NARRATIVE SPORTS JOURNALISM
JMC 3184
Mondays, Asynchronous
Wednesdays, 8-9:15 am

Dr. Thomas Oates
thomas-oates@uiowa.edu
Zoom Drop-in Hours: Tuesdays 10:30-12:00, Wednesdays 10:00-11:00, and other arranged
times.

Course description and objectives
This course focuses on longform, narrative journalism about sports. The pieces we will read,
though nonfiction and well-researched, present structures, themes, and conventions commonly
associated with fiction. We will examine several examples, some decades old, others from the
recent past, examining the voice, organization, and context of each work. By doing so, I hope that
you will learn new tools for analyzing sports journalism and crafting your own work. To facilitate
these goals, you will have several opportunities to practice research, writing, and planning over
the course of the semester.

The structure of this course allows you to assume responsibility for your improvement as a writer,
thinker, and critic. In this way, the course highlights the kind of self-discipline and motivation
that you will need to continue in order to improve and grow as a writer and thinker after your
coursework is complete.

Required texts
Pete Axhelm, The City Game: Basketball from the Garden to the Playgrounds (Bison Books,

Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru, League of Denial: The NFL, Concussions, and the Battle

Course assignments
• Discussions – Several times during the course, discussions will provide opportunities to review material,
seek clarification about course concepts and other details, and work towards success on the papers. Each
week, we will address the elements of narrative analysis discussed in the “tools for interpretation” lecture.
• Midterm Self-Evaluation – You must submit a self-evaluation by Week 6. This
evaluation should reflect on (1) your assessment of the goals and aims of the course, (2)
what you hope to learn, (3) what grade level you commit to, and what that grade requires.
We will also meet briefly to discuss your evaluation.
• Interviews – Three times this semester, we will have visitors who work in various
capacities as with narrative journalism. Students will conduct group interviews with each
of these visitors to better understand their work. Before each visit, you should research
your subject and carefully compose at least one open-ended and thoughtful question.
• Rapid Response Essays – These 500-1,000 word papers should identify and analyze a
single element (voice or organization or context) of the reading for the week. These
papers must be uploaded by Friday at 5 pm on the same week that the reading is assigned.
• Story Pitch – In this 1000-1500 word memo, make a compelling case for an original
work of sports journalism. Be sure to make a compelling argument that shows why the
story will be interesting. Describe who you would need to talk to and what other
information you would likely have to access. Discuss your plans for voice and organization as well. The assignment is due on the Monday of exam week.

**Course Rules and Regulations.**

- **Registration Deadlines:** Last day to drop without a W: Feb 5. Last day to drop with a W: April 2.
- **Absences and Attendance** – Students are responsible for attending class and for contributing to the learning environment of a course. Students are also responsible for knowing their course absence policies, which will vary by instructor. All absence policies, however, must uphold the UI policy related to student illness, mandatory religious obligations, including Holy Day obligations, military service obligations, unavoidable circumstances or University authorized activities. Students may use the CLAS absence form to aid communication with the instructor who will decide if the absence is excused or unexcused. The form is on ICON in the top banner under "Student Tools." More information is at [https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/attendance-absences](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/attendance-absences).

- **Lectures** – Lectures will review and further develop concepts and themes from the readings, and will introduce new concepts, themes, and examples. Recordings of each lecture will be posted on ICON, and you should watch each lecture ahead of the synchronous Wednesday meeting each week.

- **Studying** — The Center for Teaching recommends a 2:1 ratio of time spent studying per hour in class, which translates to 5-6 hours per week for this course. This course has a challenging reading load, so 5-6 hours will be necessary to do well. You should use this time to complete and carefully review the assigned reading, review your notes on readings and lectures and complete written assignments. Some weeks will be more work-intensive than others, so plan ahead and budget your time accordingly. Start your written assignment early.

