Specialized Writing and Reporting: Video Games and Communication 019:120:SCC

Tuesdays & Thursdays – 5:30pm-7:20pm – W336 AJB

The University of Iowa – School of Journalism & Mass Communication

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Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30-5, Wednesday 10:00-11:30

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Course Description

This is a writing course about a subject that deserves scholarship: video games. Specifically, it is the aim of the class to teach students to write about video games and electronic media as part of their professional development as journalists. The course places emphasis on games as an area of media studies scholarship, and applies the teachings of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication to a previously unexamined area. It also involves a humanistic, theoretical, and critical approach to writing news stories and journalistic work on video games.

Video games have emerged as a successful entertainment medium, becoming a $74 billion industry with widespread reach over growing audiences. But so little is truly known or explored about this phenomenon within the academy, and fewer still focus on the ways that journalism can meaningfully cover the games industry. For this class, we will explore how journalism affects the video game industry and the persons involved in it. We will also discuss how digital games are effective in their engagement, and how they function as a means of transmission of cultural and social norms and ideas. The aim of this class is to expand the teachings of the School of Journalism & Mass Communication by applying the lessons you have learned to the subject of video games. It will then delve into critical thought towards how video games function as communication of narratives, social ideas, cultural norms, and gendered, racial, and sexual dimensions. Students are expected to be able to write meaningfully and effectively about digital games from a critical-cultural evaluative framework. By doing this, you will also be able to develop writing skills of effective critics, skills that are required for today’s technological and cultural journalists and bloggers.
Required Texts (all available at Prairie Lights, located in downtown Iowa City at 15 South Dubuque Street)

*All Your Base Are Belong to Us: How Fifty Years of Video Games Conquered Pop Culture* by Harold Goldberg. ISBN-13: 978-0307463555


Other required readings will be posted on the ICON site and weekly e-mails. These will range from academic journal articles to news stories by reporters to links written by designers and reporters. All of these will contribute to the goal of the class, which is to create better video game writers and reporters.

Course Expectations

As a student enrolled in this class, you are expected to do the following:

- Use the writing skills you have learned in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication to create meaningful content and reporting
- Bring an open mind and critical perspective to the course materials and class discussions
- Read the assigned readings BEFORE class. This will affect your grade and enjoyment of this class
- Post required feedback to the ICON discussion board by the beginning of the week
- Complete assignments in a timely fashion

As your instructor, you can and should expect me to do the following:

- Provide stimulating and informative course materials
- Actively facilitate class and online discussions
- Post assignments and readings on the web in a timely fashion
- Provide extra readings to the class if you suggest them or think that they would extend the class’s learning in some way
- Give feedback on assignments in a timely fashion

Rules and Regulations

**Classroom conduct:**

No inappropriate classroom behavior will be tolerated. This is a class about video games and how they can be effective, but also how they can be fun and useful. I expect that you will treat this class as an opportunity for professional development and engaged learning, not as your personal recess period. In this class, “inappropriate behavior” includes talking on cell phones, texting, surfing the Internet, and talking to other students during class.
Turn off ringers and beepers (or anything else that makes noise) before the class starts. If you feel the need to sleep, update Facebook, or read the newspaper, you may as well not come to class.

**Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes:**

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

**Course Assignments**

All work must be completed on time to be eligible for full credit.

100 points total

- Attendance and In-Class Participation – 15 points
- Weekly Reading Responses – 10 points
- Weekly Play Log and Feature Responses – 20 points
- EPX Studios Interview – 10 points
- My IGN Accounts – 15 points
- In-Class Presentation – 10 points
- Final Paper – 1000-1500 words – 20 points

**Attendance and In-Class Participation – 15 points**

Attendance is mandatory for every class. If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to play and participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class we may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the class meeting, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by one minute, you are late and I will mark you as late, which affects your standing in this class.

Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your credit for the class.
If you have 3 or more unexcused absences, you’ll automatically lose 5% of your final grade.
If you have 5 or more unexcused absences, you’ll automatically lose 10% of your final grade.

If you know you are going to miss class because of an emergency (death in the family, severe illness), you need to let me know ahead of time via email, if you can, and we can make any necessary arrangements. If you miss class for medical reasons, I will need a doctor’s note from you in order to be excused. And if you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes and see me in order to make up missed work so you do not lose too much credit on an assignment.

Preparedness and participation forms a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Again, negative participation will hurt your participation grade.

