Course description: Specialized Reporting and Writing is a 4-credit-hour course in which students focus on a topic or genre as they practice a variety of writing and research skills needed in the professional communications industry. The prerequisites for this course are Journalistic Reporting and Writing (JMC: 2010) and Introduction to Multimedia Storytelling (JMC: 2020). Lectures, discussions and assignments in Specialized Reporting and Writing will build on the basics learned in the pre-requisite courses and prepare students for advanced coursework in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

This section (JMC: 3400:0002) will focus on the topic of health, the environment and fitness. Students will complete the following major assignments: an issue story, a personality profile, an opinion piece, a public affairs story and a fifth story from the category of their choice. The sixth and final major assignment will be a group research project and presentation. The project and stories will be based on topics related to health, the environment and fitness.

Students will be expected to do interviews, research, self-editing and peer-editing that produce professional-level work. They are encouraged to submit the work for publication in any credible journalism venue. All work written for class will be posted to a closed blog that may be viewed only by their peers in the class. Students also should consider posting their work from this class to their personal blogs for potential use as an online portfolio.

Required reading:
- The Associated Press Stylebook (2016)
- The New York Times
- The Des Moines Register
- The Daily Iowan
- Other readings assigned throughout the semester

The Associated Press Stylebook may be purchased in print, or the online version may be used. Students also will have access to a shared online account for the AP Stylebook. The newspapers may be read online or in print. Other readings will be posted on ICON. Assigned readings should be completed before the related class sessions.

The New York Times (nytimes.com) and the Des Moines Register (desmoinesregister.com) are available in vending machines around campus and are accessible to students using their ID.
cards. Both newspapers have limited access on the open Internet. They are available through the Proquest, Factiva and LexisNexis databases.

Students must check ICON for readings. Most readings will be posted by 5 p.m. on Fridays for the following week. The exception will be breaking news stories. Students should check ICON by noon on the days that the class meets to see if any breaking news stories have been posted. The instructor will seek to limit the last-minute updates to stories that are good examples of health, fitness or environmental writing, or breaking news of critical importance that warrants discussion.

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**SJMC Learning Outcomes**

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication is committed to your academic and professional success. In line with this commitment, we have identified particular learning outcomes that every student should obtain by the time they earn a JMC degree. We regularly assess the curriculum to determine whether students are achieving these outcomes. This course contributes to these learning outcomes by helping you develop the abilities to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages across multiple media domains and to communicate effectively with the highest, professionally-accepted standards in all work.

Achieving these outcomes means:

- You will demonstrate an ability to anticipate and recognize ethical issues when they arise and to reason through them taking multiple perspectives and contexts into account.
- You will develop critical thinking skills to analyze and interpret media messages through an understanding of media practices and institutions.
- You will learn how to create and disseminate media messages in various forms.
- You will demonstrate the ability to gather factual story elements, and to evaluate and express them in logical, narrative forms for multiple media and audiences.
- You will display the ability to access and analyze data, report facts accurately, research and edit information responsibly and in a manner commensurate with professional standards.
- You will demonstrate the ability to apply above concepts in a manner that is sensitive to audiences across all media.
- You will demonstrate an ability to work with members of diverse groups to engage publicly over issues of community interest.

**Course-specific objectives:**

By the end of this course students will demonstrate:

- The ability to use journalistic techniques in writing.
- The ability to communicate effectively.
- The ability to research and gather information.
- An understanding of the elements of news.
- An understanding of ethical and professional standards of journalism.
- An appreciation for journalism’s role in democracy and society in general.
- An ability to meet deadlines.
**Course requirements:** All assignments, quizzes and exams are designed to support the learning objectives listed above.

- Students will complete five major writing assignments: an issue story, a personality profile, an opinion piece, a public affairs story and a fifth story from the category of their choice. Each story is worth 100 points. Rubrics will be used to grade each of these assignments, and students will choose the order in which they write each assignment.

The final drafts of the stories must be turned in to the instructor for grading before they are submitted for publication elsewhere. Grades for each story will become official after students have posted it to the internal class blog. Points for the major writing assignments will total 500.

