Writing Across Cultures syllabus

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class meets: 1:30 – 3:20 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays
W236 AJB

office hours: 9 – 10:30 a.m. Fridays, E338 AJB

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication office is located in E305 AJB. The Director of the School is Prof. David Ryfe, who may be contacted at (319) 335-3482.

Course Overview and Goals

Journalists are often called on to cross borders—not just national ones, but borders of culture, identity, race, religion, and other markers of identity. As part of thinking about reporting and writing in a diverse global context, this class will focus on the complex issues involved in reporting on different spaces, places, and people. We will read the best cross-cultural and travel journalism, discuss concepts drawn from ethnography and social geography, and research and write feature stories for newspapers and magazines, based on students’ experiences of traversing cultural boundaries. The course will be conducted as a writing workshop. Designed for the novice writer who aspires to a career in feature journalism, this class will set you on the road to publication through its exploration of excellence in reporting and writing—from the first steps in research and interviewing to the strategies involved in establishing a rapport with your sources, developing cultural sensitivity, and understanding the ethics of in-depth reporting. We will also discuss appropriate markets for your articles and the basics of pitching free-lance stories to editors.

By the end of the semester, you will

• understand the specialized knowledge and skills involved in cross-cultural reporting
• strengthen your writing skills as you learn to write correctly, clearly, and well
• become adept at editing and revising your writing (and others')
• be able to develop strong story ideas
• understand some of the ethical and legal issues related to writing across cultures
• acquire basic reporting, interviewing and research skills
• understand concepts of diversity relating to audiences, sources, and issues
• understand the role of the media in translating and shaping cultures
• be able to write query letters
• recognize excellence in journalism

The techniques you develop and practice in this course will orient you to the practice of in-depth feature journalism and contribute to your overall preparation for work in the field.

This course supports all the standards of the Iowa Dozen, the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication’s 12 principles for excellence in journalism education, which include: learning to write correctly and clearly; to conduct research and gather information responsibly; to edit and evaluate carefully; to use media technologies thoughtfully; and to apply statistical concepts appropriately; valuing First Amendment principles; a diverse global community; creativity and independence; truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity; and exploring mass communication theories and concepts, media institutions and practices, and the role of media in shaping cultures.
texts
The following books are available at Prairie Lights Books, 15 S. Dubuque Street
required

Additional course readings will be made available on the course ICON site.

recommended


Everyone in the class is expected to own and use the latest edition of the Associated Press Stylebook. This can be purchased at Prairie Lights or just about any bookstore.

accommodations for disabilities
If you have a disability that needs accommodation, please come to my office hours to discuss it as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements in advance. A student seeking academic accommodations first must register with Student Disability Services and then meet with a SDS counselor who determines eligibility for services. A student approved for accommodations should meet privately with the course instructor to arrange particular accommodations. See [www.uiowa.edu/~sds/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/)

I can only make accommodations for students who have been evaluated by SDD, following that office’s specific recommendations.

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.)

course web site
The class has an ICON site that students can access using their Hawk IDs. **First and second drafts of all stories must be uploaded to this site on or before the deadlines in the syllabus.**

The site is password protected. Each student has access to his/her grades on this site, as well as all the course information that is online (syllabus, course calendar, etc.)

To access the ICON site, go to:

icon.uiowa.edu (please note that there is no “www” at the beginning of this URL)

log on to ICON using your Hawk ID and password

[Note: The login ID for each new account will be your HawkID. If you don’t know your HawkID, you can find out what it is by calling the Customer Information Desk (384-0800), looking it up in WebISIS (http://isis.uiowa.edu/) or calling the ITS Help Desk (384-4357)].

Select the appropriate semester, and click on the plus sign next to “Spring 2011” if you don’t see this class listed right away.

Click on “019:128:001 Specialized Reporting and Writing”
Some course readings will be under the “Content” link the green navigation bar at the top of the page.

