Reporting on Big Business in Arkansas
Business Journalism
JOUR 405v | Sec. 9
Online Course
Instructor: Rob Wells, Ph.D.
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(479) 575-6305 No calls / emails after 9 p.m.
If the contact occurs after 5 PM on Friday, response may be expected on Monday.
Office Hours: By appointment: https://calendly.com/rswells/30min. **(v. 5/22/19)**

Course Description:

This class, designed for journalism, public relations, advertising, business and non-journalism undergraduate and graduate students, describes how journalists find stories about big companies. The class will examine three giant corporations in Arkansas, Walmart Inc., J.B. Hunt Transportation Services Inc. and Tyson Foods, Inc. Students will learn how the stock market works by checking on the stock activities of these huge companies. You will learn about basic operations of companies by digging into the financial statements of these companies. And you will learn about economic data, such as the employment and GDP reports, through the lens of these companies and their impact on the state and national economy. This course welcomes a broad range of students. It will benefit students interested in sports, entertainment, political and investigative journalism. Non-journalists will benefit by learning the common research methods used by journalists to make sense of the business world.

Learning Outcomes:

This class provides you with the skills for interpreting and reporting on corporate and government data. By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Report on basic corporate financial statements and Securities and Exchange Commission filings.
2. Describe the essential functions of the stock market and explain how it is influenced by business, economic and political events.
3. Describe the essential functions of the fixed income or bond market and explain how it is influenced by business, economic and political events.
4. Describe the essential functions of the international currency market and explain how it is influenced by business, economic and political events.
5. Identify market sensitive economic data published by the government and describe its effect on the financial markets.
6. Use the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission enforcement filings to describe legal violations by major corporations.
7. Attain basic proficiency in the Tableau Public data visualization program to produce basic charts with financial data.
8. Gain basic proficiency in Excel, employ best practices in documenting source data and presenting spreadsheets for professional presentations.

Online Course Format:

This course is presented primarily in an asynchronous online format. With the online coursework, students will view video lectures and perform various online exercises. They will pose questions in discussion forums and work on specific problem-solving tasks. This will give students numerous opportunities to master basic concepts.

The professor may offer optional in-person lectures or workshops if there is sufficient student interest.

Required Texts (Electronic Book Versions Available for All Titles):

- *Guide to Money & Investing.* By Virginia B. Morris and Kenneth M. Morris. Lightbulb Press. 2012. ISBN: 978-0-9764749-9-9
- *Financial Fine Print: Uncovering a Company's True Value.* By Michele Leder. Wiley, 2008. ISBN: 0471433470
- Daily subscription to The Wall Street Journal, print or electronic. More features are available via an individual student subscription to WSJ.com: https://buy.wsj.com/shopandbuy/order/subscribe.jsp?pId=27900076

Background Materials:

- *Business Essentials for Strategic Communicators*, By Matt Ragas and E. Culp. Palgrave. 2014. 978-1-137-38533-8
- *After the Music Stopped: The Financial Crisis, the Response, and the Work Ahead.* By Alan S. Blinder. Penguin Group. 2013. ISBN: 9781594205309
- *Associated Press Stylebook*, print or electronic (students in this class may use versions previously purchased)
- Lectures also will reference *The New York Times* and *The Economist*, the weekly news magazine, also available at the library.

Software:

- Tableau Public. Free. Sign up: https://public.tableau.com/en-us/s/
- Excel and Microsoft Word. Office 365 is free for students, faculty and staff, and it can be installed on up to five of your devices at a time. https://its.uark.edu/help/ta/office-365-desktop.php#install-office-apps

Prerequisites:

None. Class limit is 20.

Assessment:

All assignments that are not automatically graded by Blackboard, such as Quizzes and certain Exams, will be graded as soon as possible. For small assignments, expect a grade in 72 hours, for larger essay papers, expect a grade in at most 5 days.

Quizzes and Discussion Posts:

Each week, you will complete discussion posts and take a quiz. No make-up quizzes will be given. There is no final examination.

