vivid and immediate fashion quite distinct from academic inquiry. Students, who hopefully will bring to this course the perspectives of political science, history, anthropology, should emerge from this course with a sense of how journalism frames issues and writes about them. Success will be reflected in their own writing.

Course Requirements and Form of Assessment:

Grading will be based on your writing and your class participation. That said, the idea of this course is to do good work and not worry about grades. There will be a series of reported pieces required as well as a lengthier piece towards the end of the semester, either a reported piece or a research paper on some aspect of journalism in China, either to be decided on after conference. Roughly 40 percent of your grade will be based on the shorter written pieces and 50 percent on your longer project. Participation in our weekly discussions is extremely important as well and will constitute 10 percent of the final grade.

Attendance Policy:

If you don't want show up for class, don't sign up; if you do, it will be fun and you may actually learn something. Failure to attend class will, not suprisingly, have a somewhat deleterious effect on your final evaluation.

Academic Honesty Statement:

Please refer to the following web link for policies on academic honesty:
http://www.luc.edu/cas/pdfs/CAS_Academic_Integrity_Statement_December_07.pdf

Required Texts:

Here are some books, most written by prominent journalists who have worked here for years, that we shall read; **required:**

1. Michael Meyer, *The Last Days of Old Beijing: Life in the Vanishing Backstreets of a City Transformed* (Walker & Company, 2008)
2. Ian Johnson, *Wild Grass: Three Portraits of Change in Modern China* (Vintage, 2005)
3. Leslie Chang: *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China* (Spiegel & Grau, 2008)
4. Philip P. Pan, *Out of Mao's Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China*

- (Simon & Schuster, 2008)
5. Chen Guidi & Wu Chuntao, *The Life of China's Peasants* (PublicAffairs, 2006)
 6. Jen Lin-liu, *Serve the People: A Stir-fried Journey Through China* (Harcourt 2008)
 7. John Pomfret, *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China* (Holt Paperbacks, 2007)
 8. Richard McGregor, *The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* (Harper Collins, New York 2010)
 9. James Kynge, *China Shakes the World: A Titan's Rise and Troubled Future -- and the Challenge for America* (Mariner Books, 2007)
 10. Rob Gifford, *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power* (Random House, 2008)
 11. Jan Wong, *Red China Blues: My Long March from Mao to Now* (Anchor, 1997)
 12. Lijia Zhang, "Socialism is Great": *A Worker's Memoir of the New China* (Anchor 2009)

recommended reading:

13. Sang Ye: *China Candid: The People on the People's Republic* (University of California Press, 2006)
14. Jan Wong, *A Comrade Lost and Found: A Beijing Memoir* (Mariner Books, 2010)

and, for fun, and not inconsiderable insight:

Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (Bay Back Books, 1999); originally published 1938.

Class Schedule:

Journalism does not come to us in neatly packaged modules, unlike your other courses in history or political science. Our goals over the coming twelve weeks are to read widely the China coverage from western newspapers and magazines, discuss with increasing knowledge the work of specific journalists, and write regular pieces based on your own journalistic efforts.

The rhythm of the semester will depend in some measure on my presentations of journalism's basic principles and approaches to reporting in China, and to some extent on your own interests and perspectives. This is intended to be a collaborative effort among us all. I will, each week, assign reading from our suggested texts, and encourage wider reading where appropriate. Every week, students will be expected to submit a short, perhaps 800- to 1,000-word, original piece of reporting that tells us something interesting about China. We will discuss everybody's reporting in class.

Broadly, however, the semester will be segmented as follows:

- An introduction to the practice of journalism, and to the practice of journalism in China.
- An exploration of Beijing, what goes on in this city of 17 million people and how journalists wrote about China's capital.
- A broad and deep look at the nature of Chinese society, how it is changing and how some of the best journalists report this staggering

social transformation.

- A careful exploration of political repression and how, despite occasional dangers, journalists cover delicate and risky subjects
- China's rapid economic is reshaping not just itself but the world; we shall examine this profound reordering of economic life.

Students will also be required to read one book each week. The assigned readings are by journalists with a wide range of experience in China and each has a distinct perspective on China, and on reporting about China.

About mid-way through the semester I expect students to settle on an idea or subject for a longer piece of reporting, or research paper, on which we jointly agree.

Over the course of the semester we will examine how correspondents cover breaking news and how they report and write longer feature and investigative pieces; we will invite several correspondents to our class to discuss their work. We will also look briefly at how Chinese journalists report on their own country and how it differs from the work of western journalists.

Now, for those considering this course: if you are serious you'll be expected, in addition to what you write in Beijing, to write a piece from each of the two class excursions, one to the lands of the Silk Road (Rob Gifford's fine book may be illuminating in this regard), and the second to Guilin. I'd like you, during your trips, to find someone or something that strikes you as interesting – for example, a potter, a monk, a kite-maker, a musician, a polluted river, a shanty town, a boat-man, a fortune-teller, a tea shop – and spend an hour or so (or more, should you wish) doing interviews and taking notes, take another hour or so writing an 800-word piece based on your reporting and bring it to class after each trip; please email your first effort to me by the first day of class (9 September). We're off and running. It will be grand.