

CoJMC Undergraduate Curriculum Committee JOUR 200a Review

2020-2021

11/22/21

Overview

During the 2021 spring semester the CoJMC Undergraduate Curriculum Committee began an assessment of JOUR 200a. JOUR 200a is a required writing and reporting course for all CoJMC majors normally taken in their Freshman or Sophomore year. The course was added as a requirement for all CoJMC majors starting 2019-2020.

At the time of the requirement, a new faculty member, Jessica Walsh, began as course coordinator for JOUR 200a/b. In addition, it was the first time JOUR 200a had multiple sections, going from two sections in Fall 2019 to 11 sections in Spring 2020. The added challenge in Spring 2020 was midway through the semester COVID-19 shutdown UNL in March moving courses online and in hybrid instructional modes until Fall 2021.

These efforts compliment Jessica's work she has already put in place. In addition, Jessica and Chris Graves' work studying JOUR 200a as part a peer review of teaching program called Faculty-led Inquiry into Reflective and Scholarly Teaching (FIRST). The goal of this assessment is to provide guidance moving forward given the original intent as a JOUR course versus the need for basic media writing skills for all majors. Additionally, considering the added disruptions from COVID-19.

History

In 2017, a writing committee made up of CoJMC faculty reviewed the beginning editing, writing and reporting course in the JOUR major. This ultimately led to the creation of JOUR 200a: Fundamentals of Editing and Reporting I and JOUR 200b: Fundamentals of Editing and Reporting II replacing JOUR 201: Editing I and JOUR 202: Editing II for JOUR and BRDC News majors. The original intent of JOUR 200a was to focus on editing and bring writing in more at the end then handoff to JOUR 200b that is exclusively writing. The first section of JOUR 200a was first offered in Fall 2018 running parallel to JOUR 201 until fall 2019. JOUR 200b trailed a semester behind starting in Spring 2019.

Soon after the launch of JOUR 200a/b in 2019-2020, CoJMC faculty approved JOUR 200a as a requirement of all CoJMC majors: ADPR, BRDC, JOUR, and SPMC. As a result, this increased the amount and types of students in these courses. Enrollment jumped from 56 in Spring 2019 to 212 in Spring 2020. The addition of ADPR and SPMC, the two largest majors in the college, shifted the needs of the course.

Methods

The methods of data collection were used in the assessment process:

1. Faculty Survey
2. Faculty Interviews with writing instructors
3. Student Survey

The curriculum committee began with a faculty survey asking questions about their experiences and thoughts on JOUR 200a learning outcomes. Participants included 14 faculty members with about half having experience teaching a 200-level writing course in the college. Next the committee held short, 30-

minute interviews with CoJMC faculty about JOUR 200a in March 2021. These instructors were all the instructors who have taught JOUR 200a or one of the major specific writing courses (ADPR 221, BRDC 260, JOUR 200b, SPMC 250). This was comprised of 15 faculty from across the college. Next a student survey was sent to those currently enrolled in JOUR 200a or one of the follow up writing courses. Students were asked to share their experience with JOUR 200a. A total of 159 student responses were collected.

Findings

Faculty surveys

From the JOUR 200a learning outcomes faculty agreed with

- level of skill to prepare them
- basics of editing and news judgment
- basics of media trends.
- ethics, journalism bias and accuracy
- write clearly and concisely and organize a news story
- write for different platforms and audiences

With a little less agreement on

- grammar rules and AP style
- information/write news stories/ social posts for audiences
- interviewing/quoting best practices in reporting/story writing
- measurable improvement as a writer after JOUR 200A

Rank Order of the importance of topics. The top 5 were clearly to the most important

1. Clear Writing – far and away the top
2. News Story
3. Reporting
4. Ethics
5. Bias

Falling behind significantly were Strategy, Diversity, BRDC, PR

Faculty Interviews

Themes from interviews with instructors who have taught JOUR 200a or one of the major specific writing courses.

