Journalism 221

Writing for the Media

Fall 2012

Tuesday and Thursday, 8-10:10 a.m.

3412 Sage Hall

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"Nothing is easy."
-Y.A. Tittle.

Course Objectives

The purpose of this class is to make you a good writer and a better thinker. Good writing isn't an accident or a birthright. It's a skill like any other and as such, it needs to be practiced and developed. The same can be said for thinking. This is not going to be a class where you memorize names, dates, rules and mantras before spewing them back at me for a final that's worth 90 percent of your grade. You'll have to think. You'll have to justify. You'll have to improvise, adapt and overcome. This will not be natural to many of you and it won't come easy to most of you. Don't worry about it. If you stick with the class and work hard on what you've been assigned, you'll grow, develop and improve. That's the point of college, isn't it?

Over time, you will be able to accomplish basic tasks like those taught here almost as a matter of course. At that point, you'll move on to deeper and broader skill sets while maintaining the basics taught to you here.

However, in order to get to that point, you'll need to practice. A lot.

Expect that each time you enter this classroom, you will be required to write something. This class will be taught in half-lecture, half-lab format. The first half will consist of us discussing a particular skill or topic, the second half will be spent applying that skill or writing on that topic. In some cases, you'll be sent home to improve upon what you completed in class or given another task that advances what you've done in lab.

If there's one thing in life I hate, it's busy work, so don't expect any. The stuff I'm giving you to do in and out of class is all goal-directed work with the purpose of making you better at writing and thinking.

Course Texts

News Writing and Reporting (10th Edition). The Missouri Group
The Associated Press Stylebook. Get the most recent edition. Bring this to every class.
A good dictionary If you don't have one, buy one. It's a decent investment.
In addition, you are expected to read the Advance-Titan, The Oshkosh Northwestern and at least one other newspaper.

Policy on Academic Misconduct

Cheating and plagiarism are prohibited. Whatever you do for this class must be done on your own, unless expressly noted during class. You'll note that journalistic credibility has taken a beating over the past few years and that trust isn't a boomerang: once you throw it away, it doesn't come back. The best place to start holding yourself to a decent ethical code is right here and right now. Academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarizing and cheating, is a death knell for your program and your career as a journalist. The best way to make sure you aren't messing up is to ask me in advance of doing whatever it is you think might be problematic. If you don't and you get caught, the university will deal with you and that can range from probation to expulsion. The university website contains a list of procedures regarding dishonesty. I will follow those procedures.

Policy on Attendance

Quizzes and in-class writing assignments will be conducted in class. In addition, you'll be getting information in class that you can't get anywhere else. You're paying for this class, so I'd imagine you would want to get your money's worth. That said, as incentive, here is the attendance policy:

Each person gets two absences. I don't care if you use them for illness, bad weather, because you're going to a concert in Milwaukee (actual excuse) or because you just didn't feel like it. If you notify me that you'll be missing class prior to class, I'll mark it as one of your two absences and you'll be excused from any quiz that day. Any additional work associated with that day will need to be picked up from a classmate or me. If you do not notify me prior to class, you'll still lose one of your absences but you'll get a zero for all work we complete that day. Any absences beyond the two absences will count for zeroes for all work completed in class that day.

Policy on Sources

You need to reach beyond people that are easiest for you to contact. Thus, any story you're assigned to cover CAN NOT include anyone in the journalism department or any of your family members. Best friends and significant others are off limits. Acquaintances are fine. The only exception to this rule is if the family/friend/journalism faculty member is the only source who can answer the questions you need answered (e.g. Your best friend is the head of the student government and you're working on a student government story) or the primary news source (e.g. The department chair is named dean (or kills six people with an axe) and you get an interview.)

Grading

The grades in this class aren't nearly as important as what you learn and how you progress as a writer and reporter. If you make this all about the grades, you will deprive yourself of a great opportunity to learn these skills and you will be kicking yourself later in life. As for getting out of here alive, the department and the university set the standards. **Students must earn at least a "C" to continue in the major or the minor.**

Don't panic about bombing out. I have found that students who operate that way often find themselves the victims of self-fulfilling prophecies. Grades will be assigned on this scale:

100-91	Outstanding work. Work that is ready for publication
90-81	Above average. With minor revisions and editing, it could run.
80-70	Average. Work requires some editing/additional info/revision.
69-60	Below Average/Poor. Requires some major changes.
59-41	Failing. Paper has inherent problems in reporting/writing.
40-0	Beyond problematic. Work that is unacceptable because of factual, spelling or other major errors or reporter missed deadline.