Participation is determined by
1. your respectful presence in class,
2. your willingness to discuss, comment, and ask questions,
3. your preparation for class, which includes bringing required materials to class and doing all of the assigned reading for class,
4. your engagement in group work and play,
5. and your interactions with the instructor and other students.

Finally, failure to turn in homework, incomplete assignments, or late papers will negatively impact your participation grade.

Writing Assignments

The goal of the class is to provide you with the skills necessary to work in video game journalism and related fields. Our assignments are set up for you to encounter the video game journalism industry by giving you a portfolio of work that you can expand upon for future job opportunities.

Weekly Reading Responses – 10 points (Beginning in Week 2)

Every week you will be reading the assigned readings. However, I also want you to respond to these readings. Starting in the first week, you will select readings from the syllabus and create a response to them to submit to the ICON dropbox. In this response (200-400 words, no more than 1 page; 12 point-font, double-spaced), you will explain the main point of the article and how it contributes to a greater understanding of video games as journalism. Don’t summarize the article. Instead, construct a small op-ed or feature about the reading, explaining its contribution to gaming journalism.
For example: Do you agree or disagree with the point that the writer is making? What is something that you feel is missing or should be explored? How well-written is the piece? What are some of its strengths and/or weaknesses? You can locate the article and Google similar pieces on websites (IGN, GameSpot, Gamasutra, Kotaku, Destructoid, The Escapist and Eurogamer to name a pitifully small few…), then see how the article compares. That may be an easier way of looking at this material.

Both the responses and the comments need to be meaningful. If you are not doing the reading, it is very easy to spot in your work, and your points will be lowered for this reason. Meaningful and thoughtful contributions are always appreciated, and good writers and critics will always provide these types of writing in future job assignments.

Weekly Play Log and Feature Responses – 20 points (worth 2 points each; must do AT LEAST 10 feature responses for maximum credit)

(Beginning in Week 3, with preview coverage and impressions) (Separate sheet given for detailed instruction of play logs)

You will be required to keep a weekly play log, or "plog." These "play logs" are more than just summaries or personal reactions. These logs are your notes that you take when playing or watching video games. Every week, select a video game and examine how the video game works.

(This can form the basis for your story, and you could even take one of these plogs and turn it into your final project if you so choose)

Once you have collected your “plog” details for the week, go back and look through your play logs and generate a short response (1-2 pages, or roughly 300-500 words) to what you have seen, experienced, and played. These responses will take the form of any one of the following types of writing:

- Game Review
- News Report
- Op-Ed
- Game Preview

*You will turn this response in at the beginning of class each Tuesday.* By the end of the semester, you will have practiced and performed what it means to be a games journalist through these short informative pieces.

These feature responses are where you take the formats and styles you’ve learned about writing for this class, and incorporate them into your writing. For example, if you’re writing a game op-ed piece, you could consider the following:

- What does the game do with genre? Narrative genre? Gaming genre? Does the game do anything new, or is it familiar?
- How does the game’s narrative connect to the game’s mechanics?
- Do the mechanics of the game add to or detract from the game experience? Why?
Is there a connection between the game and the broader social and cultural context?
Does the game tell us something about race, gender, sexuality, or another social/cultural issue or idea?
What is the game arguing?

Note: You do not have to buy the latest videogame console or title for these “play logs” and close playing responses to count. I encourage you to note any game that you play for these logs because the skill here isn’t designed around the game you play, but rather how well you discuss this playing method. The game can be as simple as Tetris, Angry Birds or Cut the Rope, or as complex as Starcraft, World of Warcraft, or Portal. Whether it’s a Flash game on your computer, a game on your smartphone, or Call of Duty on your Xbox 360 is irrelevant; what matters is the quality of writing and analysis you create. I will select a few of these “plogs” each week and their discussion will make up the latter part of the next class.

If you are looking for a variety of free games that would fit within the context of the class, I can recommend you games from the following links:
- http://mashable.com/2012/01/10/free-classic-video-games/
- http://www.addictinggames.com/

Create a MyIGN Account and Post Weekly – 15 points

This semester, The University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication is teaming up with IGN for Video Games and Communication. As the world’s leading video games media company, IGN will draw from its 13 years of experience covering games and lend the expertise of its professional editorial staff to help add a real-world perspective to the course. This is a unique opportunity that you have here.

In the first week of class, we’ll be constructing a MyIGN account for you. In this account, I want you to repost your weekly feature responses. You may also post about things that you have learned in this course, along with games and other content you have been exposed to in this class. You may also post blogs about other games on this site. You can even link to videos of your work or the work of others on this site.

