University of Iowa: School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Journalism and Bob Dylan
JMC 3185: 0001

Fall 2020 Syllabus

2:00 – 3:15  TTh

Professor: Don McLeese

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Office/Drop-in hours: Tuesday and Thursday 12:30-2
Or by appointment. We will establish Zoom links for both drop-in hours and appointments (unless the student would prefer phone, email or some other form of communication)

Even during drop-in hours, a student might consider making an appointment. We’ll be using the Zoom waiting room, so if you have an extended wait in there, it’s because I’m already talking with another student.

STUDENT COURSE OBJECTIVES:

*To understand how media mediates (which grammatically should be “how media mediate”) between the subject of such journalism and the consumer.
* To get a sense of how complex this relationship of artist-journalist-consumer has been in the case of Bob Dylan, who has viewed the media as both an antagonist and an enabler, and has used it for his purposes of both revealing and concealing himself.
* To track the ever-changing phases of Dylan’s music and public image through the media lens. And to understand that progression within a wider cultural and socio-political context over the course of more than a half-century.
* To gain a greater understanding of just what Dylan’s artistic accomplishment is, and what might constitute the “real” Bob Dylan.
* To engage with a range of inspired music and incisive writing, thus deepening our appreciation for both the musical arts and arts journalism.
* To sharpen one’s skills in writing clear, coherent and compelling analysis of complex issues and artistry.
* To discuss, debate, argue and to have some fun in the process.

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

On Wikipedia (a source I suggest you never use for an academic paper), you can find the following:

From August 15, 2002 until April 19, 2012, Dylan had been introduced at the beginning of every concert with an announcement made by a member of his stage crew, the stage manager, Al Santos:

“Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the poet laureate of rock 'n' roll. The voice of the promise of the 60s counterculture. The guy who forced folk into bed with rock. Who donned makeup in the 70s and disappeared into a haze of substance abuse. Who emerged to find Jesus. Who was written off as a has-been by the end of the '80s, and who suddenly shifted gears releasing some of the strongest music of his career beginning in the late '90s. Ladies and gentlemen — Columbia recording artist Bob Dylan!”[7]

This introduction was adapted from an article by Jeff Miers about Dylan that had appeared in a local newspaper, The Buffalo News, on August 9, 2002.

This introduction cuts to the heart of this course—the relationship between Bob Dylan and journalism, and the manners in which his artistic identity has been mediated through those who would analyze and interpret it. Why would Bob Dylan choose to use that introduction, based on (but unattributed to) an obscure review, for over a decade?

Did he appreciate the way it encapsulated his career and legacy? Did he find it funny, simplistic, reductive, wrong-headed? Is he making fun of the journalist? Or is he making fun of himself?
The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind. Perhaps no other artist, musical or otherwise, has changed the world in which we live more than Bob Dylan. Or reflected and anticipated those changes. And none has adopted and shed more personae, throwing the very essence of artistic identity into question. He warns those who would dare to understand him too quickly, too simplistically:

Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin

Those lines are from “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” an anthem Dylan recorded in 1963, when he was 22 years old. At the time, Dylan had no idea of the changes to come, how radical and quick and significant and tumultuous they would be. But he was already challenging those who would categorize him too quickly, as a folksinger, a protest singer, the voice of his generation.

More than 50 years later, that wheel’s still in spin.

During the 2020 pandemic lockdown, he released his first album of new, original material in eight years. It was totally unanticipated. The first song proclaims, “I Contain Multitudes.” He stole that phrase from Walt Whitman. We’ll be considering the twisted relationship between influence and originality over the course of this semester as well. (Bob Dylan—genius or charlatan?)

We’ll be examining Dylan through his various phases and guises over the decades: Woody Guthrie wannabe, civil rights and anti-war activist, rock revolutionary (and folk traitor), speed freak, motorcycle accident casualty, seminal country rocker, born-again Christian, hardcore Zionist, folk traditionalist (once young, and again, toward the latter stages of his career), an ever-touring senior citizen enjoying a creative resurgence that no one anticipated, and, until recently, froggy-voiced re-interpreter of the Great American Songbook (those songs associated with Frank Sinatra in particular).

How can we assemble the pieces of this particular puzzle so they fit together?

We’ll also see how an artist who has often sustained a guarded, even adversarial relationship with fans, the press and the culture at large became surprisingly accessible in the 21st century—writing his memoirs (the first volume, which we’ll read here), hosting his own “Theme Time Radio Hour,” participating in Martin Scorsese’s “No Direction Home” and “Rolling Thunder Revue” documentaries. (We’ll likely watch some of each in here.)
And we’ll ask ourselves, over and over, through all the complications and contradictions that we confront, who or what is the “real” Bob Dylan? Is there a common denominator or connectivity? Does even Bob Dylan know what to make of this “Bob Dylan” character?

And maybe here’s the crux of Dylan’s music, more than the meaning of verses that might mix poetry with drug-addled gibberish: *How does it feel?*

As with a lot of my courses—and a lot of Bob Dylan’s songs—we’re likely to raise more questions than we can ever hope to answer. (“How many roads must a man walk down, before you call him a man?”). We will examine Dylan from many perspectives—yours, mine, that of journalists and academics, Dylan’s own shifting perspectives.

