Specialized Reporting and Writing (JMC: 3400:003)
Spring 2016
W340 Adler Journalism Building (AJB)
10:30 a.m.-12:20 p.m. TTh

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Office location and hours: W343 AJB, 1:30-2 p.m. Monday; 12:30-2 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday; and by appointment.
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Course description: Specialized Reporting and Writing is a 4-credit-hour course in which students focus on a topic or genre as they practice a variety of writing and research skills needed in the professional communications industry. The prerequisites for this course are Journalistic Reporting and Writing (JMC: 2010) and Introduction to Multimedia Storytelling (JMC: 2020). Lectures, discussions and assignments in Specialized Reporting and Writing will build on the basics learned in the pre-requisite courses and prepare students for advanced coursework in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

This section (JMC: 3400:003) will focus on the topic of higher education. Students will complete the following major assignments: an issue story, a personality profile, their choice of a how-to story or trend story, their choice of an opinion piece or fine arts review, a public affairs story and a sixth story from the category of their choice other than opinion or review. The sixth story could be a breaking news story if the opportunity arises or a category not listed here with the approval of the instructor. Stories will be based on campus life and issues at the University of Iowa. Ideas may be drawn from national issues in higher education but will be explored at the local level.

Students will be expected to conduct interviews, research, self-editing and peer-editing that produce professional-level work. They are encouraged to submit the work for publication in any credible journalism venue. Work that is not used by outside publications will be posted to students’ individual WordPress sites.

Required reading:
- The Chronicle of Higher Education
- The New York Times
- The Des Moines Register
- The Daily Iowan
- Other readings assigned throughout the semester

The Associated Press Stylebook may be purchased in print, or the online version may be used. Students also will have access to a shared online account for the AP Stylebook. The newspapers may be read online or in print. Other readings will be posted on ICON. Assigned readings should be completed before the related class sessions.
The New York Times (nytimes.com) and the Des Moines Register (desmoinesregister.com) are available in vending machines around campus and are accessible to students using their ID cards. Both newspapers have limited access on the open Internet. They are available through the Proquest, Factiva and LexisNexis databases.

The Chronicle of Higher Education is available at the main library and can be accessed at http://chronicle.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/section/Home/5.

SJMC Learning Outcomes

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication is committed to your academic and professional success. In line with this commitment, we have identified particular learning outcomes that every student should obtain by the time they earn a JMC degree. We regularly assess the curriculum to determine whether students are achieving these outcomes. This course contributes to these learning outcomes by helping you develop the abilities to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages across multiple media domains and to communicate effectively with the highest, professionally-accepted standards in all work. Achieving these outcomes means:

- You will demonstrate an ability to anticipate and recognize ethical issues when they arise and to reason through them taking multiple perspectives and contexts into account.
- You will develop critical thinking skills to analyze and interpret media messages through an understanding of media practices and institutions.
- You will learn how to create and disseminate media messages in various forms.
- You will demonstrate the ability to gather factual story elements, and to evaluate and express them in logical, narrative forms for multiple media and audiences.
- You will display the ability to access and analyze data, report facts accurately, research and edit information responsibly and in a manner commensurate with professional standards.
- You will demonstrate the ability to apply above concepts in a manner that is sensitive to audiences across all media.
- You will demonstrate an ability to work with members of diverse groups to engage publicly over issues of community interest.

Course-specific objectives:

By the end of this course students will demonstrate:

- The ability to use journalistic techniques in writing.
- The ability to communicate effectively.
- The ability to research and gather information.
- An understanding of the elements of news.
- An understanding of ethical and professional standards of journalism.
- An appreciation for journalism’s role in democracy and society in general.
- An ability to meet deadlines.
Course requirements: All assignments, quizzes and exams are designed to support the learning objectives listed above.

- Students will complete six major writing assignments. The first five assignments are worth 100 points each, and the sixth assignment is worth 200 points. Rubrics will be used to grade each of these assignments, and students will choose the order in which they write each assignment. To ensure that students put forth a good effort for their first draft, the instructor will give stories an initial grade that can be raised by up to 10 points (one letter grade) after revision but not to exceed 100 points. The sixth assignment may be raised up to 20 points through revision, not to exceed 200 points.

