

# J226-001: Reporting on Health & Medicine

Spring 2018

Thursdays 10a – 12p

106 North Gate Hall (Upper Newsroom)

## Instructor Contact/Office Hours

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 12 – 2p

## Course Description & Objectives

This course offers an accessible introduction to health and medical reporting. Students in the course will learn what constitutes a health or medical beat and how journalists find and report such stories. By the end of this course, you will have a robust toolkit of health reporters' resources in your personal files. Because this is a graduate-level course, we will also go beyond reporting basics to think critically about health and medical reporting. We'll explore how politics, economics, sociocultural norms, and technology shape health news stories and how such coverage reflects and shapes public attitudes and values with respect to health. We'll also consider the role of the media as a social and political institution and critique media coverage of health with a focus on issues of representation, identity, and equality.

In brief, this course will strengthen students' abilities to:

- Identify various types of health and medical story ideas
- Conduct deep background research for health and medical stories
- Thinking critically about the production of health and medical news
- Locate and analyze several types of primary source documents to inform their health reporting

This is not a production class. Instead, think of it as a deep dive into a specific area of coverage with a bit of multiple personality disorder (health coverage includes everything from stories on the latest study showing that coffee is good for you to investigative reports on rogue research or corrupt influences shaping policy). Expect to do lots of reading, research, talking, and deep thinking.

Students in this course can choose one of two assignment tracks. Students in Track 1 will write three short, 700 – 1,000 word pieces (a first-person, opinion, and health policy or study story). This track is designed for students looking to gain experience writing and being edited. Students in Track 2 will write a final memo summarizing how they applied specific ideas, methods, readings, or reporting resources covered in this class to a specific, in-depth reporting project they are working on outside of class. This track is designed for students who want to deepen their health and medical reporting skills. Students in both tracks will write a short critique of an award-winning piece of health journalism and give two short presentations, one that analyzes the previous week's health coverage, and a final one that proposes radical changes to contemporary health reporting norms. Students may present in pairs or groups of three. Students will be committed to a track when the second story assignment (the opinion piece) is due. If you choose not to complete either of the first two story assignments, you will be in Track 2. Details and guidelines for all assignments will be posted to the Assignments module of the bCourses site for this class.

Student performance will be evaluated as follows (see the **Grading Policy** section, below, to convert points to final course grades):

Track 1

Participation	20 points (2/class weeks 3 – 13)
Book quizzes	10 pts (5 each)
Weekly news pres.	10 pts
Awarded critique	15 pts
Final pres.	15 pts
Story 1	10 pts
Story 2	10 pts
Story 3	10 pts

Track 2

Participation	20 pts
Book quizzes	10 pts
Weekly news pres.	10 pts
Awarded critique	15 pts
Final pres.	15 pts
Final memo	30 pts

**Required Readings**

- Carey Gillem, *Whitewash: The Story of a Weed Killer, Cancer, and the Corruption of Science* (Washington: Island Press, 2017). ISBN-13: 978-1610918329
- Maryn McKenna, *Big Chicken: The Incredible Story of How Antibiotics Created Modern Agriculture and Changed the Way the World Eats* (Washington: National Geographic, 2017). ISBN-13: 978-1426217661

Other assigned readings and media will be posted to the Readings module on bCourses. Weekly topics or readings may be adjusted to respond to breaking news, unforeseen opportunities, and student interest. All changes will be posted by noon the Monday before class. Anything posted later will be considered optional.

**Weekly Schedule**

The complete list of readings and assignments for the course will be posted to bCourses and subject to change. (Italics indicate things you must do or turn in.)

Week 1 (1/18)	Welcome! Course intro, overview and introductions
Week 2 (1/25)	Health reporters, health readers. The basics, from writing to being read <i>Readings: A Field Guide for Science Writers, Part I</i>
Week 3 (2/1)	What’s wrong with health reporting? Scientists have some answers <i>Readings: See bCourses.</i> <i>Due: First-person story (Track 1 only)</i>
Week 4 (2/8)	Hang on, what is health? And who decides? <i>Readings: See bCourses.</i>
Week 5 (2/15)	So-called study stories, the bread and butter of health reporting <i>Readings: See bCourses.</i> <i>Due: Opinion story (Track 1 only)</i>
Week 6 (2/22)	Health policy stories: where to begin <i>Readings: See bCourses.</i> <i>Due: Study story (Track 1 only)</i>
Week 7 (3/1)	Health in numbers: clinical trials, risk, and statistics <i>Readings: Cohn and Cope, News &amp; Numbers, passim and articles posted to bCourses.</i> <i>Due: Policy story (Track 1 only)</i>
Week 8 (3/8)	Investigating health: the series <i>Readings: “When Caregivers Harm,” ProPublica</i> <i>Due: First Track 1 rewrite deadline</i>
Week 9 (3/15)	Investigating health: the book

	<i>Readings: Carey Gillem, Whitewash</i> <i>Due: Book quiz (complete in class)</i>
Week 10 (3/22)	Award Winning Story Critiques <i>Readings: Choose your own; see bCourses for guidelines.</i>
Week 11 (3/29)	NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK
Week 12 (4/5)	A story for our time? Antibiotics <i>Readings: Maryn McKenna, Big Chicken</i> <i>Due: Book quiz (complete in class)</i>
Week 13 (4/12)	Responsible health reporting? Vaccines and Vaccination <i>Readings: See list of articles posted to bCourses.</i> <i>Due: story 2</i>
Week 14 (4/19)	NO CLASS. <i>Due: Second (and last) Track 1 rewrite deadline</i>
Week 15 (4/26)	Final presentations <i>Readings: See list of articles posted to bCourses.</i> <i>Due: Final reporting memo</i>

### **Class Start Time**

This class follows modified "Berkeley Time;" class starts at 10:05am to accommodate students coming from other departments. Anyone showing up after 10:05am will be considered late.