Unlike ICON, this is a public forum as well, so I will be grading your content here based on how you present yourself. Since you are expected to be professional journalists/writers in some form, you are to conduct yourself with professionalism and decorum because this is a public site. You do not have to use your full name in your username, but I would like
to see you responding to any comments made on your posts. I will follow and comment
myself, and I will also be posting self-created content here throughout the semester.

Developer Interview – EPX Studios – 15 points – Due Thursday, October 11

The University of Iowa is lucky enough to have a student organization dedicated to visual
arts and video game production. EPX Studio (formally AIUI) is a student organization
that develops different media like video games, animations, websites, product design,
robotics, and whatever else their members are interested in. For this assignment, I want
you to choose a member of EPX and interview them about their projects. I want to see
how it intersects with video games, and I want to see how the interview utilizes class
concepts.

In-Class Presentation – 10 points

In Week 13 (right before Thanksgiving break), you will be required to present for 5-10
minutes on a video game that will form the basis of your final paper. In this presentation,
I want to hear what you have to say about the game you are reviewing, previewing, or
discussing. Remember, intelligent reporting and writing will be what separates you from
other journalists looking to break into this industry, so make sure that you present your
ideas to us very neatly. The whole class will be providing feedback to you for the
purposes of strengthening your final paper (see below).

Final Paper – 20 points

Due Friday, December 7 at 5:00 in ICON Dropbox and E305 Adler Journalism
Building.

For this paper, I want you to select a game that you have already played before. It can be
something that you have played before this class or during the semester, but you have to
have experience with the game. You will be asked to sign up for a game during the eighth
week of class. You cannot select the game if another student in the class has already
selected it.

In this paper, I want you to construct a review of a game, or a larger feature on an
existing or upcoming title. You may also choose to perform a feature or a review on a
local video game developer’s product (e.g. EPX Studios). For example, you could choose
to focus on an aspect of a video game that you find needs greater examination (e.g. the
representation of race as a potential problem in Resident Evil 5), or explore how a
developer or video game designer creates or constructs their games. You could even
conduct an interview with a person who develops games or is involved with the video
game industry.

The review or feature should be 1000-1500 words in length, and should clearly
incorporate class concepts and formatting.
You may also create a more interesting approach to this story. If you choose to create a video presentation of your work, it must follow the guidelines and style formats covered in week nine in class.

You will be graded based on the quality of the work. Given that this is the final project in this class, this should utilize the tools of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication to be a publishable work. I want this project to be an entry into a portfolio of work that you will take with you to any prospective employers in the video game industry. I also want to see an individual, distinctive voice emerge with this work.

Follow-Up – Gaming and You – To be turned in with final paper – 5 points

This is a 1-2 page summary of your experiences in this class. You will benefit from having your personal reference inventory from the beginning of the semester in hand when you are writing this. What are some of the practical implications of your experiences in this class? What did you learn in this class that you could contribute to your other academic experiences? Was there anything you wish we had covered in greater detail? This is an overview of what you have learned, so be honest with yourself and with me about this.
**Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Assignment Dates**