1. Misconceptions: Better understanding of expectations of CoJMC writing courses.

- Began as JOUR course
- Lack of clarity between faculty of course outcomes and materials, many faculty teaching writing courses aren't familiar with what students learning in 200a
- Each major wants more time spent on discipline specific areas
- All acknowledgement of the importance basic editing, style, and writing for different styles
- Faculty looking for guidance and what to focus on in the course instead of doing everything

“Lots of curriculum neglect in the college – nobody knows what’s happening in different courses. I’m really glad we’re doing this – it’s exactly what we need to make sure everyone’s on the same page.”

“The college and all its disciplines need the kind of foundation the course offers, but there's a couple of things that that concern me in the way it's delivered.”

“I would like a better understanding for expectations for other writing courses.”

2. Textbooks: Expensive and needs focus.

- Books are well done
- Jessica’s materials for the course are extremely helpful
- Self-editing skills instead of Copy editing so updating “Everybody’s an Editor”
- Expensive
- Potentially have OER book to cut costs for students

“World doesn’t have copy editors anymore and writers need to be more self-sufficient in editing. Editing is connected to the writing more.”

“The course also requires two textbooks that I would reduce to one required text and again not push them through material quickly, but really give them time to retain it and practice what we’re learning.”

3. Balance: Connection of fundamentals with its purpose.

- Too much time on them without application
- This content can be very dry and boring by itself
- Agreement on importance but disagree on time spent
- Range of experiences and skills in class
- Integration of AP/grammar/structure/audience with writing
- Focus on basics to get started and add in as needed
- Worries of scaring students off with too much editing and not enough writing

“Two months of very dry material that students don’t know where it’s going. By the time you get to the writing you have lost them.”

“Fundamentals are divorced from the purpose of it, which is a great way to discourage students from that information.”

“Students need it – grammar is really weak coming in to discipline specific writing courses.”

“They're the things you really need to know by rote memory, but there's an awful lot more content in the in the AP Stylebook. Learn how to use it as a reference and less memorizing.”

4. Emphasis on Writing: Students understand the style of writing in our profession.

- Students need more practice
- Get students writing early
- Focus on clear, concise writing
- Integrate with editing skills, information literacy, and critical thinking with writing

- More than a week on different disciplines

“Good writing skills is important to line up for the follow up writing courses. Just give good solid writing structure and backbone of those skills. Then teach the specifics in the major specific writing courses.”

“Understanding the difference between communications writing and English where they write long sentences.”

“Students don’t need to outline their story or think creatively because they are rearranging facts. That is different from building something yourself.”

“I feel like students have not been exposed to the style of writing in our profession.”

“Slightly less journalistically focused, because like I feel like it's sometimes teeters between being a survey course, and being a skills course.”

5. Media Literacy: Students need to understand why the course is important.

- Begin with reporting to research topics
- Appreciation for diversity and ethics into the course
- Lack of experience collecting data – interviews, observation, multiple sources, etc.
- Struggle with proper attribution and determining newsworthiness

“You can make them love journalism in this class.”

“I am not sure if students fully understand why they enroll in JOUR 200a. I think students should be aware that it’s a pipeline into upper level courses.”

“It is really just to keep the class engaged in writing engaging. The challenge for me is how to teach writing in a way that's not dull and boring.”

6. Format: Spend enough time to make a lasting impact.

- No 3-week sessions, too short
- Ideally longer meeting times to practice in class
- Shared exercises and materials are helpful and need for shared syllabus for consistency
- Continuous experimentation
- Issues of retention

“Jessica was really helpful and provided me with all the micro-exercises, and all the, all the teaching materials”

“JOUR 200a is jam packed with a lot of material that we’re not able to spend enough time on to make a lasting impact.”