To upload your files once you are in the course web site:
Click on “Discussions” in the navigation bar at the top.
Go to the appropriate forum (e.g. Personal Experience) and click on it
Go to the appropriate topic (e.g. “First drafts”) and click on it
Click on “Add message” (top right)
Copy and paste the text of your story into the “Message” box
or
Click on “Attach file” at the bottom left and browse for your story

Final stories should be uploaded to the “Dropbox” in the appropriate folder.

FYI—The topic will be locked after the deadline on the syllabus! Also, all uploaded stories are time and date-stamped by the computer, which is another way I can keep track of deadlines.

If you have any difficulties with ICON, please call ICON help at 335-5194. But technical problems are not an acceptable reason for late work! Please plan on uploading your final paper at least an hour before the deadline so that there are no hiccups!

**general expectations**

General expectations for all students include consistent class attendance, adequate preparation for in-class and out-of-class assignments, constructive participation (especially during article workshops), and completion of all reading and writing assignments on deadline. For purposes of class communication and fulfillment of assignments, you’ll need an email account and regular access to a computer and printer.

**Important note:** Deadlines are absolutely sacred in this class (as they are in the “real world” of journalism)! Late work will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per hour. No make-up work will be allowed, except in the case of an excused absence (see the policy on absences, below). In addition, final grades of “Incomplete” will not be given unless in exceptional and dire circumstances.

**Other important notes:** There will be no printing out of assignments after the start of class, unless you are directed to do so by the professor. W240 AJB is an ITC computer lab that students may use. There is also a printer in the Journalism Resource Center (350 AJB). Please make sure you have all your work printed out prior to the start of each class. There will be strict grade penalties for any attempts to print while class is in session. If you are late to class because you were printing elsewhere, this counts as a missed deadline and will be penalized according to the regular syllabus policy. Remember that printers break, computers crash, and dogs eat homework, so plan ahead. This is both professional and courteous, and it will also save you a lot of trouble.

Be sure to back up your work, for the same reasons. Many students have lost their only copies of final projects at the very last minute, so be smart and back up.

And, finally, cell phones and other communication devices must be turned off during class.

**ethics**

Follow basic academic and journalistic ethics. Be original, be creative, and be true to your values: show me that you are a person of integrity and principle. Your writing will reflect who you are as a person. Remember that we will form lasting impressions of each other this semester.

The only real crime in this class would be cheating. It is expected that all work submitted for a grade in this course reflects the original work of the student submitting it. Students are encouraged to discuss their work with others (inside and outside of class), and to exchange
drafts of papers with one another for comments and criticisms. But keep in mind that if you borrow an idea from someone else, you must cite the source, even if it is based on a conversation or correspondence. Also, inventing sources/quotes constitutes plagiarism in journalism; sources used in stories will be verified by the instructor.

Plagiarism and any other activities that result in a student presenting work that is not his or her own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is reported to the departmental DEO and then to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Services in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences who deals with academic dishonesty according to these guidelines: www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook//ix.shtml

This course is given by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. This means that class policies on matters such as requirements, grading, and sanctions for academic dishonesty are governed by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Students wishing to add or drop this course after the official deadline must receive the approval of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Details of the University policy of cross enrollments may be found at: http://www.uiowa.edu/~provost/deos/crossenroll.doc

Any student who does not fully understand the standards of academic honesty should speak to me in advance of submitting coursework.

**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.

**Final Examinations.** An undergraduate student who has two final examinations scheduled for the same period or more than three examinations scheduled for the same day may file a request for a change of schedule before the published deadline at the Registrar's Service Center, 17 Calvin Hall, 8-430 M-F, (384-4300).

**understanding sexual harassment**
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Visit www.sexualharassment.uiowa.edu/ for definitions, assistance, and the full policy.

**student rights**
Students have the right to make suggestions or complaints and should first visit with the instructor, then with the course supervisor if appropriate, and next with the departmental DEO. All complaints must be made within six months of the incident. www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook//ix.shtml#5

**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 web site.
student classroom behavior

The ability to learn is lessened when students engage in inappropriate classroom behavior, distracting others; such behaviors are a violation of the Code of Student Life. When disruptive activity occurs, a university instructor has the authority to determine classroom seating patterns and to request that a student exit the classroom, laboratory, or other area used for instruction immediately for the remainder of the period. One-day suspensions are reported to appropriate departmental, collegiate, and Student Services personnel (Office of the Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students).

