University of Iowa: School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
**JMC:3460:0EXW** (4 semester hours)  
**Arts and Culture Media**  
**Fall 2015 Syllabus**

Tues and Thursday  
1:30-3:20

Professor: Don McLeese  
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Office hours: Friday 12:30-1:30, after 2:45 (by appointment)  
Online: Mon-Thurs: 9-10  
Or by appointment

**COURSE OVERVIEW**  
The aim of this course is to immerse the student in the field (ocean?) of arts journalism. Students will develop the skills and sharpen the instincts required for reviewing, criticizing, reporting, profiling and analyzing, and learn to apply their craft to coverage of both the popular arts and the (so-called) fine arts. I believe that such journalism represents a conversation with the culture at large, one that encompasses trends, new releases, classics, awards shows, the responses of other arts journalists, social media and any other areas where we can distinguish a creative pulse.

For the purpose of this course, everyone will be encouraged to be a generalist, to develop a critical range that extends across the spectrum of arts typically covered in mainstream journalism (from daily newspapers to alt-weeklies to general interest publications to arts journals to blogs and websites). Students can focus more on whatever interests them most in the longer pieces, employing an expansive latitude in what qualifies as art. If your journalistic ambition is to explore the “art” of video games, graphic novels, reality TV or roadside restaurants, you’ll be permitted to write those pieces in this class (though your reporting and writing will be judged by the same standards that would apply if you were reviewing ballet or Shakespeare, not that your tone should be the same).
You will be required to write a lot of short reviews (in the 500-750 word range), as well as longer assignments that will extend your reach, range and scope. Occasional assignments might have all students responding to the same piece of work; most assignments will allow the students some or considerable leeway in selecting what to review. By the end of the semester, you will have written a review of each of the following: book, movie, visual art, TV program, music performance and/or recording and theatrical or dance production (preferably from a live performance but possibly from DVD).

You will also write an occasional musical tune-up to sharpen your skills, a capsule review (250-350 words) of an album previewed on NPR First Listen. We’ll be doing this for as long as I find it useful and you find it interesting and fun.

http://www.npr.org/series/98679384/first-listen/

You will also read a lot of arts journalism and read a lot about arts journalism—from critiques of coverage to reviews of reviewers to analyses of the arts and arts journalism in general. In the process, you will develop a critical eye in regard to arts coverage as well as to the arts, and you will be encouraged to apply the lessons from the writing of professional journalists to your own writing. Such readings will be posted on ICON and assigned in class.

You will additionally learn from each other, responding to students’ work in class discussions and workshop sessions, learning to recognize the wide range of valid responses to a single work—and learning to distinguish between a compelling, provocative response and one that lacks authority.

Flexibility of mind is a crucial attribute in a journalist and one that will be encouraged here. Though we will generally adhere to the syllabus as far as writing deadlines are concerned, this class will exercise the latitude to respond to current developments, engage in in-class readings and reviewing exercises, and perhaps even accommodate guest speakers as their schedules permit. Just as the working journalist often has no idea when starting work that morning what assignments might come during the day, each class period should include the possibility of surprise and spontaneity, rather than conforming to a syllabus etched in stone.

Without abandoning the role relationships of professor and student, this course will attempt to approximate the working relationship of an editor and writers, with class sessions frequently functioning like workshops, story meetings and brainstorming sessions, sometimes as viewing or listening sessions, and rarely like lecture periods.

Perhaps the most important requirement of this course is that you have fun. (That’s an order.) Your writing will be livelier and more engaging. Anyone who treats these assignments as obligations rather than opportunities will never be an arts journalist. This
is an all-consuming vocation, not a 40-hour a week job. It’s a privilege to get paid to do what most people pay to do.

STUDENT COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To sharpen the observational, experiential and communicative skills required to respond to arts and entertainment with more than personal opinion, gut instinct and kneejerk reaction.
- To recognize the differences in depth and scope between criticism and consumer reviewing.
- To familiarize oneself with a wide range of professional arts journalism, learning what to do (and not) in the process.
- To learn how to create and construct engaging critical responses that capture and hold the reader’s attention.
- To develop the skills required to write the longer pieces that arts journalism often requires, becoming adept at interviewing, reporting and analyzing in the process.
- To recognize the issues and elements that all arts criticism has in common, as well as the differences inherent in responding to different forms of art and entertainment.
- To learn to recognize and engage in valid critical arguments, whether or not one agrees with a particular perspective.

GRADING

Writers are judged primarily on their writing, and so will the students in this class, with 70% of the final grade determined by the grades on writing assignments. Grading will be weighted over the progression of the semester, to reward improvement from beginning to end:

Reviews: 30%
Artist or Arts-Related Profile: 15%
Enterprise Trend or Issue Feature: 25%

Review assignments should aim for 500-750 words. (I’m less concerned with whether you go longer than if you go significantly shorter.)

For the profile of an artist or someone involved in the arts, aim for approximately 1,000-1,200 words. For the final trend, issue or enterprise feature—which should involve multi-source reporting—aim for 1,500-1,750.

For both the profile and trend feature, you will have the option of revising your story to raise your grade on that assignment by as much as a letter. Only students who have presented drafts on time to participate in workshopping and who have turned in their features by deadline will be permitted to revise for a higher grade.
On all assignments, pieces will be evaluated according to incisiveness, accuracy and effectiveness (the subjective but crucial quality of how the writing grabs this reader and sustains his interest), with points deducted for errors of spelling, grammar or other violations of the Associated Press Stylebook.