Student Survey Results

1. What is your experience with JOUR 200a: Fundamentals of Editing and Reporting?
 - a. I am currently taking it (88 – 55.3%)
 - b. I have taken it (67 – 42.1%)

- c. I haven't taken it yet (3 – 1.9%)
 - d. Not sure (1 – 0.6%)
2. How confident do you feel as a writer?
 - 7 – (50 – 31.4%)
 - 8 – (42 – 26.4%)
 - 9 – (27 – 17%)
 - 6 – (17 – 10.7%)
 - 10 – (11 – 6.9%)
 - 5 – (10 – 6.3%)
 - 4 – (1)
 - 1 – (1)
 3. JOUR 200a prepared me as a writer for my upper-level courses?
 - 8 – (41 – 25.8%)
 - 9 – (35 – 22%)
 - 10 – (34 – 21.4%)
 - 7 – (21 – 13.2%)
 - 6 – (7 – 4.4%)
 - 5 – (7 – 4.4%)
 - 3 – (6 – 3.8%)
 - 1 – (4 – 2.5%)
 - 4 – (3 – 1.9%)
 - 2 – (1)

Open Ended Student Questions Themes

Student comments and themes from the open ended questions lined up with themes from faculty interviews.

1. Range of responses and experiences. The course is solid with lots of information laying the foundation for writing skills in the CoJMC .

“JOUR 200A helped me create a solid foundation to beginning building my journalism skills and knowledge. I learned many skills and tips I didn't previously know that I still use today.”

“I think it hits on a lot of different types of writing which is good for all the different majors and gets students to write and look at writing in a way they never would have thought before.”

“I loved it when my professor would tie in real-world things that were happening and how we could either report on it, interview sources, how ethical the situation was, etc. I think that is what prepared me the most.”

“Seriously helped improve my writing and I've noticed so many different errors in writing.”

2. AP style covered but tough to recall

“AP Style. It was covered in the course, but I could not tell you about a single rule for AP Style writing.”

“I felt like the assignments in this course did not reflect what the outcomes should be. I have almost no idea how to write in AP style, despite the fact that many of the assignments were centered around that. I don't know how, but there has to be a more engaging and thoughtful way to learn AP style than the current way it is being taught now.”

3. More Writing and Styles

“I expected to learn a little bit more on how to actually report the media, we did a lot of writing this course. I expected to write a full story before the final project.”

“I would've liked to learn a little more about how stories are presented differently.”

“I felt that there should have been more long form pieces that we had to write. I never wrote any pieces for the class, only parts of pieces.”

- News/Feature
- Headlines/Story formatting
- Stories that aren't strictly news
- BRDC scripts
- PR Writing

4. Skills

“I think really just getting hands-on experiences and learning. The grammar concepts are hard to do that with, but it would have been nice to focus on more areas of journalism hands on.”

“I wish we had more assigned "good" articles to read and then write about why they were good.”

“Future JOUR 200A classes should implement brainstorm session on potential stories to write, teach students how to reach out to sources, and have a peer review system.”

- Contacting sources
- Interviewing – tips and tricks
- Taking notes during interviews
- Libel cases
- How to spot fake news and not supported by evidence

5. Student value feedback on their writing to develop these skills

“I enjoy how much feedback I got from my professor. I feel like she grades harder than most of my other professors, but I like that because that's how I get smarter and better at what I do.”

“A lot of the stuff from my class we have pretty much had to learn all on our own. The instructor rarely gave any so I in turn did poor on a lot of my assignments.”

“It felt extremely underwhelming and it didn't help that my professor lacked passion for teaching the course. My professor also dished out 100s on every story when I know that mine were nowhere near perfect, so I had no idea how I was actually doing.”

“The class was not terrible. The professors feedback was the worst! When you are learning to write, you need some feedback to get better. But the feedback we received was mediocre at best and sometimes even felt a little degrading.”

