Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Prague
Course Code / Title: PR/MDST 320 Solutions Journalism: Socially Responsible Reporting in Central Europe
Contact Hours: 45
Recommended Credits: 3
Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Media Studies / Sociology, Central European Studies, English
Language of Instruction: English
Prerequisites / Requirements: Prior coursework in Journalism recommended

---

Description

Through hands-on international reporting, students explore the principles and practice of solutions journalism – a growing investigative approach that combats news fatigue by focusing on what's working in society as opposed to negative, problem-focused stories. Combining lectures and workshops with newsroom visits, fieldwork, writing labs, and editorial mentoring, the course builds skills in identifying and pitching story ideas, interviewing, evidence-based reporting, cross-cultural journalism, writing, and editing. Working in small teams, students investigate a local social issue and a devise a response to address it, producing a problem-oriented story followed by a solutions-oriented story. The intended outcome is publication for an international audience in an online magazine.

Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students will:

- Explore and become familiar with important, contemporary social issues relevant for the Czech Republic and Central European region more broadly.
- Apply the principles of solutions journalism to identify, frame, and report on responses to social problems.
- Define and investigate social problems rigorously using appropriate context, evidence, and sources, with particular focus on the Central European region.
- Critically assess responses to social problems including their effectiveness, evidence, limitations, and transferability.
- Develop and execute a reporting plan incorporating research, sourcing, interviewing, and fieldwork in an unfamiliar environment (Central Europe).
- Conduct cross-cultural reporting with awareness of bias, representation, and gaps in contextual knowledge.
- Produce a coherent story series connecting a problem-oriented story with a solutions-oriented story.
- Engage effectively in the editorial process through pitching, drafting, peer and editorial feedback, revision, and finalization.
- Communicate reporting clearly and effectively for an international audience and adapt it for digital and social media formats.

Requirements
Active participation is essential in this intensive, practice-based course. Students are expected to attend and participate in lectures, workshops, reporting labs, editorial and peer-feedback sessions, newsroom visits, excursions, and other field study components. The course follows a newsroom-style learning model in which assignments build progressively toward the final story series and students are expected to incorporate editorial feedback into subsequent drafts. Reporting assignments are completed and assessed as team efforts. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Graded assignments include:

- **Participation:** Based on preparation for and meaningful engagement in class discussions, workshops, reporting labs, peer-review sessions, editorial meetings, and field visits. Students are expected to complete assigned readings and preparatory tasks, contribute thoughtful questions and observations, provide constructive feedback on classmates' work, and listen respectfully to others. Assessment also considers professional conduct with guest speakers, sources, and host organizations, as well as reliable collaboration and fulfillment of individual responsibilities within reporting teams.

- **Story pitch:** In teams of two, students develop and present a story pitch defining the problem, identifying a credible response or solution, and outlining an initial reporting plan. Students revise their pitches based on feedback from trainers and editors.

- **Field reporting:** Students conduct research, interviews, and site visits in Prague and/or its surroundings and participate in required newsroom visits, excursions, and practical reporting activities. Reporting generally includes 4 key interviews and 1 site visit.

- **Problem-oriented story:** Teams research, draft, revise, and complete a short problem-oriented story (800 words) that establishes the context for the solutions story. Students participate in peer review and individual editorial feedback and submit revised drafts according to course deadlines. Responsiveness to editorial feedback and the ability to revise and improve work are assessed as part of the story assignments rather than as a separate graded component.

- **Solutions-oriented story:** Each team researches and produces a solutions-oriented story (2,000-2,500 words) as the course's main deliverable, critically examining the response, its evidence and impact, limitations, and transferability. Students develop the story through multiple rounds of reporting, drafting, peer feedback, and consultation with one of the course co-professors. Responsiveness to editorial feedback and the ability to revise and improve work are assessed as part of the story assignments rather than as a separate graded component.

- **Video teaser:** Each team produces a short video teaser for social media to accompany and promote its reporting. The curriculum includes practical instruction and production time for this component.

