SYLLABUS
Interviewing and Storytelling about People, Topics and Trends:
A Depth Reporting and Writing Course
JMC:3405:0002 (19:121:02) – Su2014
School of Journalism & Mass Communication
University of Iowa

Classroom/Period: W340 AJB/ 12:30-3:20 p.m. TWTh
Instructor: Associate Professor Stephen J. Berry
Office Hours: Th., 3:20-6:30; or by appointment, W337 AJB
Contact: stephen-berry@uiowa.edu; office – 335-3331; cell – 319-541-4951.
Textbook: None. Readings - Articles selected to intrigue you and improve your writing.
Summary of main assignments include an in-depth:
1. Public affairs news article OR a news feature story.
2. Feature profile on a newsmaker or about someone with a significant story to tell.
3. Peer-editing workshops
4. Writing analysis

OVERVIEW

In journalism, we live by the old saw that good journalists report the facts “without fear or favor.” That means you question everything and everybody and favor none. You cannot be a good writer and story teller if you are not a good reporter. That starts by learning to be critical thinkers. Critical thinking is a universally useful instinct that, if developed on every interview, will prompt you to think of questions that don’t occur to others, to see what others miss, to look where they don’t and to ask what they fear to ask. Second, it means you must observe and report situations and daily life with a questioning, investigative mentality that makes you curious about what experts and average people from many different walks of life know about your topic. Third, as you conduct your reporting, you must constantly think what will be the best way to tell the story – through writing, visuals [video, photos, maps, graphs or an audio]. The best storytelling presentations usually involve all three.

This course puts a heavy emphasis on interviewing. But, you also will learn that a story based solely on superficial interviews and reaction sound bites is usually pretty squishy. I am going to teach you how to give them substance. In this class, we go for depth, substance and the truth, which means we do not publish quotes that contain lies, false information or distortions, unless you present the facts that reveal the distortions.

As you might imagine, the mental discipline is not merely a professional skill for journalists. It is a life skill. It will equip you to become top-tier job applicants in any profession and fast-trackers in the one you choose.

In the end, I hope I can give you something tangible and useful in helping you find a job – stories worthy of being published on IowaWatch.org, the Daily Iowan or in other news outlets so that you will have stellar clips for your career portfolio and scholarship applications.
Course Activities

You will produce two enterprise stories and present them in whatever format – verbal, visual, audio or a combination – that most effectively tells the story. You will be reporting, writing, editing, rewriting and conducting line-by-line fact-checks on your stories and learn about the performance and ethical standards that major metropolitan news organizations require.

Be prepared to report to the class what efforts and progress you have made at least once a week. Often we can learn as much from efforts that don’t succeed as those that do.

When the stories are complete, you will read and edit each other’s stories outside class so that you can critique them in scheduled class workshops.

In class, I will focus on interviewing and other reporting skills through class discussions, peer-editing workshops, case studies and lecturing. I also will depend on class discussions that you will generate through your weekly verbal progress and effort reports. In those discussions, I want you to comment on the progress and effort reports of your classmates by asking questions or offering suggestions that might be helpful to them. And that means I will be less reliant on lecturing to fulfill my obligation to teach you what I know.

We will do deep analyses of the writing and reporting of award-winning enterprise stories to demonstrate the direct connection between high-quality reporting and superb writing.

Engagement and Attendance

In your future careers, you will very quickly learn the need to discipline yourself to pay attention to and engage with people and in meetings and seminars, even when they are boring. For journalism and communications fields especially, the discipline of paying attention and focusing on events you cover are essential skills set you learn in this class. My job is to evaluate the degree to which you develop that discipline.

If you attend class but cannot answer questions when called upon or when you use class to look at your phones, text, email, use the internet or do anything not related to class activity, you are not engaging. Such behavior is disobeying basic rules of courtesy. Even worse, you are being rude and conveying disrespect for whoever is talking. I will note that in evaluating you engagement and attendance grade.