The guidelines for civility extend to written work, as well. Please avoid gratuitous obscenity and racist, sexist, and other discriminatory language in your writing, unless there are exceptional circumstances where such content is essential to the story. Communicate clearly with your instructor about such circumstances.

course requirements

class participation (5% of final grade):

Class participation is an important part of this class. You will be encouraged to voice your ideas and thoughts and to contribute to the discussion of every topic. Even the shy ones will be given an opportunity to speak and interact with their classmates and the professor. Respect for others’ feelings, beliefs and values are essential to the success of the class, so please be considerate of your classmates’ different backgrounds and experiences as you discuss various points of view.

Those who are usually silent in class, or whose participation is unrelated to the readings or conceptual terms discussed in the class, will not earn the portion of the grade that is based on class participation.

attendance and compliance with deadlines (5% of final grade):

Attendance will be taken in every class and will count toward your class participation grade. Excused absences are granted only for the following reasons: serious illness (which must be documented with a doctor’s certificate), a death in the family (again, documentation is required), or, in very rare cases, a school-related event that requires your presence and that you have arranged with the professor well in advance (e.g. an out-of-town university competitive event in which you are required to participate, a religious holiday, or a job interview). In order for an absence to be excused, documentation must be provided (a note from a coach, letter scheduling the interview, etc.).

The following types of situations are NOT considered excused absences: social events, meetings of Greek or service organizations, entertaining out-of-town visitors, holiday plans, going to weddings or to visit relatives, or any other circumstance that is extracurricular and at which your attendance is optional and secondary to your schoolwork.

A note on Thanksgiving and Spring Break: The University generously offers a full week for each of these scheduled breaks. Class is officially in session before and after this designated week. If you choose to extend your break, you cannot have extensions on deadlines, nor can you make up the missed work. The choice to extend a break is a choice to accept the grade penalty.

Regarding deadlines, see the note above.
responses to the readings/other in-class assignments (20% of final grade)

**Reading responses**
Good writers are, inevitably, avid readers. If you wish to become an accomplished writer, you must read a lot of good writing. (You can read the junk, too, but you should know it when you see it!) As a would-be published writer, you should always be reading, widely and eclectically, both fiction and nonfiction, from books, newspapers, poetry, the Web, and especially magazines.

You will have assigned readings in this class throughout the semester, and you will be asked to provide written and oral responses to the readings. Your responses will be graded on the basis of their depth, thoughtfulness, and originality. Responses should make it clear that you have read and reflected on the whole article. Reading assignments will be heavier at the beginning of the semester and ease up as you work on your longer projects. Most readings will be in the packet, but others will be distributed in class or made available through the Journalism Resource Center in 350 AJB.

Only half credit will be given for assignments turned *in absentia* (unless it is an excused absence; see above).

**Format for responses:** You will receive handouts with details on how to respond to each reading. Responses are generally expected to be between 300 and 500 words in length. For each response, put the response # in the upper right-hand corner.

You will also be asked to write some short essays on various topics discussed in class; these will be similarly graded. Be prepared to read your responses and essays aloud in class.

All essays and responses must be printed out from a computer. No handwritten responses will be accepted. All responses should be legible (i.e., the print should be dark enough to be easily read). As in all journalism classes, deadlines are sacred! Late work is not graded.

**group presentations (10% of the final grade)**

There will be a series of oral presentations by students during the semester. Groups of students will read an assigned chapter and report on it to the class, discussing its main points and its relevance to the course. The use of audiovisual materials and illustrations of the points made in the chapter are encouraged. Presentations will be roughly 30 minutes long. Each presentation will cover:

A quick summary of the main points of the assigned reading
Key information about the culture or topic being discussed (based on outside research)
Important issues for journalists regarding this culture or topic (chapter + outside research)
Relevant examples drawn from various media (the Web, but also TV clips, print media, etc.)
Resources for journalists (chapter + outside research)

Presentations will be graded on the depth and thoughtfulness, the extent and quality of original research conducted for the presentation, the relevance of the examples, and the presentation itself—organization, clarity, and so on.