- **Computer responsibilities** — You are responsible for knowing how to use a computer. This includes maintaining back-up files of your work. You must have an uiowa.edu account and be able to receive email there. Check this account regularly and forward to your primary account if necessary. All email communication for the course (both sent and received mail) must move through your uiowa.edu account. Course announcements will also be posted on ICON, so be sure to check in regularly.

- **Accommodations for Disabilities** – UI is committed to an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (such as mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related condition) by registering with Student Disability Services (SDS). The student is then responsible for discussing specific accommodations with the instructor. More information is at [https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/](https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/).

- **Administrative Home of the Course** – The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the administrative home of this course and governs its add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and related policies. Other colleges may have different policies. CLAS policies may be found here: [https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook).

- **Class Behavioral Expectations** – Students are expected to comply with University policies regarding appropriate classroom behavior as outlined in the Code of Student Life. This includes the policies and procedures that all students have agreed to regarding the Steps Forward for Fall 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly, all students are required to wear a face covering when in a UI building, including a classroom. In addition, the density of seats in classrooms has been reduced; in some
instances, this will allow 6 feet or more between students while other cases, it may be less. Regardless, wearing a face covering and maintaining as much distance as possible are vital to slowing the spread of COVID-19. In the event that a student disrupts the classroom environment through their failure to comply with the reasonable directive of an instructor or the University, the instructor has the authority to ask that the student immediately leave the space for the remainder of the class period. Additionally, the instructor is asked to report the incident to the Office of Student Accountability for the possibility of additional follow-up. Students who need a temporary alternative learning arrangement related to COVID-19 expectations should contact Student Disability Services arrangements; +1 319 335-1462 (https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/fall-2020/covid-19-temporary-learning-arrangements)

- **Class Recordings: Privacy and Sharing** – Some sessions of a course could be recorded or live-streamed. Such a recording or streaming will only be available to students registered for the course. These recordings are the intellectual property of the faculty, and they may not be shared or reproduced without the explicit written consent of the faculty member. Students may not share these sessions with those not in the class; likewise, students may not upload recordings to any other online environment. Doing so is a breach of the Code of Student Conduct and, in some cases, a violation of the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

- **Communication and the Required Use of UI Email** – Students are responsible for official correspondences sent to the UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for all communication within UI (Operations Manual, III.15.2).

- **Complaints** – Students with a complaint about an academic issue should first visit with the instructor or course supervisor and then with the Chair of the department or program offering the course; students may next bring the issue to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; see this page for more information: https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities.

- **Final Examination Policies** – The final exam schedule is announced around the fifth week of classes; students are responsible for knowing the date, time, and location of a final exam. Students should not make travel plans until knowing this information. No exams of any kind are allowed the week before finals with very few exceptions made (for labs, ESL and some world language courses, and off-cycle courses): https://registrar.uiowa.edu/final-examination-scheduling-policies.

- **Nondiscrimination in the Classroom** – The University of Iowa is committed to making the classroom a respectful and inclusive space for people of all gender, sexual, racial, religious, and other identities. Toward this goal, students are invited in MyUI to optionally share the names and pronouns they would like their instructors and advisors to use to address them. The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination and harassment against individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, and other identity categories set forth in the University’s Human Rights policy. For more information, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity (https://diversity.uiowa.edu/eod; +1 319 335-0705 or https://diversity.uiowa.edu/).

- **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 must uphold the UI mission and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment must be reported immediately. For assistance, please see https://osmrc.uiowa.edu/.

- **Mental Health Resources for Students**
  - http://counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu
  - http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/services/psychiatry
https://hr.uiowa.edu/livewell/managing-stress-and-behavioral-health
https://www.jccrisiscenter.org/24-hour-crisis-line/

24-Hour Crisis Line via The Johnson County Crisis Center
Hours: Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
Phone: (855) 325-4296; (319) 351-2726

**Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence**

If you have been the victim of a sexual assault or domestic violence on or off campus, or you know someone who has been assaulted and you want to find out more about available resources please contact the Rape Victim Advocate Program (RVAP), or Monsoon United Asian Women of Iowa, the UI Campus Police, or the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP).

