Course Description:
In an era where digital communication is rapidly overtaking the printed word from evolving technological platforms and new information sources, clear communication remains key not only to your career and academic advancement, but to your day-to-day interactions in life. Clarity of writing reflects clarity of thought.

The goal of this course will be to adapt the principles and processes taught in graduate-level journalism courses at the UISJMC. We want to improve your writing, particularly quick turnaround assignments that are necessary in today’s digital age. We will also learn how to conduct research in the traditional sense of reporting and interviewing others as well as aggregating, reading and studying information from a variety of sources.

A lot of topics aren’t communicated so consumers can understand them, whether they be aspects of the President’s signature Affordable Care Act, Wall Street finance, a scientist’s academic research or sports on ESPN. We will discuss ways to make narrow topics more inviting to all. The lack of effectively reporting, writing and communicating is critical to engaging and expanding your audience.

Here’s an example of what we don’t want to do. During the government shutdown news of late last year, reporters in Washington and elsewhere constantly referred to members of Congress needing to pass a “Clean CR.” Few people know what that is. Unlike Congress and the talking heads on nightly political shows, we want to speak to the people and, in turn, want them to understand what we are saying.

Good writing is about sharpening, refining and polishing for optimal impact and effectiveness. The best writing is clear, fresh, engaging and avoids clichés. It opts for shorter, concrete words rather than longer, abstract ones. It prefers the active verb voice to the passive. It engages the reader and informs them.

While learning and being refreshed upon basic writing and information-gathering through lectures, instructor handouts, videos, texts and guest speakers, students will also spend time doing research and interviews necessary to write stories, speeches or memos to help professionals, businesses and the public at large. Students will also practice and study how to write and edit across all platforms whether they be print, digital or broadcast outlets.

Student goals will be accomplished through lectures, guest speakers, readings and writing assignments. There will be both a mid-term and final writing assignment as well as three or four
shorter exercises throughout the semester where students will be asked to conduct interviews or cover events or research topics or presentations for their stories.

Writing isn’t easy, but it should appear to the reader that it was easy.

**Texts**

Inside Reporting: A practical guide to the craft of journalism by Tim Harrower. Third edition. This text is optional. If you do buy it, Amazon has a cheap copy and digital copies can also be ordered.

Much of what you need will be e-mailed to you, posted on the course home page or provided via links that I send or put on the course homepage.

**Reading** (what to read will be an important aspect of the first two classes)

Students should follow, read and watch the news, particularly in the 24 hour period before each class. Strongly consider reading or following on social media major news outlets such as the New York Times, Politico, and my Forbes blog, [http://www.forbes.com/sites/brucejapsen/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/brucejapsen/) which you can sign up for by clicking the red “follow-on” segment to the right of my picture on any column. It’s free and you get an e-mail each time you write something. You can also sign up for various news outlets for free or friend them on Facebook or follow them on Twitter. We can do this in class if you are not already using social media.

**Instructor Office Hours**

My set office hours are Thursdays between 4 pm and 6:30 pm (Central time). But also before and after class on Thursdays.

I am incredibly accessible via e-mail. Email is the best way to reach me at bruce-japsen@uiowa.edu or brucejapsen@gmail.com goes to the same place.

**Grading**

Class attendance and participation and general engagement: 35 percent

Writing assignments (both in and out of class) 25 percent

Midterm reporting and writing assignment: 15 percent

Final reporting and writing project: 25 percent (grade based ½ reporting/interviewing and ½ writing)

Attendance (whether in the classroom or online) is MANDATORY, as the course will be much more interactive than lecture oriented, with written assignments as well as discussion part of the class sessions. Particularly with once-a-week classes, each week represents a significant portion of the course. If you can’t attend and have a good reason, please let me know as soon as you can (before the class and not after).
**Deadlines:**
Deadlines are critical in journalism, public relations and communicating information in today’s digital age. Late assignments will drop at least one letter grade for each day they are past their deadline. If the assignment was due at 4 pm on a Thursday and it comes in at 4:01 pm, a B falls to a C. If the assignment comes in at 4:01 pm on the following day, such as the Friday, the B would fall to a D and so on.

Check daily your e-mails and the news item section of our classroom, particularly the morning of class.

In today’s media, developments in the news are reported more frequently than ever. You should be attuned to the latest developments in news, weather, sports, business and health care.

**Spelling, style and grammar.**

Grades suffer if copy has spelling, style or grammatical errors.

**Attendance/Class participation**

It is important to attend class during our Wednesday evening allotted time and participate while you are in class. See grading.

**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](http://operations.uiowa.edu/)).

**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/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/) 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 tenth day 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 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.

