Course overview
The overarching goal of this course is to develop reporting and writing skills beyond the basic or foundational level. The emphasis will be on feature writing. This class proceeds from the standpoint that good writing is best achieved through practice. In other words, the course is a writing-intensive one. Students will be expected to write publishable stories, workshop papers and engage in other practical assignments. A seminar style or workshop format will be adopted. Class sessions will straddle between lectures, “workshopping” and writing. Students will learn how to develop ideas, research techniques and how to write various kinds of features. Since we cannot ignore the current wave of new media impacting journalism, we will explore ways of adding value to our work in order to prepare us for 21st century journalism. You should be willing to immerse yourself in the class by thinking critically, working conscientiously and behaving professionally. Even if you never end up in a newsroom, the skills you learn should help make you a stronger writer for standard features or in-depth pieces. Strategies for finding professional publication outlets will also be discussed.

Readings


Basic Policies and Requirements
Keeping up with local, national and international news stories is a key requirement for this class. There will news and AP style quizzes as well as other in-class exercises designed to improve your knowledge and skills. In order to
succeed as a feature writer, you must be an avid consumer of news and a relentless pursuer of knowledge. I particularly encourage everyone to read longer, in-depth articles from news magazines as well. Twice during the semester you will write self evaluations/reflections which should demonstrate (i) your progress as a writer and (ii) your internalization of feature writing methods or how you’re thinking about the entire writing process.

“Workshopping” constitutes a major methodological approach in this class. This means your work will be seen, read, and critiqued by others. This is not meant to embarrass anyone but to encourage a constructive learning attitude. Whether you go on to graduate school or the “real” world you will encounter variants of this. Further instructions will be provided since workshops will be dependent on class size.

**Assignments and Attendance:** In order to make the most out of this class, attendance is key. Late assignments or homework will have consequences. Absence will only be permitted under extenuating circumstances with advance notice. There will be no makeup assignments. After two absences your overall course grade will be lowered by one-third of a grade for each subsequent absence. Being more than five minutes late or leaving class early will be counted as being absent. Failing grades will be received for plagiarized and inaccurate information. Don’t attempt.

**Class sessions:** Class sessions will consist of lectures, open discussions, exercises, reading responses, quizzes and routine “workshopping.” Additionally we will try to mimic the real world newsroom during certain sessions by having budget meetings and other such related exercises. Be prepared to participate fully. You are responsible for your own learning experience. Ask questions and in general be courteous towards everyone in class. In short, act professionally.

**Workshopping:**

At Iowa, we value collaborative and constructive learning. Class workshops are to be conducted in a responsible, positive, honest and supportive manner. Everyone must respond to any article being “workshopped.” You’re not allowed to be silent. If you’re quiet it will affect your participation score. Bring copies of your piece to class on workshopping days. Both the author and listeners must take notes during the process. When you turn in your papers write down half a page response on what you got from the feedback process.

**Feature analysis/critique:** Subscribe to any top news site of your choice. Come to class with a news feature from your chosen publication prepared to make a presentation. This will involve a critical analysis of what you learned from
reading it. How is it organized? What approach does the writer adopt in telling her stories. In other words, how does he/she do it? What techniques are employed to hold the reader’s attention? What tools were used to give depth to the story? In order to write well, we must read widely, learn from the best and be able to pick out those that could be improved.

**Critical reading responses:** Students will be expected to provide generalized, and well thought out reaction papers to specified chapters. These should be between 200-500 words. Be prepared to read your reaction papers aloud in class.

**Guest speakers:** Experienced professionals and academics will be brought in when relevant. This is to enable students to benefit from a wide range of scholarly and professional expertise.

**Supplemental requirements (Documentation packets)**
Packet of documentation should consist of: (a) notes from reporting process with specific time, place, date and persons involved; (b) all research work, observation and other related activities related to writing any feature assignment should be written down; and, (c) a bibliography or reference list should be neatly created. Include all contact information for sources.

**Getting published**
While grades are important, getting published is equally important if you want to succeed as a journalist. Wherever life sends you, communication will always be crucial. I strongly encourage students to seek out sources for publishing their work.

**Blogs**
This contributes to your news story grades. Everyone would be expected to develop and maintain a personal website. This will serve as a portfolio for your work and demonstrate multi-media proficiency. You might want to be more specific. Do you want them to have a blog or a website?

**Market study**
An analysis of any publication for which you plan to freelance for. Objective: describe target audience, needs and how published pieces address those needs as well as writing style. Describe your target reader.

**Grades**
Feature stories: 70 percent of final grade
In class work, attendance, participation, homework: 30 percent of final grade
Assignments points
In-class work/Homework (Total of 165 points: 30%)
- Market study/presentations (20 points: 5%)
- Participation: Blogs, feature analysis, workshopping, textbook exercises and other assigned tasks 20 points: 5%
- News/AP style quizzes (100 points: 15%)
- Critical reading responses/Reading Tests (25 points: 5%)

Features (Total of 430 points: 70%)
- Short feature: 800-1000 words (30 points: 10%)
- Profile: 1,200 words (100 points: 15%)
- News feature: 1,200 words (100 points: 20%)
- Final feature: 1,500 words (200 points: 25%)

Assignments will be graded on the following:
- Content: (strength of story idea, nature of conflict, level of interest etc)
- Lede: arresting/compelling, very effective at pulling reader.
- Clarity, flow and journalistic quality: show rather than tell, effectively develops characters, contains good description etc
- Grammar and mechanics: Style, editing etc
- Research: sources, information gathering, relevance of quotes etc

Grading scheme: Letter grades will be assigned including plus including (+ and -) in the following manner: A=Exceptional work (rare), ready to be sent to press B=very good work C=average work (normal), meets all class requirements, D=unacceptable work, F=fail