- The instructor will assign teams for the final project, which will involve identifying health, fitness or environmental data commonly cited in the media and tracing the data to its origin. Teams will prepare a 15-minute presentation that describes the issue, how the data is used by the media, how they traced the data and what they found. Participants will be graded in two parts – as individuals and as teams with each part worth 100 points. The total value of the final project is 200 points.

- Class attendance and participation are required. The class meets 30 times during the semester. Students will be eligible for up to four participation points each class period through Nov. 16 (before the break) for a total of 100 points. This system allows students to have one “free” absence before the break without losing participation points. The “free” absence cannot be used when a speaker is scheduled. Participation points for the final project will be awarded separately as part of the rubric for that assignment and will include attendance during the last two weeks of class.

  Participation points will be awarded as follows: 1 point for arriving to class on time and 3 points based on preparation for class demonstrated by asking relevant questions, making constructive comments and participating in exercises that aren’t graded separately. If students collectively fail to demonstrate through their participation that they are reading assignments in advance, the instructor will start giving reading quizzes as a substitute for participation points.

- Eight in-class exercises will be collected randomly during the semester and will be worth 10 points each. Students will also write reviews of local fitness clubs, which will be worth 20 points. The review and in-class exercises will total 100 points.

  If a speaker is scheduled, class attendance will be required. Attendance that day will count as one of the 10 point in-class assignments, and students will only receive the full 10 points if they arrive in class on time, pay attention and engage with the speaker.

  Students will peer edit the five major writing assignments. Each editing session will be worth 10 points to be awarded based on the editor’s efforts to assist the writer in completing stories worthy of publication. Editing for the semester will total 50 points.

- Two 25-point quizzes that cover the lecture material will be given. The first will be given Oct. 12 and will cover lectures up to that point, and the second will be given on Nov. 28,
covering lectures from the last half of the semester. Points from lecture quizzes for the semester will total 50.

Summary of points:
Major assignments: 700 points (70 percent)
Attendance and participation: 100 points (10 percent)
In-class exercises, editing and guest speakers: 150 points (15 percent)
Lecture quizzes: 50 points (5 percent)
Total: 1,000 points

**Academic honesty and grading:** Professional communication is fact-based. Aside from selected mock assignments given by the instructor, students’ work will be original and factual. The instructor may check sources used by students to ensure the sources had been contacted and were quoted accurately. Plagiarism and fabrication are treated with the utmost seriousness in professional workplaces and will be regarded the same way for this course. Any student who plagiarizes or fabricates information will receive a “zero” on the assignment and will be reported to the college for further disciplinary action. See the paragraph on Academic Honesty in the final section of the syllabus for more information. In addition, collaboration is not permitted unless the instructor gives specific assignments that require teamwork. In situations where students are covering the same event or issue, they must work independently and may not share notes, recordings, or any other material or information related to that assignment. Students who engage in collaboration will receive a “zero” on the assignment.

Students will turn in a log for each major assignment. The log will include the time, date and place of all interviews; contact information including email addresses and phone numbers for all people interviewed; and a bibliography and website addresses for all research used. Students also must produce all notes or recordings upon request. Students must not interview relatives or friends, and instructors may randomly check with sources to inquire about their relationship to the student journalist. The use of relatives or friends as sources is considered an unethical conflict of interest in the field of journalism and will reflect negatively in the student’s grade for that assignment.

**Missed assignment policy:** In-class assignments, quizzes and so forth cannot be made up unless the student is attending a University-excused activity or provides a doctor’s note verifying illness. The instructor will not repeat lecture information or in-class announcements. Students who must be absent should arrange to get lecture and discussion notes from classmates. When students are absent for excused activities that are scheduled in advance, they must turn in assignments before the deadlines. Students who provide verification of illness may be allowed an extension on major projects without penalty until class time the Monday that follows the deadline. Students who miss class for an excused absence may be given up to one week to make up in-class exercises or quizzes. Students should be aware that absences will not be excused for minor illnesses, internships, outside job duties, etc. Because one “free” absence is allowed, other absences will rarely be excused, so plan accordingly. The “free” absence also cannot be used to extend deadlines on the major assignments, and it cannot be used for a class period when a speaker is scheduled.
**Deadline policy:** The ability to meet deadlines is a critical skill in the communications industry and will be strictly enforced in this class. Students will begin losing points immediately after missing the assignment deadline and will lose a full letter grade for each 24-hour period that the assignment is turned in late. After five days, the assignment will not be accepted and the student will receive a “zero” on that assignment.