Official course grades:

A	**100-91**	**C**	**78-71**
A-	**90-89**	**C-**	**70**
B+	**88**	**D+**	**69**
B	**87-81**	**D**	**68-61**
B-	**80**	**D-**	**60**
C+	**79**	**F**	**59-0**

Major ways you can cost yourself points:

In your major assignments, you will be graded in three areas: reporting, writing and style. Because this is a writing course, you will be graded most heavily on your writing. That said, each section accounts for a third of your grade. On more minor writing assignments, you'll get a single grade with notes as to specific deductions.

Factual errors (wrong information, misspelled proper nouns etc.) will cost you half of your reporting grade in assignments graded for reporting.

AP Style: You will lose 20 points per error in assignments with a graded style section. That means, if you write "July 4th" five times, you're already down to 0 points for your grade.

In-Class Style: Several aspects of structure, grammar and spelling will be emphasized to improve your writing. For each violation of those rules (as they are introduced), you lose 10 points. That means, you write "said Smith" or keep slipping a "D" between "I" and the "G" of "religion," you'll be costing your 10 points each.
Other point deductions will be noted within the text of your story.

Course Assignments

Grades and assignments are not meant to be punitive. However, since the university does require the grades, here are the assignments for the class and what they're worth:

Minor Assignments: 30 percent

The grade part of this is not like every other class where if you show up you get 10 percent worth of A. We will be doing a variety of minor assignments that attempt to shape or improve some aspect of your writing. Some of these things will be done in class, while others will be done on your own time. In either case, they should be simple and yet are important. You will need to take them seriously.

Your grade on this will include:
- AP exercises
- Lead writing
- Essays
- Various other items
- Looking alive (No heads on desks, please…)

Major Assignment: 30 percent

The assignments you'll get for out-of-class work will include improving upon things we do in class and writing longer pieces that will include additional research and interviewing. Part of this will involve some group work and some in-class discussions of what works well and what has worked poorly. It's all part of the process of learning how to write, so make sure you're ready with your material and your ideas.

Quizzes: 10 percent

For quizzes, you will be expected to know AP style, current events and current readings. This may seem like a ton of information but if you are going to pursue any career in journalism, you are going to have to know this stuff cold. Current events questions will come from one of the papers you are required to read. If a story is on-going, the only way to keep up with it is to read the paper every day. Read the AP book. Each week you will get another healthy dosage of the AP guide. It may seem like you are reading a dictionary but if you need to know if you are using proper style in a moment's notice, that guide is your saving grace.

Mid-term Exam: 10 percent

This is not the standard, memorize and regurgitate exam. This is a live event of my choosing that will be covered in class. Your job will be to listen, find news value and write a story on what just occurred as if you were trying to make a deadline at a paper. The specifics of this will be discussed later in the term.

Final Exam/Assignment: 10 percent

This will be an extended writing project that will draw on the skills you have garnered in class. Expect it to be produced under a deadline situation and in a way that will help demonstrate what you've learned to this point. It will not be a standard, memorize and regurgitate exam either. It'll make you write, work and think like a journalist. Specifics on this will also be covered later.

Professionalism/Participation: 10 percent
If you want to do well in this class, you'll need to make sure you are an active participant. That includes both being alive and alert during class, asking questions and making important points to your colleagues. In addition, we'll be doing some in-class peer reviewing and you'll want to be a very helpful colleague during those exercises. As the great Wes Harrison once noted, "If you're going to make a scene, be seen."

All assignments will be dealt with digitally. We're going to try to save some trees. It'll also be easier for you all to read my comments if we're doing this digitally. Deadlines for assignments will be set in class and the expectation is that I'll receive your work via email no later than that deadline. If you are having trouble email, contact me and we'll work something out. Don't wait until after the deadline has passed to get in touch with me.

Statement for Students With Special Needs

The university's policies regarding disability will be followed here. Contact the dean of students at 424-3100 or head to the web at: http://www.uwosh.edu/dean/disabilities.htm for information. The university and I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with disabilities.

