Masters Advanced Reporting and Writing
019:226:01 [3 credit hours]
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Iowa
Fall 2011 Syllabus

Class Time and Room: Thursdays, 4:30-7 p.m., Room W-336 AJB.
Textbook: None
Professor: Stephen J. Berry
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:30-5; Wednesdays, 2-3; or by appointment, W-337 AJB
Contact: stephen-berry@uiowa.edu; o – 319-335-3331; home – 319-665-3770 [leave a message].

Journalism that Matters

First off, here is what this course is not about – celebrity whiz, entertainment news, crime and mayhem, sensationalism, horse-race politics, puff-piece features, gee-whiz public relations news releases.

This course is about journalism that matters.

The objective is to produce multimedia stories that will meet the reporting and writing standards of a well-respected, prize-winning large metropolitan newspaper. At such newspapers, editors examine every word and line before they decide to risk their newspaper’s reputation, their credibility and their newspaper’s legal funds on your story. Those are the standards I set for IowaWatch.org, the website of The Iowa Center for Public Affairs Journalism, Inc., a non-profit, totally volunteer news organization that is independent of the University of Iowa, and those are the standards I set for you.

With your permission, I will publish deserving stories on IowaWatch, and some of them will be pitched to Iowa news organization.

Because this classroom will be run like a real news operation that produces real news stories – not class papers – for mass distribution and scrutiny, the stories you submit will, in effect, be your informal certification that you believe your story is true and accurate, represents your best reporting and writing and is ready for publication. The extent to which I determine that your story is ready for publication will determine your grade for that story.

Reporting, Writing and Presentation

About two-thirds of the course is focused on three major stories. The primary presentation form will be writing; but you also will be expected to provide some visuals and/or audio. You also will spend time reviewing and practicing in class and in the field doing basic reporting and writing skills.

You will be responsible for originating your story ideas and doing enough preliminary investigation and clip searching to determine whether it will produce a publishable story.
In reporting, you will be interviewing public officials, business figures, politicians, professors, private citizens, students or anyone else needed to develop your story. You will be expected to find research studies, reports, statistics, and government records.

In this course, the reporting phase—the gathering of information—is primary; if your story is not based on thorough reporting, it will not be worth publishing, and thus I will not spend much time trying to improve the writing in it.

But if you do the reporting that is necessary, I will go the extra mile to help you improve your writing. Do not feel that you are a poor writer if I return your story covered with editing comments. First of all, it means you have done a good job of reporting; second, it means that I think it is worth spending time on it to make it best that it can be.

If you do the reporting, we can make the prose in an explanatory story reflect the literary eye of a creative writer who recognizes telling details and the perfect quotes, all of which will make your work come alive with rich description, texture, imagery, and energy. If it’s an investigative story, we can make your writing so powerful and authoritative that it will hit like a hammer.

The real writing doesn’t start until you start self-editing and rewriting and self-editing again and rewriting again and again until you have fashioned a work that you will be proud to submit for publication.

The MAP Project Proposal

The MAP project proposal is a paper of 5-7, double-spaced pages [1,250-1,750 words]. The MAP project is a formal paper of about 10,000 words that is the capstone of this graduate program. Part of the project requires you to write a formal project proposal and defend it in front of your project committee. The assignment in this class is primarily to get you thinking immediately about what you will do for this project. The proposal you write for this class does not have to be the one that you will eventually pursue, but it will put you ahead of the game if you try to settle on your project this semester make this assignment the proposal that you will defend. If you are not a part of the MAP program, you have the option of substituting another reporting assignment with my approval.

Class Involvement

Class involvement is not an automatic A. Your class involvement involves two grades: one for attendance; one for engagement in peer editing, brainstorming story ideas and on graded class exercises.

Unexcused class absences are not allowed; you will lose attendance points on your attendance grade and receive a zero for any graded quiz that you missed. Because we meet only once a week, I cannot excuse you for merely feeling bad or tired, oversleeping, forgetting about class or for scheduling something that conflicts with this period. I can excuse you because of a death in the family, being physically unable to get to a class or suffering a fever or other sickness that could spread to others. In those circumstances, you will be allowed to make up any graded
quiz in that class. Your absence will not exempt you from responsibility for that day’s lesson or an assignment that is due, unless you have arranged a new due date with me. Contact classmates to learn details of assignments you miss.