*Note: These are subject to change at instructor’s discretion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Schedule</th>
<th>Topic/Theme</th>
<th>Readings (always read before lecture that day)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, August 21</td>
<td>Go over Syllabus; meet EPX Studios; create My IGN accounts</td>
<td>first readings due by next class</td>
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❖ Goldberg, *All Your Base Are Belong to Us*, Introduction (pg. ix-xiv)  
❖ Bissell, *Extra Lives*, Author’s Note (pg. xi-xiv), & Chapter 1 “Fallout” (pg. 3-14),  
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<th>Weekly Schedule</th>
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| Tuesday, August 28 | News: Following a Beat, Telling the Whole Story | First assigned reading responses due  
Dead Space 3 – focus on how the story is told about the game.  
- [http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/09/dead-space-3-allegedly-features-co-op](http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/09/dead-space-3-allegedly-features-co-op)  
- [http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/30/dead-space-3-logo-first-screenshot-appear-online](http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/30/dead-space-3-logo-first-screenshot-appear-online)  
- [http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/31/more-dead-space-3-screenshots-leaked](http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/31/more-dead-space-3-screenshots-leaked)  
- [http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/31/e3-2012-ea-confirms-dead-space-3](http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/31/e3-2012-ea-confirms-dead-space-3) |
| Thursday, August 30 | Previews and Op-Eds | Previews  
- [http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/07/18/dota-2-power-without-the-](http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/07/18/dota-2-power-without-the-) |
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<th>Op-Eds</th>
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<td>grind <a href="http://games.ign.com/articles/121/1210801p1.html">http://games.ign.com/articles/121/1210801p1.html</a></td>
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<td>Op-Eds <a href="http://www.1up.com/previews/god-war-ascension-preview">http://www.1up.com/previews/god-war-ascension-preview</a></td>
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<td>Op-Eds <a href="http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/30/opinion-what-the-hell-is-with-that-hitman-trailer">http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/05/30/opinion-what-the-hell-is-with-that-hitman-trailer</a></td>
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<td>Tuesday, September 11</td>
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<td>Thursday, September 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, September 18</td>
<td>Features Discussing Writing About Games</td>
<td>❖ Bissell, Chapter 2, “Headshots” (pg. 17-</td>
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<td>Goldberg, Chapter 4, “Of Monkeys, Mario, and Miyamoto.” (pg. 56-73)</td>
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<td>Bissell, Chapter 3, “The Unbearable Lightness of Games,” (pg. 33-47)</td>
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<td>Thursday, September 27</td>
<td>Video Games &amp; Violence: How a Hot Topic is Covered in Multiple Ways</td>
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<td>John Constantine, <em>1UP.</em> “Rules of War.” Found at <a href="http://www.1up.com/features/historical-war-influenced-game-design">http://www.1up.com/features/historical-war-influenced-game-design</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, October 2</td>
<td>Video Game Violence – Feature Writing</td>
<td>❖ Bissell, Chapter 8, “Far Cries.” (pg. 129-157)</td>
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<td>❖ Bissell, Appendix II, “It’s a Massacre!: The</td>
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<td>Tuesday, October 9</td>
<td>Race Within Games: The Diversity of Video Games, or Lack Thereof</td>
<td>Sign up for games for final paper for class on ICON discussion board</td>
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<td>❖ <a href="http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123672060500987853.html">http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123672060500987853.html</a></td>
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Thursday, October 4

Games as Art – Feature Writing

❖ Goldberg, Chapter 12, “Bioshock: Art for Game’s Sake.” (pg. 184-207)
❖ Bissell, Chapter 6, “Braided.” (pg. 91-103)
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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| Thursday, October 11 | Video Games and Gender; The Female Gamer in Gaming Culture | **Developer Interviews due on ICON and in class**
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<td>Tuesday, October 16</td>
<td>Special Guest Lecturer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, October 18</td>
<td>Special Guest Lecturer</td>
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<td>Samit Sarkar, <em>Destructoid</em>. “Infinity</td>
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- Goldberg, Chapter 10, “Everquest: Orcs, Elves, and a Cast of Thousands,” & Chapter 11, “The Everquest Killer.” (pg. 159-183)ii  
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<th>Weekly Schedule</th>
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❖ L.B. Jeffries,
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| Thursday, November 8    | Gaming and Trauma: How to Deal with Grief and Painful Issues | ❖ Bissell, Chapter 9, “Grand Thefts.” (pg. 159-183)  
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<td>Tuesday, November 13</td>
<td>In-Class Presentations</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Thursday, November 15</td>
<td>In-Class Presentations</td>
<td>None</td>
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Week Fourteen – No Class – Thanksgiving break

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<td>Tuesday, November 27</td>
<td><em>Mass Effect 3 and the Variety of Coverage About It</em></td>
<td>❖ Bissell, Chapter 7, “Mass Effects” (pg. 104-127)</td>
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<td>❖ <a href="http://kotaku.com/5900991/the-better-business-bureau-says-yes-mass-effect-3-was-falsely-advertised">http://kotaku.com/5900991/the-better-business-bureau-says-yes-mass-effect-3-was-falsely-advertised</a></td>
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<td>Thursday, November 29</td>
<td>Covering Technology &amp;</td>
<td>❖ Rob Fahey -</td>
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### Weekly Schedule

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, December 4</td>
<td>Workshopping/The Future</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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Final Papers Due in ICON Dropbox and E305 Adler Journalism Building on Friday, December 7 at 5:00 pm. Any paper turned in at 5:01 pm will lose 10% of their grade.
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.

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 of a final exam 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 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 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. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Public Safety website.

*These CLAS policy and procedural statements have been summarized from the web pages of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and The 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.