If the group provides a handout with resources, be sure to list specific resources that will help someone who wants to research the group or topic: actual URLs for web sites, actual names of organizations dealing with the group/topic, actual names of relevant scholarly journals. Don’t just say “government agencies” and leave it at that! (Obviously there are government agencies that deal with the issues and topics we’ll cover in this class; the group’s job is to locate the relevant ones and provide the class with that information.) For example, if the presentation is on South Asian Americans, then one resource would be the South Asian American Policy and Research Institute (http://saapri.org/index.html)
articles (60% of final grade)

This is a writing class, so the majority of the grade is based on your written assignments. You will be asked to write three long stories and several short ones during the course of the semester. The length and complexity of the long stories will increase as the semester progresses. The last article is weighted most heavily, and is expected to “showcase” what you have learned in the course of the semester. The categories of long articles you will write include:

- A first-person experience article (10 points)
- A personality profile (20 points)
- An in-depth feature that is either (a) a human interest story, (b) an investigative story, or (c) a remarkable story that defies categorization. (30 points)

All stories must be approved by the instructor in advance. No last-minute topic changes will be accepted. A key aspect of magazine journalism is developing the manuscript, revising, editing, and reworking, so once a story idea is approved, the writer must stick with it until its completion. Again, deadlines are set in stone! Late stories lose a letter grade for every hour they are late.

grading

Set high standards for yourself, as grading will be rigorous in this course. You will receive letter grades for each element of your work, with A for exceptional/outstanding work, B for very good/above average work, C for acceptable work, D for unacceptable but passing, and F for failing. Plus and minus grades will be used. Stories will be graded partly on mechanics (grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence fluency, transitions, language use, organization of the article, etc.) and partly on content (background research, use of sources, depth of reporting, etc.).

Extra credit: If you have one or more articles actually published or accepted for publication in a magazine by the end of the semester, you will receive extra credit (actual extra credit will vary depending on where your piece is published). Other extra credit opportunities may also come up, but all extra credit must be completed and handed in prior to the last day of class.
course calendar

- Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are in the textbook on reserve; all others are from the course-pack or online. Many of the readings with web addresses are under either “Content” or “Links” on the course web site (check both before you panic!).
- Please note that this schedule is subject to change depending on circumstances. It is the student’s responsibility to attend class and check email and the ICON site regularly to be sure to keep up with any changes.
- If readings are assigned, then written reading responses are due at the next class meeting, even if the syllabus doesn’t specify it.

week one

Monday, 8/25 — Introductions, syllabus, anthology, etc.

Reading for Wednesday:

Response #1: “What is culture?” (due 1/28)

Wednesday, 8/27 — Responses due. Discussion of excellence in travel writing, definitions of culture and cultural crossing.

Readings for next Wednesday:

week two

Monday, 9/1 — University holiday (Labor Day)

Wednesday, 9/3 — Reading responses due; discussion of how to create a sense of place; discussion of theses and angles.

Reading for Monday:
Elliott, Andrea. (2006). “A Muslim leader in Brooklyn, reconciling two worlds.” *The New York Times*. Under “Content” on course web site. If you have an online subscription to the Times, you can access this story at:
http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/nyregion/05imam.html?ex=1187150400&en=aacaaf638bc60cf92&ei=5070
week three

Monday, 9/8 — Reading responses due. Discuss ideas for “sense of place” and “personal experience” stories.

Readings for Wednesday:

Wednesday, 9/10 — Student presentation #1:

Short writing assignment #1 handed out in class

Reading for Monday:

week four

Monday, 9/15 — Reading responses due; writing assignment #1 due in class; workshops of stories.

Cannibal Tours
Guest speaker: Sisi Wei, ProPublica

Readings for Wednesday:

Wednesday, 9/17 — Reading responses due in class. UI librarian Jennifer Cooper will discuss how to do cross-cultural research for journalism. This is a crucially important presentation—be sure to attend!