Class involvement is extremely important to your education, because you and your classmates learn from each other. You will be expected to question your classmates about their stories and story ideas and offer your thoughts about the strengths and weaknesses of your their work. Classroom courtesy dictates that you should not use class time to check your email, read newspapers, carry on side conversations with classmates while someone else is speaking or do anything else not related to the class.

Assignments

Two-thirds of your grade will come from three out-of-class enterprise stories. Each of the three may be independent of each other. However, because this is a graduate-level class, I strongly encourage you to think about making the three stories into a long-form, three-story package covering a single topic, issue, problem, controversy or an individual.

One story can be about a person who plays a pivotal role in the topic. The other two have to be stories that are explaining or investigating the topic itself. They can either be one main story with shorter sidebars that would run on the same day; two mainbar stories with one sidebar and all three running on two days; or three mainbars running on three separate days. I also am open to a three-story package about an individual if that person’s circumstances warrant it, for example, a story about a wrongly convicted man who spent time in prison for a crime he did not commit [incidentally, I have information about two such people, if anyone is interested]

I have set specific and very firm deadlines for each of the three stories. It doesn’t matter whether the person-story comes first, second or third. However, please note that the first deadline comes fairly quickly.

Each story must be carefully fact-checked line-by-line, fact by fact, and your fact check must be documented in the following ways.

1. Footnote the stories. Each quote, fact, statistic, document must be followed by a numbered footnote referring to the specific source that you will list in an endnotes page at the end of the story.
2. For all human sources, the end note must contain working contact information – email addresses and phone numbers.
3. For all human sources quoted from your handwritten or electronic notes, provide me with a copy of the page that contains the quote.
4. For all written material, either provide a working link or the hard copy of the document from which the material originated.

Deadlines:

Deadlines are absolute. Missing deadline brings a point penalty equal to a grade sign. Each day thereafter will result in another grade-sign penalty. After five days, the story will get a zero.

AP Style/Grammar Errors

Five or more different AP style, grammar-rule errors [including punctuation and capitalization] on Story 1 and six or more on Stories 2 and 3, reduces your grade three points. Two or less errors on Story 1 and three or less on Stories 2 and 3, earns a 3-point
bonus. Refer to my “Writing Basics” handout to avoid the most common AP Style and grammar errors that students commit.

Assignments, Due Dates and Weights

Note: Send all assignments via Email

Sept. 1 - Pitch Memo Story 1 Email to Steve/Class @ 4 p.m. = 10 points
Sept. 1 - Lecture Quiz 1 in Class = 10 points
Sept. 11, Sunday – Pitch 2 Due to Steve/Class @ 11:45 p.m. = 10 points
Sept. 18, Sunday - Story 1 Due to Steve/Your Group @ 11:45 p.m. 750-1,000 words: 100 points
Sept. 25, Sunday- Pitch 3 Due to Steve/Class @ 11:45 p.m. – 10 points
Sept. 29: Lecture Quiz 2 re Ethics = 10 points.
Sept 30, Friday: Story 1 Revision Due to Steve @ 11:45 p.m.: 50 points
Oct. 13; Meeting Story Due to Steve @ 11:45 p.m. = 50 points
Oct. 20: Speech Story Due to Steve @ 11:45 p.m. = 50 points
Oct. 23: Story 2 Due to Me and Your Group @ 11:45 p.m., 1,500.-2,000 words; 150 points
Nov. 4: Story 2 Revision Due to Me @ 11:45 p.m., 100 points
Nov. 29, Tues.: Story 3 Due to Steve/Your Group @ 11:45 p.m.: 1,000-1,250 words. 125 points
Dec. 11, Sunday: Story 3 Revision Due to Steve @ 11:45 p.m. 75 points.
Dec. 12, Tuesday: MAP Proposal Due to Steve @ 11:45 p.m. 50 points.

Class Attendance and Decorum: 100 [each unexcused absence: 7 points deducted from grade]
Peer Editing & Brainstorming: 100 [Each student must make at least one constructive criticism or suggestion for improvement for each of your classmates’ stories or story ideas.

