SYLLABUS
Interviewing and Storytelling about People, Topics and Trends
A Depth Reporting and Writing Course
JMC: 3405:0001 (19:121:00) – Aug. 25, 2014-Fall Semester
School of Journalism & Mass Communication
University of Iowa

Classroom/Period: W340 AJB/ 9:30-11:20 a.m. MW
Instructor: Bradley K. Martin
Office Hours: Mon., 11:30-1:00; Thurs. 2:00-3:00; or by appointment, W311 AJB
Contact: bradley-k-martin@uiowa.edu; office: 335-3415; cell: 319-512-2368.

Description: Advanced reporting for the media; emphasis on covering community
sources, trends and issues in depth, including politics, local government, courts and law
enforcement, science and technology, business and finance, sports business and policy
(not simple game coverage) and arts (not ordinary previews and reviews).

Outcomes: By the end of the course, students should be skilled at reporting and writing
in-depth news features in the tradition of the stories that appear on the front pages of the
finest newspapers and Web-based news outlets and in the best weekly magazines.

Assessment: The most important assessment item, by far, will be performance on the
reporting assignments. Students are expected to publish their stories, at a minimum on
their personal websites (if you have a WordPress account please continue to use that
same account to assemble and display in one place your journalistic portfolio) and
preferably on IowaWatch.org, the Daily Iowan and other prominent news outlets.

Grading:
- Class attendance, preparation, participation, exercises and quizzes (which may be
  assigned on the spot in class or lab), 8%
- Four (4) approximately 1,500-word news features, 23% each

Required Texts and Materials:
- The New York Times, USA Today, Iowa Watch, Daily Iowan, other local print and
  broadcast media, NPR, BBC, CNN, etc. You are expected to keep yourself fully
  informed about world, national and local news on a daily basis. We will discuss,
  in class, stories that you have read, watched or listened to, including some that I
  will specifically assign. Many of your story ideas will come from examining those
  stories and asking questions such as: What’s next with this story? Could it happen
  in this state/community?
- AP Stylebook (as in earlier classes you are expected to know and follow AP style).
- Handouts such as note on STORY STRUCTURE. For written stories we will go
  beyond inverted pyramid form to a building block structure suitable for front-
  page and other top stories:
The Wall Street Journal Page One Story Formula

Preferred ingredients of the top (first four newspaper paragraphs):

The Hook (what lures the reader in) – Maybe begin with an example or illustration of the theme. Journal reporters used to make special trips halfway around the world for lead-in anecdotal material that would hook their readers and enrich their reporting.

Explicit statement of theme – This is what, in a simpler, inverted-pyramid story, you might call simply the lead paragraph. It need not be the first paragraph in this formula, but put it within the first four grafs. Many practitioners call it the nut graf. Here’s where you tell the reader what you’re going to tell him/her in the rest of the story, whether it’s a single fact or (more likely, in this formula) a more complex theme. To keep as many readers as possible reading past this graf (and to the end), think striptease: make them feel there’s something additional and tantalizing, to be uncovered in due course.

Indication of the significance of the theme – answers the reader’s question: “Why should I be reading this?” Or, “Why should I care about this.” Or, “What’s in it for me?”

A quote offering authoritative backing for the theme – what we might call a money quote, from an expert/knowledgeable source, that echoes your theme and signals you aren’t just making all this up. Often the fourth paragraph is the best place to put this.

Body of the story:

The main text of the story arranged in building blocks (not an inverted pyramid). Break down the details that back up your main theme into several sub-themes, according to your outline. Each sub-theme gets a building block. Often the first sets out the issue’s history, bringing the reader up to the present time when something (to be shown in later blocks) is happening. Each sub-theme building block will answer one of the questions you asked yourself before and while reporting the story: Why is this happening? What is being done about it? Who’s making money out of it? Etc. A 1,500-world story may have five or six sub-themes. Writing a topic sentence or a subhed for each block helps you organize your material. Shuffle your building block subthemes and move them around until you see the order in which they logically should appear. Transitions between blocks of information should be carefully done to ensure the story flows smoothly to its intended ending. Don’t double back – put everything regarding one sub-topic into the appropriate building block. A quoted source need not be confined to a single building block. Put each quote you use where it logically fits. Into the space allowed, cram two facts per line.

Kicker:

The ending, often forward-looking, should stimulate the reader, leaving him/her still fascinated with this topic. It could be a choice quotation or a clever summary. Read a lot of nicely written stories to figure out how to write a memorable kicker.

(end Wall Street Journal Story Formula)
Recommended Texts:

- *Newsthinking: The Secret of Making Your Facts Fall Into Place*, by Bob Baker. (This classic book is out of print but many used copies are available online for a penny each plus shipping. You would be well advised to own a copy and consult it often.)
- *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing*, by William E. Blundell. (Blundell, of the *Wall Street Journal*, was the industry pioneer in analyzing and prescribing the structure of a page one news feature.)
- *Watchdog Journalism: The Art of Investigative Reporting*, by Stephen J. Berry. Professor Berry taught this course until this year.

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. In journalism, we understand that you cannot be a good writer or visual storyteller if you are not a good reporter. That starts by learning to be a critical thinker. 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 an investigative mentality that makes you curious about what experts and average people from different walks of life know about your topic. Finally, as you do the reporting, you must constantly think what will be the best medium for telling the story – through writing, visuals (video, photos, maps, or graphics), an audio or combination of all.