Attendance is mandatory. I cannot excuse you for making appointments for job interviews, family trips or for classes for other assignments that conflict with our class time. I cannot excuse you for merely feeling bad, forgetting about class. But, I do allow two unexcused absences which you can use for such occurrences. I grant excused absences only for a reporting interview for an assignment in this class, a death in the family, being physically unable to get to a class and suffering a fever or other sickness that could spread to others. Contact classmates to learn details of assignments you miss.
Class Rules

Most class rules are in this syllabus, but sometimes I have to make additional ones over the course of the semester to address unanticipated circumstances. They help me provide a free and open, upbeat and creative learning environment. They require polite behavior and respect for everybody in this classroom. To that end, I require that you:

- Give full-attention to whomever is addressing the class;
- Turn off your phones, unless you have advised me an advance that you are expecting a call-back from a source related to your project;
- Refrain from checking email or social networks, reading newspapers, holding side conversations while another is speaking or doing anything unrelated to what is going on in class;
- If you bring a laptop to class, you may keep it running, but lower the top unless you have it open to a word document for the purpose of taking notes;
- Stories produced for other classes or previous classes cannot be used for this class, without consulting with the instructors from both classes and showing substantial differences;
- Arrive on time (please advise me if a previous class in another building will make you late for this class).

Out-of-Class Requirements

Class preparation time will be in compliance with university guidelines, which say “that for each semester-hour credit in the course, students should spend two hours per week preparing for class sessions.” That equals eight hours a week for this class.

Most of the out-of-class work will involve working on pitch memos, two depth stories and a graded rewrites of each story and critiquing classmates story drafts in preparation for our peer-editing workshops.

For the two stories, the concept of the story and its focus must be firmly and clearly established in the draft. The interviewing and reporting must be complete, although the need for additional reporting inevitably will surface during the peer-editing sessions, and it will be required for the rewrite. The draft also will include a list of almost all complementary visual and audio elements. You will also be expected to think of ways to include video elements, graphics, photographs and audio to assist in making the story appealing to readers, viewers and listeners.

In the final version, you are expected to evaluate the critiques of your classmates, decide what to accept or reject and submit a thoroughly reported, beautifully written story that is clean of all grammar and AP style errors.
Reporting and Writing Assignments
(1,000-point grading scale)

• Pitch memos – 100 points (Story Pitch 1 – 50 points, due May 22; Story Pitch 2 – 50 points, due June 5). Pitch your story idea to me in an email. Include a second idea as a backup in the event your first choice does not get my approval. See Pitch Memo assignment sheet for further details.
• Story 1 – Public Affairs Story or News Feature. 300 points (Draft – 200 points, due June 1; Rewrite – 100 points, due June 12). Word count: 1,000 words or longer. See assignment sheet for details.
• Story 2 – A Newsmaker Profile. 300 points (Draft – 200; due June 15; Rewrite – 100, due June 26). Word count: 850 words or longer.
• In-class Writing Analysis – 100 points.
• In-class Peer-Editing Workshop Critiques – 100 (50 points for each of two)
• Attendance and Engagement – 100 points

Deadlines
Work not turned in by deadline will be accepted at the next class only, but the grade will be reduced by a grade sign, which is the equivalent of 0.33 grade points. The assignment will not be accepted afterwards, and you will get a zero.

Assignment Schedule
Note: If you persuade the Daily Iowan or another publication to publish your story, I will edit your initial version and rewrite before the scheduled deadline to help you get it ready.

A Word about Word Counts
Word counts are guidelines. If your story doesn’t reach the minimum, question whether you adequately covered the issue. Even you have the minimum words but fail to cover key issues or leave questions unanswered, the story will not be considered adequate. Do not try to pad your stories with needless verbiage. I will spend more time judging writing efficiency, accuracy, content and thoroughness than counting words.

Journalism Standards
In this course, you are expected to adhere to the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, the additional ethical standards I list below and to the concepts listed in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication’s Iowa Dozen.

