

Educators: What to Expect During your Journalist in the Classroom Experience

Thank you for your interest in SJN's Journalist in the Classroom program! We began this initiative in 2019 with two primary goals: enhancing students' understanding of course content via applied reporting/case studies and increasing students' media literacy and comfort with first-hand exposure to practicing journalists. We want all students to know that solutions journalism is part of a well-informed, engaged citizenry - and educators like yourself are a critical part of that mission!

Here's what you can expect from a typical Journalist in the Classroom experience:

Before your session:

- After you've requested a session, an SJN representative will be in touch with you to clarify the details of your request.
- After this initial contact, we will begin reaching out to our network to find the best candidate for your class. We try to match you within one week; if we are experiencing delays with your request, we will keep you updated on the process.
- After we find a match, you will receive an email connecting you to the journalist who will be completing your session.
- After SJN connects you, please reach out to the journalist to finalize details for your visit. Some instructors like to schedule a brief video call for this; others prefer email. You'll need to address...
 - Which of the journalist's article/s you will be assigning to your students (SJN will typically link you to the journalist's Story Tracker results and/or personal website)
 - Your goals for the course and this session in particular - sharing a syllabus or course schedule can be an easy way to accomplish this but is certainly not required.
- Prepare students for the visit
 - In addition to the assigned readings, we have found that the best Q&A sessions result from students who were prompted to create discussion questions before attending class.
 - Some additional contextualizing information around why you have chosen to bring in a journalist can also help set the tone for a productive discussion.
- Please send the journalist and your SJN liaison (if participating) a Zoom link at least 48 hours before the scheduled class time.

During your session:

- Open class with your regular routine (the journalist and your SJN liaison are happy to wait) and introduce the day's session however you see fit. Typically, a brief

introduction reminds students why the guests are present and contextualizes the activity and any assigned readings within the current course unit.

- Next, an SJN representative will give a brief overview of solutions journalism and SJN's work and mission (the extent of this varies depending on how familiar the students already are with SJN and sojo).
- Following this short explanation, SJN staff will formally introduce the journalist with a brief bio and a career highlight or two.
- The journalist then takes the floor to tell the students who they are; where they live and report from; why and how they entered the field of journalism; anything relevant about solutions journalism in particular; and then the process of reporting on the story or stories they've read.
- You and/or the SJN representative will then set the stage for the question-and-answer part of the session.
 - Be prepared for queries about the processes of reporting and sourcing as well as specific details from the assigned stories.
 - Besides specific questions about the story and its contents, typical questions from students tend to focus on how you go about identifying sources; the challenges of reporting; safety issues; journalism ethics and your own ethics in reporting and writing a story; the most challenging situation you've faced as a reporter.
- The whole session should last approximately one hour, although the specific needs of your session should be defined during your preliminary meeting with the journalist. If you are teaching a 2-3 hour course and want the journalist to participate for the entire session, please make that expectation clear during the planning process.

After the session:

- After your session, SJN will email you a survey link for your students. Please forward it to the class and encourage them to complete it - it only takes two minutes to complete. We are always interested in making this process beneficial and enjoyable for students, and feedback really helps.
- If you enjoyed your experience with the program and are comfortable using social media, please shout it out on Twitter! Use the hashtag #journalistintheclassroom and tag Solutions Journalism Network @Soljourno. Thank you for your participation!

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How does this work?

A: The structure of the program is flexible and can be easily adapted for most instructors' needs or preferences. The basic process works like this: first, educators who are

interested in participating reach out to the SJN team with a brief description of their course subject. Second, we match them with a journalist, either from our stand-by archive or by special request; next, a meeting is set up between the educator and the journalist to confirm the details and specific needs of the course; and finally, the presentation is scheduled. Presentations have lasted anywhere from 40 minutes to three hours (although a one-hour session is most common), and we have had journalists videoconference into classrooms from locations across the globe. The sessions themselves consist of three distinct components: an introduction from a member of the SJN team in which solutions journalism is defined and contextualized; a brief presentation from the journalist putting their work into context; and a Q&A/discussion session, usually jointly facilitated by the journalist and the course instructor.

Q: What if my class isn't related to journalism or media?

A: Not a problem - in fact, this program is specifically targeted to students outside the field of journalism! During the program's pilot year, we facilitated Journalist in the Classroom sessions in anthropology, sociology, entrepreneurship, and environmental studies courses. Our still-growing roster of stand-by journalists also includes reporters who specialize in immigration, public policy, healthcare, housing and urban policy, Central America, social justice, arts and technology, the American West, criminal justice reform, and more, so we are confident that we can match a reporter to your classroom needs. The program is ideally suited for any students who are displaying interest in how theoretical course content intersects with "real world" or applied contexts and provides a unique supplement to courses forced online by the pandemic.

Q: What if my class is asynchronous?

A: We would be happy to work with you to arrange a pre-recorded session. Possibilities include a recorded interview with a journalist (conducted with an educator, SJN staff, or both) and asking your students to submit questions for the journalist to answer on video.

Q: What if my class is at a challenging time?

A: We have journalists located all over the globe, in a variety of time zones, with a variety of personal preferences regarding working in the early morning or late at night. If we truly cannot find a match for your schedule, one of the asynchronous options mentioned above are also available to you.

Q: What do my students need to do to prepare?

A: The only requirement is reading what articles you have chosen to assign from your visiting journalist. In our experience, asking students to prepare a few discussion questions before arriving to class makes for a smoother, more productive experience during the Q&A. SJN also has a wealth of additional resources if you desire to round out the lesson;

contact your SJN representative for written or video materials on solutions journalism to supplement the Journalist in the Classroom visit.

Q: What kinds of questions do students usually ask during the session?

A: The most common questions we see from students include:

- What made you interested in doing solutions journalism? How has it changed your relationship with your profession?
- How do you get your editor/your colleagues/your readers interested in solutions?
- What strategies do you use to approach sources/have productive conversations? Do you notice a difference in how sources react when you approach them for a solutions story vs. a problem-centric approach?
- Do you notice a different reaction from readers?
- What's your specific approach to building a solutions story/finding a solutions story in your community?
- How do you navigate working with sources who might be from a significantly different cultural background? (Or race, SES, etc)
- What do you recommend that people do to become better consumers of media/news?
- Please share your favorite tip for sorting faulty news from legitimate news.
- What do you think more people should know about news/journalists?

Q: Can I contact a journalist on my own?

A: For now, we would prefer that all arrangements are made through our Higher Education Program specialist to be sure that we are compensating our journalists accordingly and respecting limitations on their time and availability. If you hosted a session with a particular journalist in a prior semester and would like to request the same visitor again, simply let us know and we will do our best to accommodate you.

Q: Hmm. I'm still not sure I "get it."

A: We encourage you to read our posts about the program on the SJN blog ([here](#) and [here](#)) and if you still have questions or concerns, email out Higher Education Program Specialist Lanie Presswood at alane@solutionsjournalism.com.