

ECON 0301, Calderwood Seminar in Public Writing: Economic Journalism
Spring 2019
Thursday, 1:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.
Ross Commons Dining 011

Will Pyle
Warner 305E
x-3240
wpyle@middlebury.edu

Office hours: Tuesday and Wednesday, 1:30 – 3:15 and by appointment

Overview and objectives: Building on core courses in the major (with ECON 211, 250 and 255 as class prerequisites), students will engage contemporary economic issues in a “public writing” format. In a series of weekly assignments, students will translate the language of formal economics into pieces that are both interesting and accessible to educated non-economists. Class time will largely be devoted to workshopping the economic and expository content of student work.

Delving into a range of topics of contemporary significance, the course aspires to strengthen students’ ability to understand, assess, and communicate key economic concepts, and to enhance their writing skills for a general audience. The workshop format, moreover, will improve students’ ability to give and receive constructive feedback.

Requirements and mechanics: Each student will complete six relatively short writing assignments over the course of the term:

- an article on an official / government report (800 words)
- an article on a scholarly paper published in a leading economics journal (800 words)
- an article on a public lecture by an economist (800 words)
- a book review (1200 words)
- an op-ed (800 words)
- an interview-based profile of a professional economist (1200 words)

The class will be divided into **Groups A** and **B**, with the two alternating between writing and editing every week. (The op-ed and profile will deviate slightly from this pattern.) For each class, that is, half the students will be **Writers** and the other half will be **Editors**. In a typical week, class will be devoted largely to workshopping student writing and discussing the underlying economics of the output produced by professional economists. Each writing assignment will go through a multi-stage cycle over a two-week period:

1. On **Thursday** (+0), I will pair **Editors** with **Writers**.
2. **Writers** e-mail “first drafts” to **Editor** by mutually arranged days (usually, **Monday**) and times.
3. **Editors** e-mail comments and edits on “first drafts” to **writers** (cc’ing me) by **Tuesday, 9:00 am**.
4. **Writers** upload “second drafts” to folder on class Google site by **Wednesday, 9:00 am**.
5. **Everyone** reads all “second drafts” and prepares substantive written comments and/or questions about economics content and expository quality prior to class.
6. On **Thursday** (+1), **Writers’** “second draft” are workshopped, with discussions led and notes taken by **Writers’ Editors**. At the end of class, I provide my comments to **Writers**, and **Editors** share notes on workshop comments with **Writers**.
7. On **Thursday** (+2), **Writers** submit “final drafts” to me by **10:00 am**.

Writers, please distribute your drafts in Microsoft Word format (.doc and .docx files) and use the following naming convention: *firstname_topic_version_date*. For instance, if I were sending my “first draft” to my **Editor** on the *Global Economic Prospects* report, I could call it “Will_GEP_v1_Feb17”; the version that I would later upload to the Google folder could thus be “Will_GEP_v2_Feb20”. Please activate line numbers and page numbers to facilitate the editing and workshopping process. Also, include a word count at the bottom of all drafts.

Editors, please enter your comments and edits in “Track Changes” mode in Microsoft Word. Please be respectful, honest, and kind as you comment on your peers’ work.

The above cycle, and our class as a whole, will only work well if students adhere to the responsibilities laid out above. Abiding by deadlines as well as preparation for and active engagement in Thursday class are extremely critical to a successful semester.

In May, everyone will turn in a portfolio of the six assignments (including drafts and revisions) and write a reflection on the course. I will provide more details later this term.

Reading material and other resources:

I will make non-book required readings available through the ***Google folder*** as well as through shared URLs. I will put one copy of both Michael Lewis’ *The Undoing Project* and (after March 4th) Kimberly Klausning’s *Open* on reserve at the Library Circulation Desk. Of course, you can also purchase copies for your own or shared use through your favored outlets.

The ***Google folder*** will also be the repository for the (“second draft”) versions of the writing assignments to be workshopped in class.

We will use ***Google Groups*** (“ECON_Journalism_s19”) for entire-class communications. This forum can and will be used to “extend the conversation” from Thursday classes. I will occasionally post and solicit feedback on relevant material; moreover, I encourage you independently to flag relevant material and share thoughts that you think will interest all of us.

When I communicate with you individually, I will use regular e-mail. Please read my e-mails promptly.

Grades and honor code: There are no examinations, written or oral. Grades will be based largely on the economics content and expository quality of your written assignments. The remainder of your final grade will be determined by class participation and editing work.

All work done for the class is conducted under the Honor Code. I encourage you to discuss the material outside of class with your classmates, as well as over Google Groups, but (with the exception of “joint by-line” assignments) you should do your writing on your own. You must cite any sources (other than the one assigned) that you draw from, using an appropriate citation method that allows the reader to locate the source.

DATE	WRITERS' GROUP	ASSIGNMENT TO BE WORKSHOPPED
Feb. 14		Introduction: Reporting on "Economists' Statement on Carbon Dividends," <i>Wall Street Journal</i> , January 17, 2019.
Feb. 21	A	Official report: World Bank. 2019. <i>Global Economic Prospects, January 2019: Darkening Skies</i> , chapter 1, 3-46.
Feb. 28	B	Professional article: Egan, Mark, Gregor Matvos, and Amit Seru, 2019. "The Market for Financial Adviser Misconduct," <i>Journal of Political Economy</i> 127:1, 233-95. Guest: Mark Egan ('08)
Mar. 7	A	Professional article: Bell, Alex, Raj Chetty, Xavier Jaravel, Neviana Petkova, and John Van Reenen, forthcoming. "Who Becomes an Inventor in America? The Importance of Exposure to Innovation," <i>Quarterly Journal of Economics</i> . Guest: Neviana Petkova ('01)
Mar. 14	B	Official report: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019. "The Employment Situation: February 2019". Available on March 8, 2019 at https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empisit.pdf .
Mar. 21	A	Public lecture: Autor, David, 2019. "Work of the Past, Work of the Future" AEA Richard T. Ely Lecture, https://www.aeaweb.org/webcasts/2019/aea-ely-lecture-work-of-the-past-work-of-the-future .
Mar. 28		Spring break
Apr. 4	B	Public lecture: Chetty, Raj, 2019. "Improving Economic Opportunity in America: New Insights from Big Data," Institute of Politics Forum, Harvard University, https://iop.harvard.edu/forum/improving-economic-opportunity-america-new-insights-big-data .
Apr. 5	A , B	Interview and profile (joint or single by-line) proposal due at 9:00 am.
Apr. 11	A	Book review: Lewis, Michael. 2016. <i>The Undoing Project: A Friendship That Changed Our Minds</i> (W.W. Norton & Company).
Apr. 18	A , B	Op-ed (joint or single by-line) Guest: Susan Greenberg
Apr. 19	A , B	Op-ed (joint or single by-line) Guest: Quoctrong Bui
Apr. 25	A , B	Open date. No assignment, but possible guest lecture.
May 2	B	Book review: Clausing, Kimberly. 2019. <i>Open: The Progressive Case for Free Trade, Immigration, and Global Capital</i> (Harvard University Press).
May 9	A , B	Interview and profile (joint or single by-line)
May 17	A , B	Portfolio due by 5:00 p.m.