*Resources:*
- RVAP: (319) 335-6000 [http://www.rvap.org/home/](http://www.rvap.org/home/)
- Monsoon: (866) 881-4641 [https://monsooniowa.org/programs-services/on-campus-victim-services/](https://monsooniowa.org/programs-services/on-campus-victim-services/)
- DVIP: (800) 373-1043 [http://dvipiowa.org/resources/](http://dvipiowa.org/resources/)
- Campus Police: (319) 335-5022 [https://police.uiowa.edu/police/reporting-sexual-assault](https://police.uiowa.edu/police/reporting-sexual-assault)

- **Resources for Students**
  - **Writing Center:** 110 English-Philosophy Building, 335-0188, [http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/](http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/)
  - **Speaking Center:** 12 English-Philosophy Building, 335-0205, [http://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/students/speaking-center](http://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/students/speaking-center)
  - **Mathematics Tutorial Laboratory:** 314 MacLean Hall, 335-0810, [http://www.math.uiowa.edu/math-tutorial-lab](http://www.math.uiowa.edu/math-tutorial-lab)
  - **Campus Inclusion Team:** [https://inclusionteam.uiowa.edu/](https://inclusionteam.uiowa.edu/)
  - **Student Disability Services:** (319) 335-1462 [https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/](https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/)
  - **Office of Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator:** (319) 335-6200 [https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/](https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/)
  - **CLAS Academic Programs and Student Development:** (319) 335-2633 [https://clas.uiowa.edu/students](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students)
  - **Academic Resource Center:** (319) 335-1497 [https://uc.uiowa.edu/student-success/arc](https://uc.uiowa.edu/student-success/arc)
  - **Conversation Center:** [https://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/conversation-center](https://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/conversation-center)

**TRIO Student Support Services:** (319)335-1288 [https://diversity.uiowa.edu/trio-sss](https://diversity.uiowa.edu/trio-sss)

**Requirements**

The schedule of papers and tests, as well as the credit assigned to each, will be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion participation</td>
<td>2/24, 3/17, 3/24, 3/31, 4/7, 4/21, 4/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Self-Evaluation</td>
<td>3/1-3/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>2/10, 2/17, 3/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid Response Essays</td>
<td>2/3-4/28 (on the assigned reading for the week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Pitch</td>
<td>Monday of Exam Week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment**

In this class, you’ll decide what grade you’ll receive. The requirements for each of these grades are listed below. This approach is called “contract grading,” and I am doing this because years of
study and my own personal experiences have led me to the conclusion that conventional forms of assessment do not facilitate learning in ways I can support. My role should be as an advocate and guide, not as an adversarial judge. I will be providing you with extensive feedback in this course, but I hope that this approach will allow that feedback to be more nuanced, and attuned to where you are as a learner and where you’d like to go. We will meet between March 1 and March 8. At that meeting, we will agree to one of the terms below. Your job is then to fulfill the requirements you’ve agreed to. My job is to monitor your progress and let you know if you’ve violated the contract.

For more on contract grading, see Jane Danielewicz and Peter Elbow, “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching,” College Composition and Communication, 2009, 244–68. Many of your questions about this method of grading may be answered below (see FAQ)

“A” grade meets all of the following

- Participate with good faith and generosity in all classroom discussions and exercises.
- Miss a maximum of one class (unexcused)
- Ask an informed, well-crafted question at all interview sessions.
- Complete the midterm self-evaluation with sincere self-reflection and familiarity with course readings and discussions.
- Submit two carefully conceived and constructed Rapid Response essays.
- Submit a story pitch that adheres to all requirements and is substantially revised in response to your classmates’ comments on your rough draft.
- Meet all deadlines.
- Meet with me twice over the course of the semester to discuss your performance in the class, areas of improvement, and lingering questions.