Recommendations and Ideas for JOUR 200a

1. Major specific writing courses (ADRP 221, JOUR 200b, BRDC 260, SPMC 250) need to build from learning outcomes in JOUR 200a
2. Change prefix, JOMC instead of JOUR. Also, consider name and number change: JOMC 200: Writing for the Media or JOMC 200: Writing for Communicators
3. Reduce to single textbook. Potentially only Writing and Reporting for the Media and AP Style
4. Look at reducing time with fundamentals and integrate into writing projects
5. Explore a grammar pretest OR 1 credit course that is adaptive learning experience required for all students
6. Use Poynter Language primer, potentially in collaboration with the CoJMC Experience Lab
7. Consider Three major writing projects: one news story for the web, one broadcast script, and one press release. Touch on all the major media areas in our college and experience in the subtle shifts in writing. These would be substantial writing projects working outside of class and understand each area. Then class would have a series of smaller, lower stakes writing assignments in between projects so the first time they do a writing project isn't for lots of points in the course. Low stakes exercises could build to the larger writing projects so students really understanding the structure of a story. This gives more opportunities to write in 200a.
8. Integration of the creative process to develop interesting stories for a specific audience
9. Continue finding ways to develop skills writing for diverse audiences
10. Work with other intro courses (JOMC 101, JOMC 130s, ADPR 151, SPMC 150) include readings and dissect pieces that build to JOUR 200a
11. Continue exploring opportunities to connect/integrate projects with current events
12. Work with Amy Ort to explore activities and strategies for shorter class time (50 minutes) of skills courses

Appendix A: Faculty Survey

Survey Questions

- Have taught JOUR 200a since it has been a requirement for all majors?
- Have taught follow up writing courses, ADPR 221, BRDC 260, SPMC 250, JOUR 200b?
- Agreement with statements about JOUR 200a including
 - o level of skill to prepare them
 - o basics of editing and news judgment
 - o basics of media trends.
 - o ethics, journalism bias and accuracy
 - o grammar rules and AP style
 - o information/write news stories/ social posts for audiences
 - o interviewing/quoting best practices in reporting/story writing
 - o write clearly and concisely and organize a news story
 - o write for different platforms and audiences
 - o measurable improvement as a writer after JOUR 200A
- Rank Order a randomized list of topics in JOUR 200a
 - o Clear Writing
 - o News Story
 - o Reporting
 - o Ethics
 - o Bias
 - o Strategy
 - o Diversity
 - o BRDC
 - o PR
- Open ended questions about strengths, weaknesses, and ideas for JOUR 200a

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Background: The undergrad curriculum committee reviews programs at the college annually. This year we are focusing on JOUR 200a. A survey was sent out to faculty for feedback around the course and our next step are these interviews. If you are not familiar with the course, it is a required course for all CoJMC majors students and has follow up courses. The data we are collecting is only used to assess the course to measure and improve it moving forward. A final report will be created that will be informed by this process.

Questions

- How familiar are you with the course? With your current understanding of the course: if you were to teach this course, how would you teach it?
- What do they see are the fundamentals of JOUR 200a and what should students be aware of and understand after completing it?
- What areas of writing are students deficient in when they come into your class and what can we do to address those?
- If applicable, what do you see is missing do you see in upper-level courses? Specifically, JOUR 200b, SPMC 250, ADPR 221, BRDC 260. Is it a retention problem or gap in knowledge?
- Keeping in mind that this is a course for all majors in the college. What skills are not being address at this level that should be? What is missing?
- Anything else, thoughts questions and comments.
- If you are teaching any of the writing courses listed above or JOUR 200a would you be okay having students fill out a quick survey in your course?

Give short overview of JOUR 200a:

Course description

This course covers the fundamentals of reporting, writing and editing for news media in print, digital and broadcast platforms.

Course Goals

1. Understand why editing, style and grammar are important
2. Understand the journalistic principles of news judgment, accuracy and ethics
3. Learn how and when to apply principles of grammar and Associated Press Stylebook rules
4. Learn how to write clearly and concisely and organize a news story
5. Understand how to write for different platforms and audiences

Thank you, any follow up comments or questions let me know. Next steps are surveying students and developing a report.

Appendix C: Student Survey

Student Survey Questions

1. What is your experience with JOUR 200a: Fundamentals of Editing and Reporting?
 - a. I am currently taking it
 - b. I have taken it
 - c. I haven't taken it yet
 - d. Not sure
2. How confident do you feel as a writer?
3. JOUR 200a prepared me as a writer for my upper-level courses?
4. Is there anything you expected to learn from JOUR 200a that you didn't?