Specialized Reporting & Writing: Profiles

019:120:0002
The University of Iowa
School of Journalism & Mass Communication

Instructor: Heather Spangler

Location: W340 AJB

Time: 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays

Office Hours: By appointment before or after class.

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319-384-0845
*Email is the best way to reach me—my voicemail goes unchecked for days.

Course Overview:
Whether their subject is a politician, an athlete, a musician, or someone less accustomed to the limelight, profiles offer journalists an opportunity to practice their investigative, observational and creative writing skills. Students in this course will learn the qualities of successful profiles by reading examples of published pieces across several beats and genres.

The course will be divided into five profile styles/topics: folks, newsmakers, athletes, artists and tributes. Each student will sign up to create a polished piece relating to one of the styles/topics. As a final project, each student will also complete an in-depth profile using the first person. But don’t take this to mean that you’ll be kicking back during your “off” weeks: students will complete readings and smaller assignments along the way as well as participate in peer editing workshops.

Prerequisite and requirements:
Students must be journalism majors and have completed 019:098.

Readings:
Susan Orlean’s The Bullfighter Checks her Makeup is on order for you at Prairie Lights bookstore, 15 S. Dubuque St.
Other readings can be found on our course ICON site.

**Suggested Texts and materials:**

- *The Associated Press Stylebook*
- *Naming the World and other Exercises for the Creative Writer*, edited by Bret Anthony Johnston
- *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*, but Bonnie Stone and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater
- Reporters’ notebooks
- A folder or binder

**Major Written Assignments:**

Additional details about assignments will be given in a timely manner, but here is the gist:

**Folks:** These are profiles about ordinary people. Profiles of this type require you to incorporate your observational skills and creative writing. Readers should finish reading your piece and feel like they’ve just hung out with the person you have written about. They should also understand why and how this person came to be the subject of your piece.

**Newsmakers:** Who is the person behind the headlines? A profile about a newsmaker brings a human face to issues and gives a new, often more nuanced perspective on top stories. Newsmaker profiles incorporate hard news details and investigative reporting along with creative writing.

**Athletes:** Why do people love sports? Emotional highs and lows, successes and failures, good v. evil, a feeling of belonging, money v. love of the game….that’s what they’ll love about your profiles about athletes, too.

**Artists:** How can you describe a song or a painting or a dance in words? It’s kind of like trying to describe a human being with words, eh? Profiles about artists require an eye for detail and vivid description.

**Tributes:** It may sound depressing, but some of the best profiles out there are actually obituaries. Many publications collect obituaries of prominent figures in advance of their deaths, so that they’ll be ready when that day comes. Obituaries require research and a more complete look at a person’s life than you would write for a traditional profile.
**Important note:** For each article you turn in, you must *document* the reporting process in an appendix that includes: a reporting log with time, place and subjects of all research, observation and interviewing sessions (whether in person, by phone or by e-mail); list of people consulted or interviewed, with complete contact information; bibliography of any printed and web materials and other references or data sources consulted. You must be prepared to produce complete notes (and, if used, audio recordings) as well.

**Grading:**

- 99-100% A+  
- 88-89% B+  
- 78-79% C+  
- 68-69% D+

- 94-98% A  
- 84-87% B  
- 74-77% C  
- 63-67% D

- 90-93% A-  
- 80-83% B-  
- 70-73% C-  
- 60-62% D-

**Attendance:**
I aim to make each meeting essential and meaningful, so please plan to attend every session or risk missing out on something important. You cannot be successful in this class if you are not consistently present and prepared. Out of respect for your classmates and our schedule, please also arrive on time and stay for the entire class period. Failing to do so may impact your grade.

Students who must miss class are accountable for all material presented and assignments given during their absence. It is your responsibility to communicate with me to see what you need to know for the next session and to turn in any work that was due during the missed class period prior to the next meeting. If this is not accomplished, the work will be considered late.

**Late work:**
As journalists, it’s essential that you respect and meet deadlines with no exceptions. I will accept late work only in extreme circumstances, including an utterly debilitating illness or a documented family crisis. It is important that you communicate with me as soon as possible if you feel you will miss turning in an assignment and provide adequate documentation to prove your given excuse. Late work will be marked down 20 percent for each day it is late. I will not accept any late work more than three days past its due date.

**The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Policies:**

**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].
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.

Making a Suggestion or Complaint
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.

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.)

Course Objectives/The Iowa Dozen:
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.

Schedule:

**Week 1: Intros**
Tuesday, June 5: Course overview, introductions, profile signup, “What do you want?” exercise.
Thursday, June 7: “Creepers” exercise.

**Week 2: Folks**
Tuesday, June 12: Folks overview.
Wednesday, June 13: Discuss Folks readings.
Wednesday, June 14: Folks workshop.

**Week 3: Athletes**
Tuesday, June 19: Folks profiles due. Athletes overview.
Wednesday, June 20: Discuss Athletes readings.
Thursday, June 21: Athletes workshop.

**Week 4: Artists**
Tuesday, June 26: Athletes profiles due. Artists overview.
Wednesday, June 27: Discuss Artists readings.
Thursday, June 28: Artists workshop. Discuss holiday assignment.

**Week 5: Newsmakers**
Tuesday, July 3: NO CLASS. Assignment: Write event vignette profiles.
Wednesday, July 4: NO CLASS
Thursday, June 5: Turn in holiday assignment. Discuss newsmakers readings.

**Week 6: Tributes**
Tuesday, July 10: Tributes overview.
Wednesday, July 11: Discuss Tributes readings.
Thursday, July 12: Tributes workshop.

**Week 7: First Person**
Tuesday, July 17: Tribute profiles due. First Person overview.
Wednesday, July 18: Discuss First Person readings.
Thursday, July 19: In-class work day.

**Week 8: Finals Week**
Tuesday, July 24: Workshop final profiles (Group 1)
Wednesday, July 25: Workshop final profiles (Group 2)
Thursday, July 26: Turn in final profile and portfolio.

*Please note that this is a tentative schedule. Unplanned opportunities and challenges may require changes.*