### **Classroom Decorum Policy**

Do not use cellphones, smartphones, laptops, tablets or other devices during class unless I ask you to. Seriously.

If I see you checking e-mail or using social media during class, I'll ask you to leave.

Don't miss deadlines. Late work will not be accepted and will be awarded zero points.

Be respectful of your colleagues in the room.

Stay open to feedback.

### **Attendance Policy**

There are three things to know about attendance:

First, attendance is mandatory. If you must miss a class, submit your request for permission to me in writing. Miss class without permission, and your grade will suffer (see **Grading Policy**, below). Legitimate excused absences per the California Education Code (CEC) include: accommodation of religious creed; approved extracurricular activities or reporting trips (permission must be sought by Week 3 of class); accommodation for disability, pregnancy, or parenting; funeral services; jury duty; and illness with an approved note from UHS or another medical professional. Please note: campus absence guidelines stipulate that "*students are responsible for material covered during missed classes whether or not they have been formally excused; therefore it is the student's responsibility to inform him/herself about the material missed....It is not the instructor's or the GSI's responsibility to tutor students in missed material. For this reason it is recommended that students absent from class for any reason make timely contact with several other students in the class to*

*arrange for thorough briefing on the material they missed."*

Second, you are expected to attend all scheduled hours of class, unless you hear otherwise from me. If you are consistently late, help yourself to unscheduled breaks, or leave early, these will add up to unexcused absences and your final grade will suffer.

Lastly, attendance is not simply a matter of showing up. For full credit you need to show up, pitch in, and participate in a meaningful, thoughtful, and respectful way. You can't do this if you haven't done the readings or assignments or if you've missed guest lectures or master classes. If you're uncomfortable sharing your thoughts or presenting work in a group setting, please speak with me in person before Week 3.

## **Grading Policy**

You won't receive letter grades on a weekly or per-assignment basis. Instead, I'll assign final letter grades for the course based on each students' total points, as follows:

A	100-93	A-	92-90	B+	89-85	B	84-81
B-	79-80	C+	78-75	C	74-71	C-	70-69
D	68-65	F	64 or lower				

Missing one class without an excuse will have no effect on your course grade. However, two unexcused absences will drop you one letter grade (e.g., from an A to a B); three unexcused absences will drop you two letter grades (e.g., from an A to a C); and a fourth unexcused absence will put you in danger of an F.

*Campus policy requires that I include the following on this syllabus:*

## **Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

The high academic standard at the University of California, Berkeley, is reflected in each degree that is awarded. As a result, it is up to every student to maintain this high standard by ensuring that all academic work reflects his/her/their own ideas or properly attributes the ideas to the original sources.

These are some basic expectations of students with regards to academic integrity:

Any work submitted should be your own individual thoughts, and should not have been submitted for credit in another course unless you have prior written permission to re-use it in this course from this instructor.

All assignments must use "proper attribution," meaning that you have identified the original source of words or ideas that you reproduce or use in your assignment. This includes drafts and homework assignments.

The Student Code of Conduct <http://students.berkeley.edu/uga/conduct.asp> is in effect at all times. There is a zero-tolerance policy for work that is submitted without proper attribution and that constitutes plagiarism. If students are unsure about the expectations regarding the Student Code of Conduct, they must seek advice from the instructors.

## **Disability Accommodations**

If you need disability-related accommodations in this class, if you have emergency medical information you wish to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me as soon as possible either after class or in office hours. If you are not currently listed with DSP (Disabled Students' Program) but believe that you could benefit from their support, you may apply online at [dsp.berkeley.edu](http://dsp.berkeley.edu).

## Links to University Services

- **Academic Calendar and Student Accommodations** Campus Policies and Guidelines <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/academic-calendar-and-student-accommodations-campus-policies-and-guidelines>
- **Disabled Student Services** <http://dsp.berkeley.edu/> DSP serves currently enrolled UC Berkeley students with documented disabilities seeking undergraduate and graduate degrees.
- **Tang Center Counseling and Psychological Services** <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/counseling> CPS offers short term counseling for academic, career and personal issues. There is no charge to get started, and all registered students can access services regardless of their insurance plan.
- **Path to Care** <http://sa.berkeley.edu/dean/confidential-care-advocate> The PATH to Care Center provides affirming, empowering, and confidential support for survivors and those who have experienced gendered violence, including: sexual harassment, dating and intimate partner violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual exploitation. Confidential advocates bring a non-judgmental, caring approach to exploring all options, rights, and resources.
- **Student Wellness Resources** <https://wellness.asuc.org/> A partial directory outlining campus services that may prove useful throughout a student's time, ranging from direct academic assistance to student health and wellness resources.