These letters translate into the following grading scale:

95% and greater A
90 to 94% A-
85 to 89% B+
80% to 84% B
75% to 79% B-
70% to 74% C+
65% to 69% C
60% to 64% C-
55% to 59% D
54% and below F
Schedule for semester (Subject to change)

WEEK 1

June 7: Introductions
- Introductions: (Previous journalism experiences, why you’re taking this class, your interests and what you’ll like us to focus on.)
- Syllabus Overview
- Journalism 101: An overview
- Feature writing: What is it?
- Types of features
- Reading: *Ricketson Ch.1*
- Writing Assignments: E-mail me profile story idea

June.8: Getting started
- Feature structures: the basic feature explained
- Feature writing techniques/styles
- Pitching
- *Ricketson Ch.2 (Reading Response)*

WEEK 2

June. 13: Research and News gathering
- Library arcade training
- *Ricketson Ch. 3 (*
- *News Quiz*
- Sources and online research
- Effective searching/Databases
- *Feature forms I: The profile*
- Class work time

June.14: Feature Forms II
- On defining the News feature
- *Guest Speaker: Robert (Ted) Gutsche, Journalist and PhD Candidate (Crossingborders project & Story telling)*
- *Ricketson Ch 4 (Reading Response )*
- Meet your AP book quiz 1
June. 15: Workshopping (Grp 1)
- Class work time

WEEK 3

June. 20: Workshopping (Grp 2)
- Class work time
- News Quiz
- *Ricketsen Ch 5*

June 21: The Magazine feature
- What is a magazine article?
- Magazine article scene, ideas and ledes
- *Guest Speaker: Jennifer Hemmingsen (Public Affairs reporting and records)*
- *Ricketsen Ch 6 (Quiz based on Chapter 6)*

June 22: Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Steve Berry comes to town
- Writing the investigative feature
- Non-profit journalism

WEEK 4

June 27: Workshopping (Grp 2)
- Class work
- AP Style Quiz
- *Ricketsen Ch 8*

June 28: Workshopping (Grp 2)
- Class work
- *Chapter 9 (Quiz based on readings)*

June 29: Feature writing in practice
- Young people and feature writing
- *Panel discussion: Jim Malewitz, Adam Sullivan*
- Multi-media, the internet & feature writing
- First self-evaluation due

**WEEK 5**

**July 5: Interviewing**
- All about interviewing
- News analysis
- AP style quiz
- *Ricketsen Ch 7 (Reading response)*

**July 6: All things commentary**
- Editorials & Columns
- Essays & Reviews
- *Photos and features: Paul Jensen*

**July 11: The PR feature**
- *Ch 10*
- In-class Exercise
- Guest Speaker

**WEEK 6**

**July 12: Grammar day & Travel writing**
- Grammar day/Mechanics
- Elements of good writing
- Conferences
- *Ch 11*
- Writing day/ Getting ahead on writing projects

**July 13: Workshopping (Grp 1)**
- *Ch 12*

**July 18: Workshopping (Grp 2)**
**WEEK 7**

**July 19: Market Analysis & Freelancing**
- Query letters
- Final self-evaluations due

**July 20: Market presentations**
- Final feature due

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**Other Issues**

**Attitude**
It’s everything. We all have bad days. If you are having troubles that you think would make their way into the classroom, please let me know. In this class, let’s support each other – and that means showing respect. Students who fail to do this will be asked to leave during that class period. Give respect. Get it.

**Warning/Disclaimer**
At times, conversation in the section, and in journalism as a whole, may raise topics that are perceived as offensive (or uncomfortable) tones. Covering such topics is a necessary part of the journalist’s role in society. I will announce any such topic in advance to allow you to decide whether to leave the class or not. But I would encourage you to remain open to the substance of these discussions. Even in PR, we must find a way to cope.

However, this freedom to discuss issues of a sensitive nature does not allow for sexual harassment, racism and other forms of discrimination. If you have concerns about conversations in the classroom or the content shared, please discuss them with me. If you do not feel comfortable after speaking with the course instructor, please contact the course instructor.

**Sexual harassment**
Sexual harassment is reprehensible and will not be tolerated by the School, College or University. For definitions, assistance, and the full University policy,
see http://www.sexualharassment.uiowa.edu/; on sexual misconduct involving students, see http://www.uiowa.edu/~our/opmanual/iv/02.htm

**Administrative supervision**
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as add/drop deadlines, second-grade option, and other related issues.

**Academic fraud**
Plagiarism and any other activities when students present work that is not their own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is reported to the departmental DEO and to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Services who enforces the appropriate consequences.

www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtm

**Accommodations for disabilities**
A student seeking academic accommodations should register with Student Disability Services and meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. For more information, visit this site: www.uiowa.edu/~sds/. Those with learning concerns must identify these concerns with me during the first week of class.

**Severe weather**
If a weather event disrupts class, we will seek appropriate shelter in the building; and class will resume if possible when the event is over.

**Suggestions and complaints**
Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit the instructor, then the course supervisor, and then the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident. See the CLAS Student Academic Handbook. For procedural information, see http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml.

**The Iowa Dozen**
We also comply with the Iowa Dozen:
“The Iowa Dozen”

We learn . . .

- to write correctly and clearly
- to conduct research and gather information responsibly
- to edit and evaluate carefully
- to use media technologies thoughtfully
- to apply statistical concepts appropriately

We value . . .

- First amendment principles for all individuals and groups
- a diverse global community
- creativity and independence
- truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity

We explore . . .

- mass communication theories and concepts
- media institutions and practices
- the role of media in shaping cultures