We will listen to a lot of Dylan (singing and talking), read a lot about Dylan, write a lot about Dylan. And we will emerge from this collective experience different from the way we were when we started, recognizing that the world is different, and our lives are different, in the wake of Bob Dylan’s impact and influence.

This course will shape itself as we reveal—individually and collectively—what we know and what we need to know. As we proceed chronologically through Dylan’s career, I’ll likely stick to the reading and other assignments on the syllabus, but what you bring to this course will determine how we will proceed in class—how much you need in the way of crash-course introduction, how deep we can go how quickly. You will not be evaluated on how much (if anything) you know about Bob Dylan at the beginning of this course, but I anticipate that all of us (including me) will have a deeper and different perspective by the end.

The late Sam Shepard—playwright, author and actor—was a Dylan confidante and collaborator. He wrote a book about participating in Dylan’s Rolling Thunder Revue. Here (from Pitchfork) the entirety of a chapter titled “If a Mystery Is Solved” reads as follows:

*If a mystery is solved, the case is dropped. In this case, in the case of Dylan, the mystery is never solved, so the case keeps on. It keeps coming up again. Over and over the years. Who is this character anyway?*

Our class sessions will be discussion intensive as well as filled with music and other clips to which we will respond (through discussion and written assignment). As the course progresses in the synchronous online format, we will determine how best to use our time together and what work you should be doing outside class (particularly in regard to video that I would otherwise have shown in the classroom but might decide to have you watch on your own).

Your reading will be enriched immeasurably by your listening to the music. (And vice versa.) You will find an online music streaming subscription (Spotify, Apple, whatever) to be crucial for immersing yourself in the music.
I will augment what’s on the syllabus with other readings and more writing assignments, often based on what we watch, listen to and discuss in class. This course has always been discussion intensive, and I would hope that the online format in no way diminishes the intensity of that discussion (which might have been more diminished in a masked and socially distanced classroom). Dylan remains a contentious figure, and the conventional wisdom about him has often proven to be misguided. As we’ll discuss.

Many have spent a lifetime listening to, reading about and even writing about Dylan. We have a semester, which could spark a lifetime’s interest. There is no limit on how much listening, reading and reflecting you can do.

This course can and will be what you make it. And you can make it every bit as rich and revelatory online as you could in the classroom.

**TEXTBOOKS**

**Chronicles** by Bob Dylan (Chron)


**Dylan: Disc by Disc** by Jon Bream, editor (DD)

The abbreviations in parentheses are how the reading assignments are referred to in the syllabus. Readings listed for each class session should be done before the class sessions that week. You can find used copies of a couple of these fairly cheap on Amazon or elsewhere. I don’t care whether you purchase the hardback or paperback. I’m also fine with the earlier edition of the Essential Interviews anthology—published in association with Rolling Stone—rather than the slightly expanded reissue from 2017, published by Simon and Schuster.

I also expect you to maintain a music streaming account or otherwise have access to Dylan’s music. This isn’t a music appreciation course, but as a journalism course that frequently references music in conjunction with how writers have responded to it, it will require you to familiarize yourself with the musical progression (or be awfully good at faking it)

As you’ll see from the syllabus, your assignments outside class are reading intensive. Dylan’s memoir is engaging and illuminating while (as always) raising as many questions and issues as it resolves. Because these books have different perspectives and are organized differently, some weeks the readings will connect with each other more closely than others, though you’ll be amazed at (and expected to respond to) all sorts of connections by the end.
Final grades will be determined as follows:

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION 20%
SHORTER PAPERS (every two or three weeks): 25%
MIDTERM: 20%
FINAL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: 35%

Written assignments that are late will be docked a letter grade per day. (A paper due Tuesday that deserves an A will receive a B if I don’t get it until Wednesday, etc.)

I’ve generally put a fairly strict policy concerning attendance on the syllabus, something to the effect that Attendance is MANDATORY. In practice, my sneaky little secret is that I have used attendance and participation considerations to reward rather than to punish. Those students who have some issues in their written work (perhaps mechanical, as regards clean copy) but who are strong participants in class discussion could well boost their final grade from the B range into the A range. But if you are consistently an A student on your written work, I will not punish you with a lower final grade because of attendance and participation.

That said, I think many/most/all of you will discover that there’s a correlation between how diligent you are about attending class and participating in it—as well as doing the required reading and listening—and how well you do on the written work. Because the written assignments will draw heavily on issues we’ve discussed in class, and you will be rewarded for incorporating elements from discussion as well as from your reading and listening in your responses.