Original Work
All work is expected to be new and original to this class. Students submitting a story to IowaWatch.org, The Daily Iowan or another publication or broadcast outlet, must submit it to this class first, before the editors of that publication have edited it.
Errors, Ethics & Plagiarism

Factual errors, plagiarism and dishonesty are serious matters in journalism.

1) **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. Spelling proper nouns and names incorrectly will reduce the grade by a grade sign.

2) **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.

3) **Conflicts of Interests**: You cannot cover a topic or beat in which you have a personal interest or personal relationship [something that is more than a casual acquaintance] with someone connected to the story. You cannot use your classmates as a 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; always discuss a potential conflict with me.

   Read the SPJ Ethics Code immediately. You are responsible for adhering to it and consulting with me if you confront any situation that may conflict. Not knowing that your conduct was unethical will not be an acceptable excuse.

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

5) **Lifting Quotes**: When you attribute a direct quotation to named sources, you are in effect telling the readers and your instructor that you personally interviewed the source for that story. If you did not and fail to explain where you got the quote, you are deceiving the readers and me and you get an F for the story. You may not use quotes or passages that you wrote for a story or paper in another class without my knowledge and permission.

6) **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.

7) **Iowa Dozen**: In this course, we will address most of the standards in the The Iowa Dozen. The full document is appended below. Here are the parts for this course:
   - We learn to write correctly and clearly; gather information responsibly; edit and evaluate information carefully; use statistics correctly.
   - We value First Amendment principles for individuals and groups; a diverse community; creativity and independence; truth, accuracy, fairness, diversity.
   - Use media technologies thoughtfully.
   - We explore media institutions’ practices and role in shaping cultures.

**Grading Notes**

**Bonus/Penalty for AP Style & Grammar Errors**

If you make five or more AP style or grammar errors on, I will reduce your grade by three points. However, if you make two or less such errors, I will raise your grade 3 points. Common AP Style and Grammar errors are in my “Writing Basics” handout.
Grading the Draft

The grade on the draft will be based on whether you have completed most of the necessary reporting – about 80 percent – and the writing. I will evaluate diction, syntax, story structure, transitions, grammar and AP Style. It should be as close to publication ready.

Grading the Rewrite

Your rewrite must reflect substantive improvement over the initial version. You must complete the reporting and polish the writing and conduct a line by line fact check. In the rewrites, you are responsible for correcting all reporting, writing, AP Style and grammar errors, including those not caught on the first editing process. You must attach a list of document sources, provide copies or valid links [if the link you provide does not provide the information, you have not fulfilled this requirement] and human sources with contact information.

General Grading Criteria

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 The Daily Iowan, IowaWatch.org or another newspaper or magazine, online or broadcast on television. The 1,000-point grading scale attached below is tied to the university’s 4-point grading system, with the maximum grade equaling 4.0. I will use plus or minus signs.

Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>10 Pts</th>
<th>25 pts</th>
<th>40 pts</th>
<th>50 Pts</th>
<th>100 Pts-10%</th>
<th>150 Pts-15%</th>
<th>250 Pts-25%</th>
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<td>38-40</td>
<td>48-50</td>
<td>95.6-100</td>
<td>143-150</td>
<td>239-250</td>
<td>956-1000</td>
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<td>36.5-37.5</td>
<td>45-47.5</td>
<td>89.6-95.5</td>
<td>135-142</td>
<td>224-238.75</td>
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<td>35.5-36</td>
<td>44-44.5</td>
<td>87.6-89.5</td>
<td>131-134</td>
<td>219-223.75</td>
<td>876-895</td>
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<td>33.5-35</td>
<td>42-43.5</td>
<td>83.6-87.5</td>
<td>125-130</td>
<td>209-218.75</td>
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<td>31.5-33</td>
<td>40-41.5</td>
<td>79.6-83.5</td>
<td>120-124</td>
<td>199-208.75</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>30.5-31</td>
<td>39-39.5</td>
<td>77.6-79.5</td>
<td>115-118</td>
<td>194-198.75</td>
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<td>29.5-30</td>
<td>37-38.5</td>
<td>73.6-77.5</td>
<td>110-114</td>
<td>184-193.75</td>
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<td>27.5-29</td>
<td>35-36.5</td>
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<td>34-34.5</td>
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<td>63.6-67.5</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>25-29.5</td>
<td>49.6-59.5</td>
<td>76-89</td>
<td>124-148</td>
<td>496-595</td>
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Letter Grade Criteria
The point system is keyed to letter grades. The general criteria for grades 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 [0.67-1.33]** – 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 could become useable with a reasonable amount of rewriting and more reporting. It lacks focus and clarity, fails to cover several obvious questions and does not use all of the basic sources.