“B” grade meets all of the following

- Participate with good faith and generosity in all classroom discussions and exercises.
- Miss a maximum of two classes (unexcused)
- Ask a carefully thought out question at two interview sessions.
- Complete the midterm self-evaluation with sincere self-reflection and familiarity with course readings and discussions.
- Submit one carefully conceived and constructed Rapid Response essay.
- Submit a story pitch that adheres to all requirements and is substantially revised in response to your classmates’ comments on your rough draft.
- Meet all deadlines.
- Meet with me once over the course of the semester to discuss your performance in the class, areas of improvement, and lingering questions.

“C” grade meets all of the following

- Participate with good faith and generosity in all classroom discussions and exercises.
- Miss a maximum of three classes (unexcused)
- Ask a carefully thought out question one interview session.
- Complete the midterm self-evaluation.
- Submit a story pitch that adheres to all requirements.

“D” grade meets all of the following
• Miss a maximum of five classes (unexcused)
• Submit a final paper that adheres to some requirements.

Frequently Asked Questions

“What if I sign up for an A but mess up on one thing?”

You get one probationary exemption from the contract. If you mess up and are absent twice instead of once, that’s OK; but you can’t do it again, or fail to fulfill any of the other terms of the contract. If you do, you’ll meet with me, and we’ll renegotiate.

“What if I change my mind about what grade I want?”

Email me and we’ll renegotiate.

“What if you decide that I haven’t fulfilled the requirements of an assignment?”

In such cases, you get a week from my notification to revise and resubmit. Please note that this does not apply to the final paper.

“If you’re not giving grades, how will I know what I need to improve?”

I’ll still comment on your drafts, exams, and papers. I just won’t attach a letter grade to them.

“How do I know how I’m doing, relative to the other students in the class?”

Who cares?

“What if I take advantage of this arrangement and don’t do my best?”

This is your education. I am trusting you to act in good faith to get the most out of this course.

Calendar

Week 1: Introductions
January 25               Syllabus Review
January 27               Introductions

Week 2: Collective Profiles
February 1               Lizzy Goodman, “The Best Women’s Soccer Team in the World Fights for Equal Pay”
February 3               Tools for Interpretation

Week 3: Collective Profiles
February 8               Sean Hurd, “The Emotional Fatigue of the WNBA Bubble”
February 10              Interview #1: Alison Overholt
Week 4: Parallel Narratives
February 15   Pete Axhelm, *The City Game*, chapters 1-9
February 17  **Interview #2: Andrew Sherburne**

Week 5: Parallel Narratives
February 22  Pete Axhelm, *The City Game*, chapters 10-17
February 24  **Discussion #1**

Week 6: Profiles
March 1   Gay Talese, “The Silent Season of a Hero”  
Meetings
March 3   Meetings

Week 7: Profiles
March 8   Wright Thompson, “The Losses of Dan Gable”  
Meetings
March 10  **Interview #3: Wright Thompson**

Week 8: Profiles
March 15  James Baldwin, “The Fight”  
**Discussion #2**
March 17

Week 9: Profiles
March 22  Claudia Rankine, “The Meaning of Serena Williams”  
**Discussion #3**
March 24

Week 10: Profiles
March 29  Katie Barnes, “Inside Maya Moore’s Extraordinary Quest for Justice”  
**Discussion #4**
March 31

Week 11: Investigation
April 5   Watch Athlete A  
Kerry Howley, “How Did Larry Nassar Deceive So Many So Long?”  
**Discussion #5**
April 7

Week 12: Investigation
April 14  **Instructional Break - No Class**

Week 13: Investigation
April 21  **Discussion #6**

Week 14: Investigation
April 26  *League of Denial* (Film)
April 28  **Discussion #7**

Week 14: Review and Workshop
May 3    **Wrap-up and Review**
May 5    **Workshop**

Exam Week
May 10  **Final Paper Due Monday by 5 pm**