Grading Rubric – Total 1,000 Points

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<th>125 Pts</th>
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<td>65.5-67</td>
<td>87.6-89.5</td>
<td>109-111.5</td>
<td>131-134</td>
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<td>42-43.5</td>
<td>62.5-65</td>
<td>83.6-87.5</td>
<td>104.5-108.5</td>
<td>125-130</td>
<td>209-218.75</td>
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<td>8-8.3</td>
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<td>60-62</td>
<td>79.6-83.5</td>
<td>99.5-104</td>
<td>120-124</td>
<td>199-208.75</td>
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<td>57.5-59</td>
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<td>97-99</td>
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**Story Evaluation Standards**

**Letter Grade Criteria:**

I will grade stories as if I am an editor considering them for publication. One of the grading criteria is quality of the story idea, which includes timeliness. Each of you should select stories ideas that are timely enough to be considered for publication by IowaWatch.org, The Daily Iowan, another newspaper or magazine or broadcast on television.

For the semester grade, I will use the university’s 4-point grading system, with the maximum grade equaling 4.0. Your final semester grade will be rounded off to a letter grade, and I will use plus or minus signs.

The grading rubric for each of the three stories is keyed to letter grades. The general criteria for each letter grade are as follows:

**A- to A [3.67-4.0]** – The story is free of errors and misspellings. It is timely, important to the community and interesting. It is clearly and efficiently written, thoroughly reported and clear in focus. It reflects initiative, strongly supports its findings and is written with power, authority and insightful analysis. It demonstrates effective use of quotations, compelling details and vivid descriptions. Each sentence and paragraph flows logically and smoothly to the next. It contains few AP style and grammar errors. With minor editing and perhaps a call or two, the story would be a good candidate for publication in a reputable metropolitan daily.

**B [2.67-3.33]** – The story is solid. It is an above average idea. It is timely, well-written and reported and covers all the basic questions. It has a clear and interesting lead, and, for the most part, is logically organized. It requires some editing, such as shifting a few paragraphs, rewriting a few awkward sentences. It contains several AP style and grammar errors. The reporter may need to make a call or two for needed information or clarification, but, for the most part, the fixes would not postpone publication.

**C [1.67-2.33]** – The story meets minimum requirements in that it is timely, covers major questions, presents all sides fairly and touches the usual bases. However, it fails to answer some questions and leaves the feeling that the reporter is doing no more than what he or she thinks necessary to get a passable mark. Several sentences are imprecise. Many are awkwardly written and confusing. It’s filled with AP style and grammar errors. The story requires heavy editing and more reporting. Publication would be delayed.

**D [.067-1.33]** – The story is salvageable and covers some, but not all, major issues. It requires substantial reporting and is confusing or vague in many places. The AP style and grammar errors make it a copy editor’s nightmare. The editor would send it back to the reporter with instructions to do more reporting, to rewrite from top to bottom and to never submit another story that needs as much work as that one.

**F [0.00]** – The story is not publishable and offers no hint that it could become useable.

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<td>62-74</td>
<td>76-89</td>
<td>124-148.75</td>
<td>496-595</td>
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A Word about Word Counts

Word counts are minimums. If the word count is less, you should question whether you have adequately covered the issue. If your story reaches the minimum but fails to cover key issues or leaves questions unanswered, the reporting will still be inadequate. Do not try to pad your stories with needless verbiage. You lose points for wordiness. I spend more time judging writing concision, accuracy, content and thoroughness rather than counting words.

Standards of Journalism

You will learn that your civic and professional responsibility is to uphold the highest ethical standards of the profession and to use the public’s First Amendment freedoms fearlessly – but responsibly – to serve society and to resist any infringement upon them.

The Iowa Dozen

The Iowa Dozen is appended at end of this syllabus. In this class, you will:

- Learn to write correctly, clearly and authoritatively; gather information aggressively but responsibly, edit and evaluate fairly and carefully, use technology thoughtfully and statistics accurately;
- Value diversity, community, creativity, independence, truth, accuracy fairness;
- Discuss media institutions and practices and media’s role in shaping public discourse.

Errors, Ethics & Plagiarism

Errors: Line-by-line fact checks on stories are essential. Stories will receive a failing grade if they contain errors weakening the story’s premise and misquotes that distort the source’s comments. Other errors will reduce the grade by a letter.