Students will seek to have their work published or will post the stories to their WordPress sites. The final drafts of the stories must be turned in to the instructor for grading before they are submitted for publication elsewhere; however, students will not receive grades on the projects until after the they have been accepted for publication or posted to WordPress. Points for the major assignments will total 700.

- Class attendance and participation are required. The class meets 30 times during the semester. Students will be eligible for up to five participation points each class period. They will automatically receive 1 point for arriving to class on time. The remaining 4 points will be awarded based on preparation for class demonstrated by asking relevant questions, making constructive comments and participating in exercises that aren’t graded separately. Students will be allowed to miss one class period without losing participation points until the last week of regular classes (in other words, the “free” absence should be used on or before April 28, if at all). See the “missed assignment policy” later in this section for information on making up missed work. Participation points for the semester will total 150.

- Ten in-class exercises will be collected randomly during the semester and will be worth 10 points each. In-class exercises will total 100 points.

If a speaker is scheduled, class attendance will be required. Attendance that day will count as one of the 10 point in-class assignments, and students will only receive the full 10 points if they arrive in class on time, pay attention and engage with the speaker.

- Pop quizzes worth 5 points each will be given randomly throughout the semester during 10 class sessions. The quizzes will cover current events and assigned readings and will total 50 points for the semester.

Summary of points:
Major assignments: 700 points (70 percent)
Attendance and participation: 150 points (15 percent)
In-class exercises: 100 points (10 percent)
Quizzes: 50 points (5 percent)
Total: 1,000 points

Academic honesty and grading: Professional communication is fact-based. Aside from selected mock assignments given by the instructor, students’ work will be original and factual. The instructor may check sources used by students to ensure the sources had been contacted and were quoted accurately. Plagiarism and fabrication are treated with the utmost seriousness
in professional workplaces and will be regarded the same way for this course. Any student who plagiarizes or fabricates information will receive a “zero” on the assignment and will be reported to the college for further disciplinary action. See the paragraph on Academic Honesty in the final section of the syllabus for more information. In addition, collaboration is not permitted unless the instructor gives specific assignments that require teamwork. In situations where students are covering the same event or issue, they must work independently and may not share notes, recordings, or any other material or information related to that assignment. Students who engage in collaboration will receive a “zero” on the assignment.

Students will turn in a log for each major assignment. The log will include the time, date and place of all interviews; contact information including email addresses and phone numbers for all people interviewed; and a bibliography and website addresses for all research used. Students also must produce all notes or recordings upon request. Students must not interview relatives or friends, and instructors may randomly check with sources to inquire about their relationship to the student journalist. The use of relatives or friends as sources is considered an unethical conflict of interest in the field of journalism and will reflect negatively in the student's grade for that assignment.

**Missed assignment policy:** In-class assignments, quizzes and so forth cannot be made up unless the student is attending a University-excused activity or provides a doctor’s note verifying illness. The instructor will not repeat lecture information or in-class announcements. Students who must be absent should arrange to get lecture and discussion notes from classmates. When students are absent for excused activities that are scheduled in advance, they must turn in assignments before the deadlines. Students who provide verification of illness may be allowed an extension on major projects without penalty until the Monday that follows the deadline. Students who miss class for an excused absence may be given up to one week to make up in-class exercises or quizzes. Students should be aware that absences will not be excused for minor illnesses, internships, outside job duties, etc. Because one “free” absence is allowed, other absences will rarely be excused, so plan accordingly. The “free” absence also cannot be used to extend deadlines on the major assignments, and it cannot be used for a class period when a speaker is scheduled.

**Deadline policy:** The ability to meet deadlines is a critical skill in the communications industry and will be strictly enforced in this class. Students will begin losing points immediately after missing the assignment deadline and will lose a full letter grade for each 24-hour period that the assignment is turned in late. After five days, the assignment will not be accepted and the student will receive a “zero” on that assignment.

