
Grabbing the attention: Writing About Sociology for the Media

The autumn course named “The sociologist as an involved observer, or How to write sociology for the media”, which took place in September 20 – 25 in the Faculty of Social Sciences’ Hollar building, was a joint project of the Faculty’s Institute of Sociology (ISS) and the Lidové Noviny newspaper (LN). It was focused at doctoral and advanced graduate students of sociology and related disciplines. Jan Maršálek from the ISS served as the project’s coordinator.

Who is this autumn course aimed at primarily?

Although the workshops take place at the ISS, this course is not aimed exclusively at sociologists. We sent out invitations to all social sciences and humanities programmes in the Czech Republic. 25 students applied, out of which we selected 15. Besides sociologists, we had people from philosophy and political sciences sign up.

Why did you decide to offer this kind specific kind of course?

Our department shares the feeling that there are not enough sociologists in the media here. Each of us can compare with abroad, for me it would be France, and it is much more common to take advantage of sociologists there. At the same time, sociologists themselves are trying harder to get into the media. Plus I have the experience of writing for the media not being easy at all.



How did you come up with the content of the course?

The course is jointly organised by the Institute and the Lidové noviny newspaper. Part of the programme is therefore devised by tutors of sociology, and another part by the editors of Lidové noviny. Students themselves chose the topics they wished to address and then we investigated them from the sociologist’s point of view. When we presented our results to the editors, they had to steer us a little, so that we don’t cross into the territory that is no longer attractive for the media. The editors then had a special lecture on how the media work and what they require from us.

How did the Lidové noviny connection come about?

We had our man there, Petr Kamberský, who used to be our student. He liked the idea and some of his colleagues joined. Five members of the editorial staff take part, with Petr Kamberský and Tomáš Němeček being most closely involved.

The autumn course took place before the start of the semester and its participants had to pay the fee of 1,000 CZK. Does that mean it was not a part of the curriculum?

The course is an optional one, is taken for credit and is officially in the electronic administration system. Only those who are doing their Master’s have to keep that in mind, as Ph. D. students don’t need any credits. The price for the course had been set in a way that would not deter applicants, and at the same time covered the expenses, as we have no other funding available.

What were the reactions of the students like?

They appreciated the fact that we worked in small groups and had individual contact with the journalists, who are, due to the nature of their job, available on email even at say 3am. The journalists didn't go easy on the participants and had them work hard, and therefore no one has been left feeling like wasting their time.

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