1) Quote Accuracy: This course requires you to interview people, and you must report their comments accurately. You are expected to give me contact information for interviewees.

2) Conflicts of Interests: You cannot cover a topic or beat in which you have a personal interest or relationship [something that is more than a casual acquaintance] with someone connected to the story. You cannot use your classmates as quoted sources in your stories. You cannot write about student government or any other organization if you are a member of that organization. Conflicts of interest are often difficult to determine; never take a chance; always discuss a potential conflict with me.

Read the SPJ Ethics Code immediately. And obey it. Consult with me if you confront any situation that may conflict. Not knowing that your conduct was unethical is not an excuse.

3) Original Work

All work must be new and original to this class. Students submitting a story to another must submit it to this class first, before the editors of that publication have edited it.

4) Plagiarism – use of others’ work as your own – is dishonest and a serious breach of university and journalistic ethics.

Lifting Quotes: When you attribute quotes to named sources, you are telling me and readers that you interviewed the source. If you did not and fail to explain the quote’s origin, you are deceiving us, and you get an F for the story. You may not use quotes or passages you wrote for a story or paper in another class without my permission.

Plagiarizing yourself: If you use quotes or passages that you previously published for another newspaper or organization, you must adhere to the rules against plagiarism and properly credit that organization.

Penalty: An act of plagiarism in a story will result in an F. The University also provides
penalties for plagiarism ranging from grade reduction to more serious penalties. For a full explanation of plagiarism and other forms of cheating, consult the College’s Student Academic Handbook. If you doubt whether a situation constitutes plagiarism, you must consult me. **Ignorance of plagiarism will not be accepted as an excuse.**

**Tentative Class Schedule (Subject to Change)**

**Week one, Aug. 25**

Assignments for Sept. 1: Read the Syllabus. You are responsible for knowing the assignments, deadlines, class rules, grading practices that are explained in them.

- : Lecture Quiz on what is “journalism that matters,” what makes a good story, conflict of interest.
- : Last Date for Pitch Memo for Story 1.

Assignment Due Sun., Sept. 11 @ 11:45 p.m. Pitch 2; Assignment Due Sept. 18 @ 11:45 p.m. Story 1.

Class Activities:
- Brief Overview of Syllabus.
- Explain 1st Story Assignment: Pick a story idea, conduct, thorough clip search, begin gathering information for your story; send me 300-word pitch by Thurs, Sept. 1, @ 4 p.m. The pitch must contain the following elements:
  - A clip search. I cannot even begin considering the merits of an idea until I know what has been written about it in the press in the past two or three years.
  - An explanation of your story idea, what audience would read your story and why you think that audience would read it; 
  - A “why-we-should-care” statement: why would your audience find the results of your reporting constructive; i.e., will it might expose a new problem, issue or trend; bring about a reform or change in law, policy or public understanding; enlighten readers with new information important to a target audience or to society; provide an inspiration or lesson about life to your readers.
  - Summary of what has been written about your topic and a list of those articles [include their publications, publication date and a link to each articles].
  - Preliminary assessment on whether this will be part of a package or an individual story.
- Lecture: “Journalism that Matters,” “What is a Good Story?”
- Writing Exercise: Meeting Scenario – 30 minutes [Go Over a few Sept. 8].

**Week two, Sept. 1-QUIZ & Pitch 1 Memos Due**

Assignments: Obtain my approval of Pitch 2 no later than Sept. 11.

- : Obtain my approval of Pitch 3 no later than Sept. 25

Class Activities:
- 15-minute graded quiz on Aug. 25 lecture
- Brainstorm Story Pitches: Applying Qualities of Good Stories.

**Week three, Sept. 8**

Assignments: Due Oct. 13 @ 11:45 p.m. Story about a government meeting.

- : Due Oct. 20 @ 11:45. Story covering a speech by a presidential candidate. If the candidate makes any false statements, provides misinformation, find the correct information and report it neutrally, objectively and properly attribute to a source.

