The James W. Foley Journalist Safety Guide

A Curriculum Plan for College Journalism and Communications

Educators: An Overview

The Medill School of Journalism, through its National Security Journalism Initiative, and the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, in partnership with Reporters Without Borders and A Culture of Safety alliance, believe it is important for journalism and communications students to learn about the growing risk of reporting on the important stories around the world that involve heading into dangerous situations – from conflicts, terrorism and violent unrest to drug cartels, unstable regimes, organized crime or violent civil unrest and hate crimes around the world. Aspiring journalists must know how to prepare for such assignments and respond to danger if they choose these important yet challenging journalism career paths.

Our organizations have created a curriculum guide with multiple seminars for undergraduate and graduate students called “The James W. Foley Journalist Safety Guide.” This Safety Guide is intended to help educators teach these important concepts to students. The foundational seminar uses the documentary Jim: The James Foley Story to lead students into the world of conflict coverage. Seminars 2-4 use research, interviews with veteran foreign correspondents and case studies to help students learn how to think through the assessments they should take before embarking on potentially dangerous reporting and then uses role-play to reinforce the assessment rubric. Seminar 5 illuminates the serious need for journalists to ensure the security of personal and work-related data stored on electronic devices and to keep themselves from being tracked through traces left on the internet.

We have created lesson plans for three-hour sessions with the first session extending to four hours (including viewing of the documentary). Instructors can use all the seminars or select among them. For undergraduate instructors, the seminars can be subdivided into one- or two-hour sessions by deleting some of the material or creating two classes out of one seminar.

These seminars can be a module in undergraduate or graduate seminars or reporting classes. They are particularly appropriate for an advanced reporting seminar or class, a foreign correspondence seminar, an investigative class or a global affairs seminar.