- **Final presentation:** Students present their completed work to the group, including reflection on the course and reporting experience.

Students working in pairs share responsibility for managing their collaboration and producing the required outputs. If significant problems arise within a reporting team, students are expected to raise them with their lead trainer so they can be addressed during the course.

Grading
The final grade is determined as follows:

Participation *(see rubric below)*	10%
Story pitch	10%
Field reporting (5 at 3%)	15%
Problem-oriented story	15%
Solutions-oriented story	30%
Video teaser	10%
Final presentation	10%

Class Participation Grading Rubric

	A – 90-100% Exemplary	B – 80-89% Proficient	C – 70-79% Developing	D – 60-69% Unacceptable	F – 0-59% Missing
Engagement and participation	Consistently and actively engages in class discussions, workshops, reporting labs, peer review, editorial sessions, and field activities.	Regularly engages across course activities.	Participates inconsistently and requires occasional prompting to engage.	Rarely engages meaningfully in course activities.	Does not participate or engage.
Quality of participation	Contributions are consistently thoughtful, relevant, constructive, and demonstrate active engagement with course concepts and peers' work. Provides useful	Contributions are generally thoughtful, relevant, and constructive and demonstrate engagement with course concepts and peers.	Contributions demonstrate some engagement but are inconsistent in relevance, preparation, or constructiveness.	Contributions rarely demonstrate meaningful engagement with course concepts or peers.	Does not contribute meaningfully.

	and constructive peer feedback.				
Preparation and professional engagement	Consistently arrives prepared, completes required preparation and interim tasks, meets deadlines, responds constructively to feedback, and engages professionally in reporting, editorial, newsroom, and field activities.	Is generally prepared, meets deadlines, responds to feedback, and engages professionally.	Preparation, timeliness, responsiveness to feedback, or professional engagement are inconsistent.	Is frequently unprepared, misses deadlines, or demonstrates limited engagement with feedback and course activities.	Consistently fails to prepare, complete required work, or engage professionally.

Readings / Resources

Curry, Alexander L., and Keith H. Hammonds. *The Power of Solutions Journalism.* Austin, TX: Center for Media Engagement (2014). https://mediaengagement.org/research/solutions-journalism/.

Lough, Kyser. "Improving Representation Through a Solutions Lens: Photojournalists' Perception and Process of Solutions Visual Journalism." *Visual Communication Quarterly* (2026). https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2026.2624813.

Lough, Kyser, and Karen McIntyre. "A Systematic Review of Constructive and Solutions Journalism Research." *Journalism* 24, no. 5 (2023): 1069–1088. https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211044559.

Lough, Kyser, and Karen McIntyre. "Transitioning to Solutions Journalism: One Newsroom's Shift to Solutions-Focused Reporting." *Journalism Studies* 22, no. 2 (2021): 193–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1843065.

Solutions Guidebook for Reporting Lived Experience. Prague: *Transitions* (2025). https://transitionsmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/SoJo_Resource_3_.pdf.

The Climate Action Playbook: A Journalist's Guide to Solutions Reporting. Prague: *Transitions* (2025). https://transitionsmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/The-Climate-Action-Playbook-Transitions.pdf.

What Didn't Work – And Why It Matters. Prague: *Transitions* (2025). https://transitionsmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/SoJo_Resource_2_.pdf.

What Is Solutions Journalism. Transitions Solutions Journalism Knowledge Center. https://transitionsmedia.org/solutions-journalism/what-is-solutions-journalism/.

van Antwerpen, Natasha, and Kyser Lough. "The Effects of Solutions versus 'Heart-Warmer' Journalism on Audience Wellbeing, Self-Efficacy, and Trust." *Media Psychology* 29, no. 2 (2026): 219–246. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2025.2491764.