Class Activity:
a. Explain requirements for covering government meeting. Distribute requirements.
b. Begin Basic Skills: Covering a Speech
c. Writing Exercise on a Speech-45 minutes-delivery and writing-If Time Permits: News
   Judgment in selecting lead, and most important secondary items and writing.

Sunday, Sept. 11: Pitch 2 Due at 11:45 p.m.

Week four, Sept. 15:
Class Activities:
   a. Divide Class up into Group A and B for Story 1 Critique on Sept. 20.
   b. Lecture. Ethics and Excellence in Journalism: this will be subject of a test on Sept. 29.
   c. Discuss Story 2 ideas, primarily to see if anyone has any ideas, suggestions, sources.

Sunday, Sept. 18, 11:45 p.m.: Story 1 Due to Steve & Your Group

Week five, Sept. 22:
   a. Peer Editing Story 1 Group A
   b. Peer Editing Story 1 Group B.

Sunday, Sept. 25: Pitch 3 Due at 11:45 p.m. to Steve and Class.

Week Six, Thursday, Sept. 29:
Class Activities:
   b. Following the Paper Trail
   c. Discuss a few Pitch 3 memos.

Friday, Sept. 30 @ 11:45 pm. – Story 1 Revision Is Due

Week seven, Oct. 6
   - Reading Assignment – “Shipbreakers”
   a. Lecture – Interviewing I - Introduction.
   b. Briefly check on progress on Speech Story Due Oct. 20

Week eight, Oct. 13 – Meeting Story Due @ 11:45 p.m. [Semester Half Over].
   - Lecture: Interviewing II.

Week nine, Oct. 20: Speech Story Due @ 11:45 p.m.
   : Writing - Deconstructing a story – “Shipbreakers”
   : Explain MAP proposal.

Sunday, Oct. 23: Story 2 Due To Me and Your Group at 11:45 p.m.

Week 10, Oct. 27. Peer Editing Story 2: Group A, Then Group B.

Week 11, Nov. 3: Case Study in Narrative Writing and Investigative Reporting

Friday, Nov. 4, Story 2 Revision Due at 11:45 p.m.

Week 12, Nov. 10: To Be Decided

Week 13, Nov. 17: To Be Decided

Week 14, Nov. 24 – Thanksgiving Recess

Tuesday, Nov. 29: Story 3 Due to Steve/Your Group at 11:45 p.m.

Week 15, Dec. 1 Peer Editing: Group A, then Group B.

Week 16, Dec. 8: Wrap-up, Evals.

Sunday, Dec. 11: Story 3 Revision Due @ 11:45 p.m.

Dec. 12: MAP Proposals Due.
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Policies and Procedures

Administrative Home
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall or see the CLAS Student Academic Handbook [www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/index.shtml].

Electronic Communication
University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences. (Operations Manual, III.15.2. Scroll down to k.11.)

Academic Fraud
Plagiarism and any other activities when students present work that is not their own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is a serious matter and is reported to the departmental DEO and to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum. Instructors and DEOs decide on appropriate consequences at the departmental level while the Associate Dean enforces additional consequences at the collegiate level. See the CLAS Student Academic Handbook.

CLAS Final Examination Policies
Final exams may be offered only during finals week. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. Students should not ask their instructor to reschedule a final exam since the College does not permit rescheduling once the semester has begun. Questions should be addressed to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint
Students with a suggestion or complaint should 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.

Accommodations for Disabilities
A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Understanding Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment at www.uiowa.edu/~eod/policies/sexual-harassment-guide/index.html for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather
In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. (Operations Manual, Part IV, 16. See items e, h, and i.)

*These policy and procedural statements have been summarized from the web pages of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and University of Iowa Operations Manual.

The Iowa Dozen
As one of more than 104 programs in journalism and mass communication accredited by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC), we must assess student learning to assure that each of our graduates meets the following standards.

**We learn to ...**
1. Write correctly, clearly and well.
2. Conduct research and gather information responsibly.
3. Edit and evaluate carefully.
4. Use media technologies thoughtfully.
5. Apply statistical concepts accurately.

**We value ...**
6. Free speech and First Amendment principles for all individuals and groups.
7. A diverse global community.
8. Creativity and independence.

**We explore ...**
10. Theories and concepts.
11. The history, structure and economy of media institutions.
12. The role of media in shaping cultures.