Story #1 guidelines handed out.

Reading for Monday:

week five

Monday, 9/22 — Story ideas (personal experience) due in writing in class. Response to reading; discussion of writing personal experience pieces; brainstorming and evaluation of story ideas.

For Wednesday:

Work on story #1. Outline and source list due 9/29.
Wednesday, 9/24 — Reading responses due. Brainstorming of story ideas, continued, if necessary. Hoba Hoba Spirit in class.
Work on story outline and source list in class

Readings for Monday:

week six
Monday, 9/29 — Reading responses due. Outline and source list for story #1 due.

Bring an outline and list of sources to class to turn in. We'll go over questions and concerns, and we may spend some time in class compiling additional sources based on Jennifer Cooper's presentation.

Readings for Wednesday:
Parts 3 and 4 of “The Boy Monk” from *The Orange County Register*

Please note: A draft of story #1 (personal experience) needs to be uploaded to the web site by 5 p.m. on Friday, 9/26; you need to read your group members' drafts by Monday.

Wednesday, 10/1 — Reading responses due in class. Story workshopping guidelines handed out.
Please note: Class will meet in E238 AJB for a special session with IowaWatch editors and Immersion Journalism.

week seven
Monday, 10/6 — Story #1 workshopped in class


Readings for Monday:

week eight
Monday, 10/13 — Final version of Story #1 (personal experience) due in class and in Dropbox.
Reading responses due.
Guidelines for Story #2 handed out in class
Student presentation #4 (MAP students): “Spies like us.”

Readings for Wednesday:
Wednesday, 10/15—Writing personality profiles; come to class with confirmed ideas for a personality profile about someone from another culture. These should be submitted in writing—short paragraphs explaining why the person is worth profiling, what the fresh angle on the story is, whether there’s a bigger picture or thesis to the story, and how the topic relates to the class.
Reading responses due

Readings for Monday:

week nine

Wednesday, 10/22—Draft of Story #2 online at 1:30 p.m. or earlier.

week ten
Monday, 10/27—Class meets. First draft of Story #2 workshopped in class.

Wednesday, 10/29—Work on Story #2. Meet with Gigi to review optional second draft. Final version of Story #2 must be uploaded by 5 p.m. Friday, 10/31

Readings for Monday:
Harriet McBryde Johnson. (2003, February 16). Unspeakable conversations (Should I have been killed at birth?) *New York Times Magazine*. Under “Content” on the course web site; don’t forget to check out her picture, which is also uploaded. Or you can find the story at: http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/843688/posts

week eleven

Discussion of final story; final story guidelines handed out in class.

Readings for Wednesday:
Chapters 1-5 of *The Spirit Catches You*

Wednesday, 11/5—Responses to readings; brainstorm final story ideas.

Readings for Monday: Chapters 6-8 of *Spirit*.

week twelve
Monday, 11/10—Outline of final story, with source list, due in class. Reading responses due. Discussion of query letters.

Readings for Wednesday:
Chapters 9-12 of *Spirit*
Wednesday, 11/12 — Reading responses due
Reading for Wednesday, 11/28: Chapters 13-16 of *Spirit*

week thirteen
Reading for Wednesday: Chapters 17-19 of *Spirit*

Wednesday, 11/19—Final reading responses due in class. Updates on story progress.
Final story drafts must be uploaded by 5 pm on Friday, November 21.

week fourteen
11/24-28 — Thanksgiving Break! Happy turkey/tofurkey day!

week fifteen
Monday, 12/1—Workshop final story drafts in class

Wednesday, 12/3—Work on revisions to final story.

week sixteen
Monday, 12/8—Work on final story; optional second draft of final story can be shown to Gigi for comments. Groups are also free to workshop their second drafts.

Wednesday, 12/10—Attendance required. Final stories due in class and online; wrap-up, evaluations, etc. Any necessary revisions to stories must be completed by December 15.

Good luck with your future adventures in writing across cultures! Send a postcard!!