Grading:

Your final grade will be based on the following percentages:

- Discussion Posts: 25%
- Quizzes: 15%
- Assignments: 60%

Discussion Posts:

Students will write concise but high quality and substantial discussion posts to answer questions based on the assigned readings. Quality posts are about 300 words, follow Associated Press style, contain attribution and cite the readings. The posts offer students the opportunity to get early feedback on concepts for the assignments. *The course schedule shows due dates.*

The discussion posts:

- Discussion Post: Syllabus and Introduction
- Discussion Post: Company Earnings
- Discussion Post: Tableau Public chart with corporate earnings
- **[UGRD Only]** Discussion Post: CEO pay and perks
- Discussion Post: Compare CNBC to WSJ on WMT coverage
- Discussion Post: Arkansas companies and the employment data
- Discussion Post: Compare Bloomberg to WSJ on TSN coverage
- Discussion Post: Enforcement issues with Arkansas companies

- Discussion Post: Compare Arkansas Business Journal to WSJ on JBHT coverage

Quizzes:

Quizzes will be assigned on readings, class lecture topics and major stories in The Wall Street Journal. *The course schedule shows due dates.*

- Quiz: SEC terms and research
- Quiz: Bond market, inflation

Assignments:

There are four assignments during the semester:

- A basic corporate earnings story, Due Saturday, Week 1, 11:59 p.m.
- Company data. Produce a static chart in Tableau Public examining earnings for assigned companies, compare to peer companies and a market index. Due Saturday, Week 3, 11:59 p.m.
- Corporations and economic indicators. Due Saturday, Week 4, 11:59 p.m.
- Reporting on consumers, business and economy, blends both the economic indicator and corporate reporting segments. Due Friday. Week 5, 11:59 p.m.

Papers will be marked down for incorrect style, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Students are expected to follow accepted journalism practices in their writing, including Associated Press style and Strunk & White's "Elements of Style" available online at http://www.bartleby.com/141/. Non-journalism students should endeavor to follow AP style.

Your work will be graded on the following scale:

A: 100 – 90

B: 89 – 80

C: 79 – 70

D: 69 – 60

F: 59 and Below

Deadlines:

Papers submitted late, **which means one minute after the assigned hour**, will be marked down one complete grade. They will be marked down an additional grade for each day they are late.

Accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act:

ADA POLICY: When possible, and in accordance with 504/ADA guidelines, staff members from the Center for Educational Access will work individually with students and assist academic units to determine reasonable accommodations that will enable every student to have access to the full range of programs and services. Phone: 479/575-3104 Email: ada@uark.edu

Course Content Support:

If you have any questions about the course content contact your instructor: Rob Wells, rswells@uark.edu

I typically respond within three hours to student emails sent during normal business hours during the week. On Saturday and Sunday, availability is not guaranteed.

Technical Support:

Students will require access to a computer and the Internet throughout the semester to investigate and review suggested sites and to utilize the Blackboard Course Management System (CMS). You are expected to regularly check your UARK email and Blackboard for course updates. All students must use MSOffice Suite software for all assignments.

Blackboard Support:

If you have any questions about Blackboard contact Blackboard Support: 479.575.6804
The current support hours are listed on the [Blackboard Support Page](#) or in the Software & Support tab in Blackboard.
After-Hours Support:
If Blackboard is not responding, or there are problems with the system after business hours, please call 479.575.2904. The appropriate personnel will be notified.

Computer Access and Technical Requirements:

Because this is an online class, students will be expected to check their email regularly (several times per week) for important notices, scheduling changes, or any other course revisions. This course is offered as an online course and it is assumed that you have the minimum system requirements and computing skills to participate.

Computing skills required:

- You should have an understanding of basic computer usage (creating folders/directories, switching between programs, formatting and backing up media, accessing the Internet).
- You must be able to use a word processing program such as Microsoft Word to create, edit, save, and retrieve documents.
- You must be able to use a Web browser to open Web pages, open PDF files, manage a list of Web pages (bookmarks/favorites), and search the Internet.
- You must be able to use an e-mail program to send, receive, store, and retrieve messages.
- You must be able to download and install programs from the Internet.

Hardware required:

- You should have access to a reliable computer with sound card and high speed internet connection (DSL or cable broadband) to submit assignments, create products, participate in online activities, and view Internet resources.
- Your computer should have sufficient space and processor speeds required by any software used in this course (will vary depending on your software version and operating system, but usually 15 GB hard disk space, 1.5 GHz processor and 4 GB memory will be sufficient).
- Since you will create an audio (video optional) presentation for this course, you must have a microphone (headset or free standing) that works with your computer. You may also use a webcam with a built-in microphone.

Care has been taken to ensure that the software that is used for this course does not require any out of the ordinary system set-ups. **But, if your system does not meet the minimum requirements then it is your responsibility to maintain your system to meet the requirements so that you may participate in this course. Technical difficulties on your part will not excuse you from the timely completion of assignments.** If you do experience technical difficulties please make sure that you refer to the Software & Support tab immediately so that proper assistance might be provided.

Class Schedule:

The schedule is in the course menu, and it may be updated depending on breaking news events, availability of guest speakers and class dynamics.