Semester schedule.

(Subject to change pending availability of speakers and or news developments in health care that may break over the course of the semester)
Week One (Wednesday, Jan. 22)
**Course overview. Getting to know you. What you should be reading.** Getting started, writing concisely and choosing topics that people will want to read. What's important to consumers or your boss or your client? We will discuss some news web sites you should consider signing up for. You can get started by signing up to Forbes to follow me in case stories emerge that I write about and we can discuss such story development. We will also sign up for and review other sites that are free and push out important information.

Week Two (Wednesday, Jan. 29)
**Today’s digital journalist, writer and communicator. (Guest speaker planned from major national news outlet)** Writing concisely. The fewer words, the better, particularly with complicated topics like business, health care, science and technology.

Week Three (Wednesday, Feb. 5)
**A look at every day writing and style.** How do people post jobs, communicate openings, alert employees to new health or retirement benefits. We can do it better. Please bring to class or e-mail me before class so everyone has a copy, something that was really poorly written and/or littered with jargon. We will look at ways to better write or communicate this in a more understandable and effective way.

Week Four (Wednesday, Feb. 12) Writing assignment due – Find a job posting (or compose one) for a position you’d like to have. Write a cover letter/personal statement, selling yourself as an exceptional candidate for this position)

Week Five (Wednesday, Feb. 19) (possible guest speaker)
Examining corporations, their communications and how to look at publicly-traded company financial statements and other available information.

Week Six (Wednesday, Feb. 26) (possible guest speaker)
Likely assignment to write a story based off of a company’s earnings statement. Schedule and deadline to be determined. We may combine Feb. 19 and Feb. 26 lessons depending on speaker availability.

Week Seven (Wednesday, March 5)
The final checklist. What should you be looking for before you hand in that major project or assignment. How to avoid errors, fact-checking made easy and simple.

Week Eight (Wednesday, March 12) (Mid-term due)
You will have, for the mid-term, written your own blog post, supporting your story through quotes, research and citations from your own reporting or the reporting of others. Less than 400 words.

(Individual conferences)
Let’s look at where we are in the semester and talk about your mid-term due next week and the end-of-semester story, memo or project you want to do. We will likely schedule individually allotted time and students will be credited as class time for these important individual sessions.

Week Nine
Spring Break. No class.

Week 10 (Wednesday, March 26)
Review midterms. Begin discussing your final story. Consider taking a position/angle on an aspect of an issue in your work field or perhaps something you feel passionate about. You should have an idea for this by the end of the first week of April. Planning for the final is critical. You don’t want to wait until the last minute on any kind of project.

Week 11 (Wednesday, April 2)
Memos for your final story are due by the end of this week (Friday, April 5)
Talking through story ideas and having an editor is a good thing. But when you don’t have an editor, there are ways to get help. Consider sharing your story ideas as a group and discussing them among the group. The class should also be prepared to offer their input to help classmates.

Week 12 (Wednesday, April 9) (Guest speaker likely)
Interviewing techniques are discussed. Handouts provided.

Week 13 (Wednesday, April 16)
Not-for-profit businesses, organizations and associations. We look at these as well as web sites where you can find information about these corporations.

Week 14 (Wednesday, April 23) (Guest speaker likely)
Investigative reporting techniques and digging deeper.

Week 15 (Wednesday, April 30)
Writing long form. Transitions. Anecdotal leads.

Week 16 (Wednesday, May 7)
Individual conferences. Final project is due by the end of this week. 500 to 700 words. (Length to be discussed. Semester overview, project assistance)

There is no final exam in this class.

About the professor
Bruce Japsen is an award-winning, health care journalist, based in Chicago. He writes about health care business and policy for Forbes. He is also a contributing writer to the New York Times, Chicago Medicine magazine and Life Matters Media. He has more than 25 years of professional and academic journalism experience, including newspaper, TV, radio and Web-
based media, working as the health care business reporter at the Chicago Tribune from 1998 to 2011. He is a regular television analyst on PBS’ WTTW’s Chicago Tonight show, WBBM Newsradio-780 AM and 105.9 FM in Chicago and other national outlets. He has also been a reporter at Crain’s Modern Healthcare magazine, the Dubuque (IA) Telegraph Herald and the Des Moines Register, covering everything from Big Ten football and basketball to an Academy Award nominated movie and presidential politics. Japsen has taught at Loyola University Chicago’s School of Communication for eight years and has also taught in the University of Chicago’s Graham School of General Studies medical editing and publishing program. He sits on the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication Advisory Board.

Mobile 773-497-6252

bruce-japsen@uiowa.edu

www.twitter.com/brucejapsen