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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 Honesty**
All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies 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 register with Student Disability Services and meet with the course instructor to make arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

**Understanding Sexual Harassment**
Sexual harassment subverts the University mission 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. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.

*These policies and procedures are 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.
CLASS SCHEDULE
Summer 2014

WEEK I
May 20, Tuesday.

Homework: Story pitches due Thursday, May 22, at 11:45 p.m.
~ Before 11:45 p.m., Thursday, obtain my approval for your Story idea 1 either via email or a 10-minute chat. Before you ask me about your idea, you must do a clip search (see handout) to see whether any story has been written about it within the last three years.
~ Begin the reporting (gathering information) for your story.

Class Activities Session 1:
# Introductions
# Overview of course.
# Distribute Syllabus and Review a few Key Elements.
# Go Over Daily Class Activities.
   a. Deadlines and details
   b. Distribute “How to do a Clip Search.”
   c. Distribute Pitch Memo details.
#Introduce reference source – Shorenstein Center Media, Politics and Public Policy website at http://journalistsresource.org/ as a source for ideas, information, neutral studies on topics.

Class Activities Session 2
1.) “Story Judgment: Is My Story Idea Newsworthy?”
3. Finding, Choosing and Developing Stories Ideas
4. Analyze News Story for Story Leads. See Press-Citizen Clips: Molester, Cat Disease
5. Resume working on story ideas: do final 2.
6. If time permits, Begin Interviewing and the Reporting Process – the next steps.

May 21, Wednesday

Homework: Story Pitches due to me at tomorrow 11:45 p.m. by email.

Class Activities Session 1.
1. Writing Basics Lesson 1 (10 minutes)
2. News Critique
3. Story Idea discussion
4. Tips for Story : Focus on Tips for Finding Story Ideas

Class Activities Session 2.
1. How depth reporting differs from routine reporting: Discussion/Comparison of two stories on a boring but important story: one is the right way and the other is the wrong way – what are the differences?

May 22, Thursday

Homework: Story Pitches due to me at today 11:45 p.m. by email.

Class Activities, Session 1
1.) Writing Basics Lesson 2
2.) News Review Follow-ups
3.) Making Your Story Ideas Your Own
4.) Progress reports on story ideas
WEEK II

May 27, Tuesday

Homework for Wednesday: Story 1 verbal progress reports; draft due June 1 at 11:45

Class Activities Session:
1.) Writing Basics Lesson
2.) Story analysis
3.) Comparing depth reporting vs routine reporting
4.) Interviewing – Getting the Interview
5.) Interviewing – Quarters for the Quote Machine
6.) Filing a public records request

May 28, Wednesday

Homework: Story 1 verbal progress reports; draft due June 1 at 11:45

Class Activities:
1.) Writing Basics
2.) News review
3.) Verbal story progress reports
5.) Jaquiss case study

May 29, Thursday.

Homework for June 1: Story 1 due to me, classmates at 11:45 p.m.

Homework for June 3: Read, Edit and write editing notes in margins or electronically. Submit it to me for grading and to the author.