This course puts a heavy emphasis on interviewing. You also will learn that stories based solely on interviews that are superficial and on reaction comments are usually squishy. I am going to teach you how to give them substance. In this class, we go for depth, because that is where you find the truth. We do not publish quotes that contain lies, false information or distortions, unless you present the facts that reveal the distortions. Nor do we leave pertinent questions unanswered or vague answers unchallenged.

I hope you come out of this course with something tangible and useful for 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. However, the mental discipline, creativity and critical thinking ability this course develops are not merely professional attributes for journalists. They are life skills. They will equip you to become a top-tier professional and job applicant in any field and a fast tracker in the one you choose.

COURSE ACTIVITIES, RULES

You will produce four enterprise stories, and you can present them in whatever format – verbal, visual, audio or a combination – that you think most effectively tells the story. For *IowaWatch* and most modern news outlets, photographs and, if appropriate to
the story, video are required; so I will want you to list visual and audio elements that would help your stories and explain how you use them. 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.

You will need to make definitive reportable progress on your story every single week. That means, that I, like a city room editor, will periodically ask you to report how you are coming along on your next story.

There will be time after your initial submissions are critiqued for you to revise your reporting, improve your writing and raise your grades. Please be patient as I look for the best way to provide such opportunities in a class packed with 20 students. I may request staggered submissions.

The course will focus on interviewing and other reporting skills through class discussions, case studies and lecturing. I also will depend on class discussions that you will generate through your periodic 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. Colleagues in a newsroom typically help each other that way.

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.

**Attendance and Engagement**

Attendance is mandatory. I allow two unexcused absences. I cannot excuse you for making appointments for job interviews, family trips or for classes for other assignments that conflict with our class time. Reserve your two unexcused absences for such events. I cannot excuse you for merely feeling bad, oversleeping, forgetting about class. I will excuse you 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.

In your future careers, you will very quickly learn the need to discipline yourself to pay attention to and engage with people in meetings, at speeches and in classes, even when the discussion may seem boring. In our field – in which the ability to communicate with others in groups or to a mass audience is key – developing the discipline to pay attention and focus on events that you cover are essential parts of the skill set you need to be successful. Part of my job is to evaluate the degree to which you are developing that discipline, and that is where your grade for engagement and attendance comes in.
If you only attend class but cannot address questions when called upon or use class to look at your mobile device, send or read messages, check Facebook, browse the internet or do anything not related to the class activity, you are not engaging.

With such behavior, you are not only losing points and failing to develop this mental discipline, but you are being rude. You are conveying disrespect for whoever is talking.

Class Rules

Class rules help me provide a free and open, upbeat and creative learning environment. In summary, they require polite behavior and respect for everybody in this classroom. To that end, I require that you:

- Give full attention to whoever is addressing the class;
- Turn off your phone, 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

I expect you to spend at least eight hours per week outside class working on assignments and preparing for classes. That amount of time complies 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.”

Most of the out-of-class work will involve working on pitch memos, on your four depth stories and on graded rewrites of each story.
In the stories, the concept or theme of the story and its focus must be firmly and clearly established in the initial version. The interviewing and reporting must be nearly complete for the first version. Although the need for additional reporting inevitably will surface during editing, if the story is not substantially complete before then you will find yourself playing catch-up on that story while trying to report and write for the next story assignment. The initial version also will include almost all of complementary visual and audio elements or at least a list of the elements that will be in the final version. If want to get the story published in IowaWatch.org or the Daily Iowan, you will need to take photographs and, if possible, shoot video. Also try to think of ways to include graphics and audio to assist in making the story appealing to readers, viewers and listeners. I will grade the initial version and then you get a chance to raise the grade in a rewrite.

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

If you make five or more AP style, grammar or punctuation errors, I will reduce your grade by three points. However, if you make two or fewer such errors, I will raise your grade three points.

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

**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 may require some editing, such as shifting a few paragraphs, rewriting a few awkward sentences, correcting 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 may fail to answer some questions and may leave the feeling that the reporter is doing no more than what he or she thinks necessary to get a passable mark. Several sentences may be
imprecise, awkwardly written or confusing. Numbers of AP style and grammar errors are problematic. The story requires heavy editing and more reporting. Publication would be delayed.

D [.067-1.33] – The story is salvageable and covers some, but not all, major issues. It requires substantial reporting and is confusing or vague in many places. AP style and grammar errors may 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 but might 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.

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. Without special permission based on compelling issues, the assignment will not be accepted afterwards.

Assignment Schedule
Note: If you persuade the Daily Iowan or another publication to publish your story, I will edit your initial version and do any necessary rewriting 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.

Factual Accuracy

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.

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.

**Ethics & Plagiarism**

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

1. 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.

2. 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.

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

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 do so, 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.

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

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

Iowa Dozen: This course will address most of the standards in the The Iowa Dozen. Here are the especially relevant 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.
- We use media technologies thoughtfully.
- We explore media institutions’ practices and role in shaping cultures.

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). 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.

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, who is David Ryfe at david-ryfe@uiowa.edu. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident. See the CLAS Student Academic 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 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 Department of Public Safety website.

* These teaching policies and resources can be found at: http://clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/teaching-policies-resources-syllabus-insert. They are from the web pages of CLAS and University of Iowa Operations Manual.