**Grading:**

- **A** = 93 percent to 100 percent
- **A-** = 90 to 92 percent
- **B+** = 87 percent to 89 percent
- **B** = 83 percent to 86 percent
- **B-** = 80 percent to 82 percent
C+ = 77 percent to 79 percent
C = 73 percent to 76 percent
C- = 70 percent to 72 percent
D = 60 percent to 69 percent
F = 59 percent and below
Percentages will be rounded to the nearest whole number when grades are assigned at the end of the semester.

General expectations

- Complete assigned readings before the lectures.
- Set aside plenty of time to complete projects. Most of the work on the major assignments will be done outside class. For a 4 credit hour course, students should expect to spend at least 8 hours a week working outside class time.
- Stories must be approved by the instructor more than a week before the first draft is due. The sooner you get this approval, the better. This will give you more time for reporting and writing. Well-organized students could theoretically turn in all their story pitches at the beginning of the semester, and as soon as the pitches are approved, get a head start. I will gladly accept completed stories before the listed deadlines.
- Be prepared to share assignments with others in class. Professional writing by its nature is public and subject to scrutiny. Get accustomed to it.
- Do not interview relatives or friends for assignments. Professional communicators must talk with a diverse range of people in a wide variety of situations. Start to develop these skills now.
- Likewise, do not rely on email, texting or other forms of electronic communication for interviews. In-person or, secondly, telephone interviews remain the best methods of obtaining fresh, first-hand information.
- Take notes. You might not believe this, but technology can fail and often does at the most inconvenient times. Good notes are an acceptable back-up to produce written journalism, and they are particularly helpful in deadline reporting.
- Do record interviews along with taking notes, even for stories intended only for print. **Equipment can be checked out** from the equipment room located on the first floor of the Becker Communication Studies Building. This is expensive equipment, and you are responsible for maintaining it when you check it out. To check out equipment for this course, please reserve it by visiting [http://research3.its.uiowa.edu/film/](http://research3.its.uiowa.edu/film/). You must reserve equipment by 8 a.m. on the day you’d like to check it out. You can only reserve equipment for pickup on a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. You can reserve equipment up to two weeks in advance. You must have a valid University of Iowa student ID card to checkout equipment.
- Good writers are voracious readers. Set aside at least 30 minutes a day to read news stories. Along with the New York Times, the Des Moines Register and the Daily Iowan, try Time magazine (time.com), cnn.com and npr.org among others. Reading the professional publications will improve your writing skills and alert you to trends and issues in education that could be used for the major assignments in this class.
Class structure:
This class will operate as a quasi-newsroom with students serving a dual role as reporters and copy editors. The instructor will serve as a managing editor and assignment editor. This process will help students understand the basics of how news is produced, although students should be aware that news operations vary among different media organizations. Nevertheless, the basic procedures tend to be similar, and certain values – such as accuracy and transparency -- are widely shared and worth cultivating, even as media platforms continue to evolve.

In many ways, journalists – and professionals in other communication fields – are never “off duty.” They are constantly observing the people, places and activities that surround them and looking for stories that are interesting or useful for their audience. They are flexible and prepared to change plans with little or no notice. They monitor news at the local, state, national and international level and appreciate good reporting and writing on any topic in any form. They are continuously learning and searching for ways to improve. The structure of this class is aimed at helping students develop this mindset; thus, the requirements to check for reading updates on weekends and evenings, attend events or interviews whenever needed for assignments, come up with story ideas independently and consume news daily.

Class meetings will be a combination of lectures, discussions and hands-on work. As with anything, students who put for the most effort stand to gain the most – not just a good grade but personal and professional development.

Tentative course schedule: The instructor may extend discussion of certain topics if needed for the students’ benefit, or interject discussion of high-profile breaking news stories. Check ICON regularly for updates on assignments.

Readings from newspapers, magazines and news websites will be added each week. Most reading assignments will be posted to ICON the weekend before class, but breaking news stories may be assigned for reading the night before class no later than 9 p.m.