Selected solutions journalism stories from Transitions Magazine (https://tol.org/), which might include:

Abakunchyk, Galina. "Ukraine Breaks Crucial 'Link' to Healing Foreign Soldiers." *Transitions*, February 13, 2026. https://tol.org/client/article/ukraine-breaks-crucial-link-to-healing-foreign-soldiers.html

Costa, MaryLou. "How Lithuania More Than Halved Its Suicide Rate." *Transitions*, November 14, 2025. https://tol.org/client/article/how-lithuania-more-than-halved-its-suicide-rate.html

Rychlíková, Apolena. "Just a Regular School for Everyone." *Transitions*, October 11, 2024. https://tol.org/client/article/just-a-regular-school-for-everyone.html

Transitions Solutions Journalism Archive, https://tol.org/client/article/category/solutions-journalism

Žabka, Jan. "Breaking Stereotypes by Giving Kids a Boost." *Transitions*, February 13, 2025. https://tol.org/client/article/breaking-stereotypes-by-giving-kids-a-boost.html

Content

Topic 1 – Foundations of Solutions Journalism
- Principles and defining characteristics of solutions journalism
- The four pillars of solutions journalism
- Distinguishing solutions journalism from advocacy, promotion, "good news," and other forms of reporting
- Current research on solutions journalism and its relationship to journalism practice
- Analysis of solutions journalism stories and approaches

Topic 2 – From Social Problems to Reportable Solutions
- Defining and framing social problems rigorously in the Central European context
- Identifying responses to social problems and determining their journalistic relevance
- Finding and vetting potential solutions stories
- Assessing evidence, impact, limitations, and transferability
- Developing a problem–solution relationship that can sustain a journalistic story series

Topic 3 – Reporting Solutions Journalism
- Research and source development for problem- and solutions-oriented reporting
- Interviewing techniques for solutions journalism
- Gathering and evaluating evidence
- Identifying insights, limitations, and lessons from responses
- Field reporting and reporting from social enterprises, organizations, and communities

Topic 4 – Reporting Across Cultures
- Fundamentals of reporting in an unfamiliar country and cultural context
- Understanding context gaps and avoiding assumptions, focus: Central Europe/USA
- Bias, representation, and responsible reporting
- Working with local sources and navigating access
- Reporting local stories for an international audience

Topic 5 – Changemaking, Social Impact, and Critical Distance – in Central European Context
- Understanding local changemakers, social enterprises, and other actors responding to social problems
- Examining social impact from a journalistic perspective
- Maintaining critical distance when reporting on organizations and proposed solutions
- Investigating effectiveness alongside limitations and challenges
- Distinguishing rigorous solutions reporting from promotion or advocacy

Topic 6 – Visual and Multimedia Solutions Journalism
- The role of visuals in solutions journalism
- Visual representation of problems, responses, and communities
- Applying a solutions lens to visual storytelling
- Adapting solutions journalism for digital and social media
- Developing short-form video based on reported stories

Topic 7 – Story Structure and the Editorial Process
- Structuring problem-oriented and solutions-oriented stories
- Connecting problem, response, evidence, impact, and limitations
- Pitching and refining solutions journalism story ideas
- Drafting, editing, and revising reported stories
- Using peer and editorial feedback to strengthen reporting and storytelling

Topic 8 – Producing Solutions Journalism for Publication
- Applying solutions journalism principles throughout the reporting and production process
- Integrating additional reporting and evidence during revision
- Assessing coherence between problem and solutions stories
- Communicating findings clearly and relevantly to an international audience
- Developing journalism to a standard suitable for publication with editorial polishing

Field study and experiential learning components may include:
- Czech Radio: newsroom visit exploring solutions-oriented journalism, including solutions reporting on education and climate reporting, and a guided newsroom tour.
- Radio Free Europe: newsroom visit and exposure to international journalism practice.
- Pragulic: visit to a Prague social project in which people experiencing or with a history of homelessness work as guides.

- Modrý domeček: visit to a social enterprise in Řevnice providing employment for people with disabilities.
- Guest lectures with solutions journalism practitioners

Syllabus of Record is subject to minor changes in Term-specific Syllabus at faculty's discretion.