A Few Final Reminders

1. Late assignments will not be tolerated. Sorry, but if you miss a deadline at a paper, firm or station, you can embarrass yourself and your editor. You can cost the place thousands of dollars each minute you are late. You are given ample time to finish the task set in front of you. Make the time for this or you will hate yourself.

2. Learning is the most important part of this class. Yes, grades matter, but the skills you acquire here are the most important thing to take away from here. I know people who were "C" students in this type of class who have landed jobs in major markets. The reason why? They took what they were told and incorporated it into their approach to journalism. If you approach this class as something you have to "get through" you will have deprived yourself of a great opportunity to learn.

3. This class is a time suck. It will take more than putting aside and hour or two the day before something is due. If it is near deadline time, most of the procrastinators will be freaking out and get that wonderful feeling of brain lock we call writer's block. Don't assume you can get everything done in the 11th hour.

4. Have fun. You become involved in a lot of different areas, work with a lot of different people and get a rare perspective into the human condition. Some days it's a drudge, but over all, it is one of the few jobs where the bad days are far outnumbered by the good days.

Writing for the Media Class Schedule
Fall 2012
(This could change, but presume it's solid for now)

Week of Sept. 3:
Tuesday: LABOR DAY—NO CLASS
Thursday: Introduction to course
READINGS: NONE

Week of Sept. 10:
Tuesday: The elements of news value
Thursday: Basics of writing; Grammar and more
READINGS: Mo. Group: Ch. 1; AP A-C
ASSIGNMENT: Grammar Work

Week of Sept. 17:
Tuesday: Leads: Learning the basics
Thursday: Leads: Workshop
READINGS: Mo. Group: Ch. 9; AP D-G
ASSIGNMENT: Lead rewrite assignment

Week of Sept. 24:
Tuesday: Inverted Pyramid
Thursday: Inverted Pyramid Workshop
READINGS: Mo. Group: Ch. 10; AP H-K
ASSIGNMENT: 4-paragraph brief

Week of Oct. 1:
Tuesday: Quotes: The spice of every story
Thursday: Interviewing basics, First topic pitch
READINGS: Mo. Group: Chs. 4 & 5; AP L-P
ASSIGNMENT: Interview and story assignment

Week of Oct. 8:
Tuesday: Story structure. The art and craft of great writing
Thursday: Meetings, speeches and news conferences. Midterm pitch
READINGS: Mo. Group: Chs. 11 & 15; AP R-U
ASSIGNMENT: First group story draft due by noon Friday

Week of Oct. 15:
Tuesday: Review Stories; Rewrites.
Thursday: Story Workshop. Midterm Prep
READINGS: AP V-Z
ASSIGNMENT: Final Draft of Story 1 due by end of class Thursday.

Week of Oct. 22:
Tuesday: Resumes and cover letters.
Thursday: Basic research: The foundation of great journalism, Topic Pitch 2
READINGS: Mo. Group: Ch. 6
ASSIGNMENT: NONE

Week of Oct. 29:
Tuesday: MIDTERM
Thursday: NO CLASS
READINGS: NONE
ASSIGNMENT: NONE

Week of Nov. 5:
Tuesday: Broadcast Guest Lecture; Talk about final exam; Topic Pitch 2
Thursday: Public Relations
READINGS: Mo. Group: Chs. 7, 13 & 20
ASSIGNMENT: Second group story draft due by Friday at 5 via email.

Week of Nov. 12:
Tuesday: Review Stories; Work with your stories
Thursday: Writing Advertising Copy; Lab: Finish your stories;
READINGS: NONE
ASSIGNMENT: Second group story final draft due by end of class Thursday

Week of Nov. 19:
Tuesday: Writing for the web; Topic Pitch 3
Thursday: THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS
READINGS: Mo. Group: Ch. 12
ASSIGNMENT: Third group story draft due by Tuesday at 5 via email.

Week of Nov. 26:
Tuesday: Convergence: Working across platforms; Social Media
Thursday: Review drafts; Work on stories.
READINGS: Mo. Group: Ch. 2 & 3
ASSIGNMENT: Third story final draft due Friday by noon.

Week of Dec. 3:
Tuesday: Ethics
Thursday: Law
READINGS: Mo. Group: Chs. 21-22

Week of Dec. 10:
Tuesday: Evaluations; Final Exam 1
Thursday: Final Exam 2
READINGS: NONE