University of Iowa: School of Journalism and Mass Communication
19:120:EXW (4 semester hours) Arts and Culture Media
Spring 2013 Syllabus

Mondays and Wednesdays
3:30-5:20

Professor: Don McLeese

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Monday, Wednesday 5:30-6:30 (online)

Or by appointment (email is generally the most efficient way to reach me).

The above office hour information reflects my classroom teaching assignment this semester (and beyond) in Des Moines. I’ll send those students in Iowa City an APB any time my schedule has me on campus, and I’ll be happy to meet with students then. (I’ll have to be there at least once a month for faculty meetings and will likely be there more often for other commitments.) Or we can meet halfway—lunch in Grinnell?

I’ll also be happy to meet with any of you who happen to be in Des Moines, for whatever reason, at whatever time and day (other than when I’m teaching).

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 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 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.

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.

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 at the BEGINNING of class 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 Monday that would have merited an A will receive a C if it isn’t turned in until Wednesday. 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. 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 4-6 page paper (1000-1500 words, double-spaced) 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.

**TEXTBOOK**

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.

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 privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Academic Honesty

All CLAS students 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 around the fifth week of the semester by the Registrar. 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 dates and times of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar’s web site.

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.

(I will note that because this course doesn’t involve going outside to a classroom and the safety issues involved, it is conceivable that we could have class on days that the university has cancelled. Or not. Just check to make sure.)

“The Iowa Dozen”

In this class we will learn the following principles, which—when spelled out—become the “Iowa Dozen.”

We will learn:

1. to write correctly and clearly
2. to conduct research and gather information responsibly
3. to edit and evaluate carefully
4. to use media technologies thoughtfully
5. to apply statistical concepts appropriately

We will value:

6. First Amendment principles for all individuals and groups
7. a diverse global community
8. creativity and independence
9. truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity

We will explore:

10. mass communication theories and concepts
11. media institutions and practices
12. the role of media in shaping cultures.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week one
Mon, Jan 21: No Class. MLK day.

Wed, Jan 23: Introduction and syllabus.
Be prepared to discuss why criticism matters (and feel free to argue that it doesn’t).

Week two
Mon, Jan 28: Discuss critical perspectives and arguments. Practice some.
For Wed: Read and be prepared to discuss Aristotle’s Poetics, with an eye toward how his critical standards reflect his world and what has changed since. You can print it out at: http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html

Wed, Jan 30: Discuss Aristotle. Discuss the difference between criticism and reviewing. More reviewing exercises.
For Mon.: Read pgs 17-41. Start thinking of a performance or recording you’d like to review.

Week three
Mon, Feb 4: Discuss popular music reviewing
For Wed.: Read assigned reviews and essays
Wed, Feb 6: More discussion and warm-up for first assignment
For Mon: Grammy predictions due before the show starts Sunday. Write popular music review

**Week four**
Mon, Feb 11: Discuss Grammys and workshop popular music reviews.

For Wed: Popular music reviews due

Wed., Feb 13: Popular music reviews due and discussed.
Discuss classical music reviewing and how it differs from coverage of popular music.
For Mon: Read pgs 42-64. Write review based on in-class instruction

**Week five**
Mon, Feb 18: Music reviews due and discussed.
For Wed: Read pgs 65-90

Wed, Feb 20: Discussion of visual arts reviewing and assignment.
For Mon: Write visual arts review. Oscar predictions due before the show starts Sunday.

**Week six**
Mon, Feb 25: Discuss Oscars. Workshop and discuss visual arts review.
For Wed: Visual arts review due and discussed.

For Mon: Write a short paper (500-750 words) contrasting two reviews that reach opposite conclusions on a single work (see Rotten Tomatoes, Metacritic, etc., for ideas.)
Where do they agree. Where do they disagree. With which critic do you agree? Why?

**Week seven**
Mon, Mar 4: Discuss written assignment and personality profiles.
For Wed: Read pgs 203-235 and assigned profiles

Wed, March 6: Movie reviews due and discussed
For Mon: Read pgs 203-235

**Week eight**
Mon, March 11: Discuss personality profiles.
For Wed: Drafts of personality profile due for in-class workshopping.

For Mon, March 25: Write profiles.

**Week nine**
Mon, Mar 18 and Wed, Mar 20: NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK

**Week ten**
Mon, Mar 25: WORK DAY, profiles due in dropbox by midnight (no class session)
For Wed: Read pgs 91-115. Read assigned profiles. Start getting ideas for enterprise stories.

Wed, Mar 27: Discuss profiles.
For Mon: Write theater or dance rvw

**Week eleven**
Mon, April 1: Theater rvws due and discussed.
For Wed: Read pgs 118-149

Wed, April 3: Discuss film reviewing and how film differs from other arts (theater in particular)
For Mon.: Write movie reviews

**Week twelve**
Mon, Apr 8: Movie reviews due and discussed.
For Wed.: Read pgs 150-170 and assigned TV reviews

Wed, Apr 10: TV reviewing discussed
For Mon: Write TV review, read 236-269

**Week thirteen**
Mon, Apr 15: TV reviews due and discussed, brainstorm enterprise stories
For Wed: Read 171-204 and assigned book rvws

Wed, Apr. 17: Discuss book rvws
For Mon: Write book review.

**Week fourteen**
Mon, Apr 22: Book review due and discussed.
For Wed: Read assigned enterprise stories

Wed, Apr 24: Read and discuss assigned enterprise stories
For Mon: finish enterprise drafts to workshop

**Week fifteen**
Mon, Apr 29: Trouble shooting and begin workshopping final features
For Wed: Read feature drafts to workshop.

Wed, May 1: Workshop final features.
For Mon: Read posted final features.
Week sixteen
Mon, May 6: Final features due and discussed. Graded assignments returned by the weekend. Anyone who wants to revise needs to submit the final version by Fri., May 17. Optional extra credit papers due Wed, May 15. For Wed: Read final features.

Wed, May 8: Final stories discussed and famous last words.

No Final. Have a great summer.