

## International Communication Teaching Division Teaching Contest

### 1. Title: *Adopt-a-Country News Articles and International Journalist Project*

2. Abstract: Students complete an *Adopt-a-Country News Articles and International Journalist Project*, a two-part, semester-long assignment. 1. Students “adopt a country” and become a media expert on that country. They collect, follow, and share news stories concerning communication from/about their country with the class throughout the semester, and 2. They contact a journalist in that country, seeking answers to specific questions, such as: Do men and women have the same opportunity to access media information in your country? (Please see attached file for the complete questions.)

3. This activity addresses three learning objectives for the class:

- Students should be able to
- 1) Explain the background, sources and receivers of key international media,
  - 2) Relate media agenda to international events, and
  - 3) Exhibit an understanding of how differences in culture, government and information delivery systems affect worldwide communication and the balance of power.

This assignment begins on the first day of class. Students choose a flag at random from a box, and then search on their phones/classroom computer for the country that matches the flag. This country now becomes their “adopted” country. At the next class, students put their country name and flag on their desk and present their country’s ranking in the Press Freedom Index, explaining the reasons why their country holds that number and giving some background on the country’s media while discussing their country’s level of media freedom/censorship. This assignment fulfills the first learning objective.

Throughout the semester, students read news articles about communication issues in their country. They are encouraged to access the ABYZ database, “a portal to online news sources from around the world.” They share their country’s news with the class, sometimes presenting as regions (Africa, Central America, etc.) or as high/low press freedom rankings. This fulfills the second learning objective as the class follows the media stories, presented from various media perspectives, and the third learning objective as students uncover differences in culture, government and information delivery systems and how this affects worldwide communication and the balance of power.

Next, as part of the international journalist part of the project, students are instructed to 1) research journalists (print, broadcast, online) who report in/on their country, 2) submit a list of reporters and his/her credentials and contact information, 3) contact these reporters (by email), to find one that will answer questions about news in their country. Students submit this correspondence and Q/A in their Adopt-a-Country folder along with the news articles collected over the semester. This fulfills the first learning objective which empowers students to analyze who makes the news, covers the news and reads/listens to the news. It fulfills the third learning objective because students get feedback from journalists who are living in the “real” world of media censorship, media agenda setting, media access,

safety of reporters, etc.

Rationale: 1. Collecting news articles enables students to understand international news from different perspectives. Sharing news of their “adopted” country with the class gives them ownership of news dissemination. Students can be “questioned” about their country’s stance on specific issues and the student is then tasked with finding answers to the questions raised. The result of this rich discussion is that the entire class is profoundly more globally aware. This country information also serves as research and the basis for the International journalist project that is intended to help students realize the interconnected world of International Communication. When they contact their list of journalists in their country, they already know much about the country and its media agenda, its level of press freedom, and can begin a conversation about specific issues concerning the media.

2. Establishing a relationship with a journalist allows students to collect first-hand information about communication issues in their country from a professional. As evidenced by responses from the journalists, students learn how to communicate their class media project to someone in another country and to be sensitive with the questions they ask. As many of the countries are underdeveloped or countries under strict government censorship, students must think strategically how to get their questions answered and are instructed that some questions in the question bank may not be appropriate.

These activities ultimately take students away from looking at their country through a “tourist” lens and focuses them instead on communication issues that affect their country, its media and its citizens. Class activities increase student knowledge and stimulate analyses/critical thinking. I believe students learn effectively when they take responsibility for investigating and researching relevant topics and verbalize their findings to their classmates.

5. Learning outcomes: Students gain in-depth knowledge of their country’s media system and how/why it works. They are also exposed to the media systems of 20-30 other countries. Students establish working relationships with journalists and, in turn, share that information with the class. They can explain the background, sources and receivers of key international media (student learning object #1), and they relate media objectives to current international events (student learning object #2). They also learn to communicate with professionals in real-world settings about real-world media issues and challenges which often exposes differences in culture, government and information delivery systems and how they affect worldwide communication and the balance of power (student learning object #3).

Please see attached files to view some responses from journalists who follow student progress, encourage students to seek additional information, wish them success in their journalistic career, or set up real-life visits. One student and a Papua New Guinea journalist exchanged country-specific gifts.

This is not an easy project, especially for students who represent countries where communicative reporters are hard to identify. Students are encouraged to be “creative” when finding a journalist. Suggestions include asking their professors, international organizations, local journalists, foreign language instructors, international students, etc.

## Questions for International Journalist Project

### #1

1. How do most of the people in (insert your country here) access their daily information: newspapers, radio, television, social media, phone?
2. What level of access does most of the population in (insert your country here) have to daily newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet?
3. Do men and women in (insert your country here) have the same opportunity to access information from the media?
4. What is the biggest news story in (insert your country here) at the present time? How long has the story been in the news?
5. Which country's news do you think impacts (insert your country here) the most or the most frequently? Why?

### #2

1. Which gets more coverage in your country's news: business concerns or government issues?
2. Is there in-depth coverage of the poor, natives, or indigenous peoples and their concerns in your country's media?
3. What is the biggest story you've ever covered?
4. What obstacles did you encounter in covering the story?
5. Do you do any self-censorship when trying to decide what information to put into a story? Can you give me a specific example of when you might have withheld some information rather than disclose all details in a story?