*Students will work with a peer editor in class on Thursdays to prepare their stories for publication and final grading. They should have all questions from the instructor answered before class and be prepared to make further changes identified by their peers. The final draft will be turned in at the end of these class periods. This process is subject to change if the instructor sees that students are not doing their best work before and during these sessions.
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<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1: Jan. 19, 21</strong></td>
<td>Introductions, course overview and syllabus review. Begin discussing issues related to higher education and start brainstorming story ideas. Discuss <strong>interviewing</strong> and <strong>personality profiles</strong>.</td>
<td>Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 2: Jan. 26, 28</strong></td>
<td><strong>Issue stories</strong> Understanding the beat structure of newsrooms. Beats may be assigned to students who have specific interests. Applicable ethical and legal issues will be reviewed.</td>
<td>Before class on Tuesday, read &quot;Covering a Beat&quot; posted on ICON and the SPJ Code of Ethics: <a href="https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp">https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp</a>. Be sure to note areas in the ethics code where you need clarification or want discussion. Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 1 with the instructor on or before Thursday, Jan. 28. Check ICON for other reading assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 3: Feb. 2, 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Affairs stories</strong> Editing procedures and expectations will be covered, including a review of the AP Stylebook. Review of lead writing.</td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 1 due by noon Friday, Feb. 5. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 4: Feb. 9, 11</strong></td>
<td><strong>Opinion writing</strong></td>
<td>Final draft of Assignment No. 1 due by the end of class Thursday.* Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 2 with the instructor on or before Thursday, Feb 11. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 5: Feb. 16, 18</strong></td>
<td><strong>Arts and entertainment writing and reviews</strong></td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 2 due by noon Friday, Feb. 19. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 6: Feb. 23, 25</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trends and how-to stories</strong> Review of story forms, such as the inverted pyramid, hourglass and various feature formats.</td>
<td>Final draft of Assignment No. 2 due by the end of class Thursday.* Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 3 with the instructor on or before Thursday, Feb. 25. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 7: March 1, 3</strong></td>
<td>Other types of stories, including but not limited to historical overviews, disaster coverage, crime coverage, obituaries and Q&amp;As.</td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 3 due by noon Friday, March 4. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 8: March 8, 10</strong></td>
<td><strong>Political writing</strong></td>
<td>Final draft of Assignment No. 3 due by the end of class Thursday.* Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>SPRING BREAK</strong></td>
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<td>Week 9: March 22, 24</td>
<td>Sports writing</td>
<td>Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 4 with the instructor on or before Thursday, March 24. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td>Week 10: March 29, 31</td>
<td>In-depth interviewing: Digging below the surface.</td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 4 due by noon Friday, April 1. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td>Week 11: April 5, 7</td>
<td>Public records, open meetings Numbers and databases</td>
<td>Final draft of Assignment No. 4 due by the end of class Thursday.* Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 5 with the instructor on or before Thursday, April 7. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td>Week 12: April 12, 14</td>
<td>Journalism blogs and other social media as journalism tools</td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 5 due by noon Friday, April 15. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td>Week 13: April 19, 21</td>
<td>Short- and long-form features</td>
<td>Final draft of Assignment No. 5 due by the end of class Thursday.* Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 6 with the instructor on or before Thursday, April 21. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td>Week 14: April 26, 28</td>
<td>Movie week! The class will view and discuss a movie such as “All the President’s Men,” “Good Night and Good Luck” or “Spotlight” that portrays journalists in somewhat accurate representations of the profession.</td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 6 due by noon Friday, April 29. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td>Week 15: May 3, 5</td>
<td>Wrap-up and review of key concepts</td>
<td>Final draft of Assignment No. 6 due by the end of class Thursday.* This is a 200-point assignment. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
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<td>Finals Week</td>
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<td>There is no final for this class. However, by the time scheduled by the University for the final (TBA), students must show proof of stories being published, accepted for publication or posted to their personal WordPress sites.</td>
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**The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Policies and Resources**

**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 Academic Policies Handbook at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/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, k.11).

**Accommodations for Disabilities** -- A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/ for more information.

**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** -- The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

**Making a Suggestion or a Complaint** -- Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

**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 Office of the Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator 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.

For more information visit: http://clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/teaching-policies-resources-syllabus-insert