I am not a professor who puts much stock in points and rubrics, in any attempt to quantify your performance as a sequence of plusses, minuses and equations. I am more like the Supreme Court justice who said he knows pornography when he sees it. I know A-level work when I see it, as well as B and C. But as a guide to those of you who can’t see through my eyes, here are the distinctions I tend to make:

A: Cohesive and coherent writing that is free of mechanical errors, reflecting critical incisiveness and depth in resourcing and researching (support from reading, watching, listening and discussion). Strong arguments, persuasively made. Writing that shows that the student has done the required listening, reading, watching, discussing and thinking. Bonus points (though I don’t use points) for amusing and entertaining your professor.

B: Writing that makes general sense and holds together, but perhaps too many mechanical mistakes (spelling, punctuation et al.) and too little documentation from sources (reading, class, lyrics et al.). Maybe some holes that need filling, some dots to connect. At least a revision or two away from an A.
C: Too messy in terms of mechanics and/or organization. Addresses the assignment and shows some familiarity with the issues but really doesn’t hold together. A lot more dots that need connecting.

D: Who are you trying to fool? You or me? This doesn’t address the assignment and/or doesn’t show much familiarity with the material or the issues. You haven’t been paying attention or doing the work. You’re phoning it in.

F: You have tried to do the bare minimum to get credit for completing this assignment, and you have not succeeded.

Another way to look at this course is in terms of three equal and interrelated components. The deeper you go into each of them, the more rewarding you will find this course. If you try to get away with doing little, you won’t fool me and you’ll be cheating yourself.

**Listening:** You will have the opportunity, and an opportunity it is, to absorb what is arguably the longest, widest and deepest catalogue in popular music, and to make sense of its roller coaster peaks and valleys and its hairpin turns. You will be expected to have listened to the albums corresponding to the assigned DD chapters before each week’s class sessions.

**Reading:** The assigned readings will help put the music in context and perspective, and show how Dylan’s everchanging music and persona have been interpreted through media coverage and shaped by it.

**Watching and discussing:** The in-class part of the regimen, though some of what I have had students watch in the classroom in earlier years might be shifted to online streaming. Class discussions will incorporate plenty of music and performing, and reinforce the salient issues that remain contentious among Dylan’s public.

**There will be no final exam.**
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, unavoidable circumstances, or University authorized activities (https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/attendance-absences). 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 located on ICON within the top banner under "Student Tools."

Academic Integrity
All undergraduates enrolled in courses offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty. Misconduct is reported to the College, resulting in suspension or other sanctions, with sanctions communicated with the student through UI email. Visit this page for information: (https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code).

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/.

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.

**Classroom 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 cover 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 of distance while other cases, it may be less. Regardless, wearing face coverings and maintaining as much distance as is 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 (https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/fall-2020/covid-19-temporary-learning-arrangements/; +1 319 335-1462).

**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](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 place 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 a few exceptions made for particular types of courses such as labs or off-cycle courses: [https://registrar.uiowa.edu/final-examination-scheduling-policies](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](https://diversity.uiowa.edu/eod); +1 319 335-0705 or [diversity.uiowa.edu](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/](https://osmrc.uiowa.edu/).
ON THE WEB

In hopes of getting everyone on the same page, could you please add some information to your Syllabus about Following SJMC on social media to stay in the loop about activities/events, scholarships, internships, awards, current students, alumni and everything SJMC??

Here are the links:

FACEBOOK: https://www.facebook.com/UISJMC/
INSTAGRAM: https://www.instagram.com/uiowa_sjmc/
TWITTER: https://twitter.com/UIOWA_SJMC
LINKEDIN:
https://www.linkedin.com/school/19128785 (Shortened version)
OR

COURSE CALENDAR (Reading and Corresponding Listening)
There will be additional reading assignments within the ICON modules, as well as a series of short writing assignments

Week one (8/25-27)
Introduction and syllabus. Watch No Direction Home

Week two (9/1-3)
DD, Intro, Ch 1-2. Chron, Ch 1, EI: Gooding, Terkel. Watch No Direction Home

Week three (9/8-10)
DD, Ch 3-4, Chron, Ch 2, EI: Hentoff, Cocks

Week four (9/15-17)
DD, 5-7, EI: Robbins through Hentoff

Week five (9/22-24)
DD, 8-10, EI: Sing Out! Through EVO

Week six (9/29-10/1)
DD, 11-13; Chron Ch 3

**Week seven (10/6-8)**
DD 14-16, EI: Cott, Watch *Rolling Thunder*

**Week eight (10/13-15)**
DD 17-8, Watch *Rolling Thunder*, Midterm Due

**Week nine (10/20-22)**
DD 19-22, EI: KMEX--Loder

**Week ten (10/27-29)**
DD 23-27; Chron, Ch 4, EI: Westwood One--Gilmore

**Week eleven (11/3-5)**
DD 28-29; EI: Shepard--Zollo

**Week twelve (11/10-12)**
DD 30-33, EI: NYT—Gilmore, RS, and to the end

**Week thirteen (11/17-19)**
DD 34-36, along with Fallen Angels and Triplicate; Chron Ch 5

**Week fourteen (11/24-26)**
No class. Thanksgiving break.

**Week fifteen (12/1-3)**
Listen to Rough and Rowdy Ways.

**Week sixteen (12/8-10)**
Wrapping up. Final papers due.