Grading standards are based on the standards of the marketplace. An A paper is a publishable piece. (If I give you a C on an assignment and you can show me I’m wrong by finding a quality outlet to publish the piece, I will change that grade to an A. With no disrespect intended toward the Daily Iowan or other student publications, these don’t count.)

All work is expected to be new and original to this class (no stories previously published elsewhere or written for a different class). You will be encouraged to find outlets to publish your work, since clips will benefit a prospective journalist more than grades, but such work should be submitted here before it is accepted elsewhere. If you are trying to coordinate assignments for this class with work you’re doing for the DI or other publications, let’s discuss. I don’t want to see a review handed in that I’ve already read in the paper, without a prior conversation.

All stories are due on the deadline date, posted to dropbox (or, occasionally, discussion thread) of the ICON site. Deadlines are crucial for the working journalist, not to be violated unless permission has been negotiated in advance (which it rarely will be in this class, and only in exceptional circumstances). Late papers will be penalized a full letter grade per day. Thus a paper due on Tuesday that would have merited an A will receive a C if it isn’t turned in until Thursday. Again, no revisions will be permitted on those longer assignments if they are turned in late.

The remaining 30% of the final grade will reflect class attendance and participation, presence of mind as well as body. Any ungraded assignments will be included within this grade. Prompt attendance (i.e. at the start of the class) is MANDATORY. Participation in class discussion—preferably by voice but alternately by chatbox typing will figure as heavily in this grade as attendance. If you can’t be here, are going to be late or need to leave early, let me know in advance.

Some of the closest calls in final grading are deciding between A/A-, A-/B+, B+/B etc., with the decision typically determined by class performance (and extra credit).

For extra credit, you have the option of writing a 3-5 page paper (750-1250 words) analyzing your own critical perspective, why you like what you like and don’t like what you don’t like, how you feel the arts function (or should function) within society. Including work from other critics with whom you agree or disagree could help bolster your analysis. Showing how this course has helped shape your perspective (or not) should be a component.

There will be no final exam.
This semester is going to be a lot of fun for at least one of us. I previously taught this course several times without using any textbook, because there was none on the market that I considered suitable for teaching journalistic coverage of a wide range of arts. I have since found one—but I had to write it to do so. The text was largely inspired and shaped by my teaching of this course and interactions with students within it, and now I’m happy to be able to inflict the printed version on a fresh group of students.


A couple of notes: My book contract called for a flat fee with no per-sale royalties, so I’m not trying to squeeze any extra nickels and dimes out of you by assigning. And we’ll augment the journalistic examples in the textbook (and skip some) by assigning the reading of more current reviews and features, ranging far beyond *The New York Times* (though including plenty from the NYT as well).

**The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Policies and Procedures**

**Teaching Policies & Resources — Syllabus Insert**

**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](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/](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.
COURSE CALENDAR

Week one

Thurs: Initial reviewing discussion and exercises. Discuss and be prepared to do your first NPR capsule music rvw.

Week two
Tues, Sept 1: Read AC, Intro and Chapter 1, post and discuss NPR rvws.

Thurs: Discuss the difference between criticism and reviewing. Read AC Ch 2 (popular music)

Week three
Tues, Sept 8: Post and discuss 2nd NPR music capsule

Thurs: Read AC Ch 3 (classical music et al.)
**Week four**
Tues, Sept 15: Music reviews due and discussed.

Thurs: Read Ch 4 (visual arts). Discuss differences btw spatial and temporal arts.

**Week five**
Tues, Sept 22: Short response on spatial and temporal arts due. Read AC Ch 5 (theater)

Thurs: Read AC 6 (film)

**Week six**
Tues, Sept 29: Post and discuss NPR music capsule. Read film reviews

Thurs: Read film reviews and brainstorm personality profiles.

**Week seven**
Tues, Oct 6: Film reviews due and discussed

Thurs: Read intro to Pt II, Ch 9 (profiles) Discuss personality profiles and troubleshooting

**Week eight**
Tues, Oct 13: Read and discuss assigned profiles. Discuss interviewing techniques.

Thurs: More on profiles and interviewing.

**Week nine**
Tues, Oct 20: Workshop profiles
Thurs: More workshopping, troubleshooting and profile discussion. Read Ch 8 (books)

**Week ten**
Tues, Oct 27: Profiles due and discussed
Thurs: More profile discussion

**Week eleven**
Tues, Nov 3: Profiles returned, WILD CARD review (art, theater, book, other to be approved) due.
Thurs: Read ch 7 (television) and discuss TV rvws.

**Week twelve**
Tues, Nov 10: TV reviews due and discussed.

Thurs: Read Ch 10 (enterprise stories) and epilogue

**Week thirteen**
Tues, Nov 17: Optional profile revisions due; brainstorm enterprise stories. Thurs: Read enterprise stories.

**Week fourteen (Nov 22-24)**
NO CLASSES, Thanksgiving break

**Week fifteen**
Tues, Dec 1: Workshop drafts for enterprise stories due
Thurs: More workshopping and discussion

**Week sixteen**
Tues, Dec 8: Final features due and discussed. Graded assignments returned by the weekend. Anyone who wants to revise needs to submit the final version by Thurs., Dec. 17.
Thurs: Discuss optional extra credit (due Mon, Dec 14) and the semester as a whole

**No Final. Have a great break.**