Homework for June 5: For those who have not completed a complete Story 2 Pitch Memo, submit it by June 5, Thursday by class time: 12:30 p.m.

Class Activities:
1.) Writing Basics
2.) News review
3.) Verbal story progress reports
4.) Jaquiss case study.

Week III

June 1, Sunday: Story 1 due, 11:45 p.m. to me, classmates.

June 3, Tuesday:

Homework for Wednesday: Read and edit with notes in margins of printout or electronically; submit them to me and the writer.

Homework for Thursday: Story 2 Pitch Memo, submit it by class time: 12:30 p.m.

Class Activity:
1.) Writing Basics
2.) Review Quotable Quotes; hard news lead; soft news lead – Paula Roche Progress reports on story 1 drafts to be peer edited Wednesday
3.) Finish Jaquiss if necessary
4.) William Zinsser on “Word Clutter”
5.) Word clutter exercise.
6.) William Zinsser on “On Writing Well”
7.) Spin and jargon
8.) The ferry boat – The two-day investigation.
June 4, Wednesday

Homework for June 5: For those who have not completed a complete Story 2 Pitch Memo, submit by class time, 12:30 p.m., tomorrow.

Class Activities: Peer Editing Workshop

June 5, Thursday.

Homework for June 10: Read the Knob Creek Story - “Owners’ Numbers are Small, but Impact is Powerful;” A Case Study in cultural trends reporting.

Class Activities:
1) Wrap up ferry boat Story
2) Discuss Story 2 Pitches Memos.
3) News Review if time permits

Week IV

June 10, Tuesday.

Homework for June 12 – Story 1 Final is due at 11:45 p.m.

Class Activity:
1.) News Review
2.) Finer Points of Writing
3.) Discussion: The Knob Creek Story - “Owners’ Numbers are Small.
4.) If time permits, Elements of Profile – Hooking the Reader, Background, Gratuitous Praise
5.) If needed, Case Study of a People Profile- “Sean Savage” by Holly James.”

June 11, Wednesday.

Homework for June 15: Story 2 Draft 2 due.

Class Activity:
1.) Final Questions of Story 1 – Let students discuss each others first five paragraphs.
2.) Case Study in Profile Writing: “After the Cheering Stops.”

June 12, Thursday.

Homework for June 15: Story 2 drafts due at 11:45.

Homework for June 18: Read and classmates stories in writing – handwritten editing notes in margins or electronic editing; submit notes to me and to the author in class.

Class Activities:
1.) Verbal progress reports and discussion of reporting efforts.
2.) Begin Case Study in Profile and Narrative Writing: “The Meaning of Work”

Week V

June 17, Tuesday.

Homework for June 18: Read and classmates stories in writing – handwritten editing notes in margins or electronic editing; submit notes to me and to the author in class

Class Activities:
1.) Finish “The Meaning of Work.”
2.) Read & Discuss “After a Life Full of Violence, Harris Goes Peacefully,” A Case Study in Observational Reporting.

June 18, Wednesday.

Class Activity: Peer Editing Workshops
June 19, Thursday:

Class Activity:
1.) Read & Discuss “A Visitation of Evil,” A Case Study on Writing About the Character of a Community.”
2.) Read & Discuss Aftermath of Columbine Reveal an Rural-Urban Divide.

Week VI

June 24, Tuesday.

Homework for June 26: Story 2 Final is Due at 11:45 p.m.

Class Activities:
1.) Verbal progress and effort reports and discussion.
2.) Read & Discuss “The Good Soldiers” by David Finkel “The Good Soldiers"

June 25, Wednesday.

Class Activities:
1) Finish “The Good Soldiers.”
2) Final Questions of Story 1 – Let students discuss each others first five paragraphs.

June 26, Thursday.

Homework: Submit Final Version today at 11:45 p.m.

Class Activities:
1.) Review with focus on writing on recurring writing mistakes.
2.) Wrap-up
3.) ACE Review.