**Grading:**

- **A** = 93 percent to 100 percent
- **A-** = 90 to 92 percent
- **B+** = 87 percent to 89 percent
- **B** = 83 percent to 86 percent
- **B-** = 80 percent to 82 percent
- **C+** = 77 percent to 79 percent
- **C** = 73 percent to 76 percent
- **C-** = 70 percent to 72 percent
- **D** = 60 percent to 69 percent
- **F** = 59 percent and below

Percentages will be rounded to the nearest whole number when grades are assigned at the end of the semester.

**General expectations**

- Complete assigned readings before the lectures.
- Set aside plenty of time to complete projects. Most of the work on the major assignments will be done outside class. For a four credit hour course, students should expect to spend at least eight hours a week working outside class time.
- Stories must be approved by the instructor more than a week before the first draft is due. The sooner you get this approval, the better. This will give you more time for reporting and writing. Well-organized students could theoretically turn in all their story pitches at the beginning of the semester, and as soon as the pitches are approved, get a head start. I will gladly accept completed stories before the listed deadlines.
- Be prepared to share assignments with others in class. Professional writing by its nature is public and subject to scrutiny. Get accustomed to it.
- Do not interview relatives or friends for assignments. Professional communicators must talk with a diverse range of people in a wide variety of situations. Start to develop these skills now.
- Likewise, do not rely on email, texting or other forms of electronic communication for interviews. In-person or, secondly, telephone interviews remain the best methods of obtaining fresh, first-hand information.
- Take notes. You might not believe this, but technology can fail and often does at the most inconvenient times. Good notes are an acceptable back-up to produce written journalism, and they are particularly helpful in deadline reporting.
Do record interviews along with taking notes, even for stories intended only for print. **Equipment can be checked out** from the equipment room located on the first floor of the Becker Communication Studies Building. This is expensive equipment, and you are responsible for maintaining it when you check it out. To check out equipment for this course, please reserve it by visiting http://research3.its.uiowa.edu/film/. You must reserve equipment by 8 a.m. on the day you’d like to check it out. You can only reserve equipment for pickup on a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. You can reserve equipment up to two weeks in advance. You must have a valid University of Iowa student ID card to checkout equipment.

Good writers are voracious readers. Set aside at least 30 minutes a day to read news stories. Along with the New York Times, the Des Moines Register and the Daily Iowan, try Time magazine (time.com), cnn.com and npr.org among others. Reading the professional publications will improve your writing skills and alert you to trends and issues in education that could be used for the major assignments in this class.

Turn off cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices during class unless the instructor allows their use for specific class-related purposes. Students who violate this policy may be asked to turn in their devices until the end of the class period.

Check ICON and campus email before each class period for announcements. In case I am ill or otherwise incapacitated, I will make every effort to send an email the night before, but that may not always be possible. The best policy is to check email and ICON in the morning before coming to class.

**Class structure:**
This class will operate as a quasi-newsroom with students serving a dual role as reporters and copy editors. The instructor will serve as a managing editor and assignment editor. This process will help students understand the basics of how news is produced, although students should be aware that news operations vary among different media organizations. Nevertheless, the basic procedures tend to be similar, and certain values – such as accuracy and transparency -- are widely shared and worth cultivating, even as media platforms continue to evolve.

In many ways, journalists – and professionals in other communication fields – are never “off duty.” They are constantly observing the people, places and activities that surround them and looking for stories that are interesting or useful for their audience. They are flexible and prepared to change plans with little or no notice. They monitor news at the local, state, national and international level and appreciate good reporting and writing on any topic in any form. They are continuously learning and searching for ways to improve. The structure of this class is aimed at helping students develop this mindset; thus, the requirements to check for reading updates on weekends and evenings, attend events or interviews whenever needed for assignments, come up with story ideas independently and consume news daily.

Class meetings will be a combination of lectures, discussions and hands-on work. As with anything, students who put for the most effort stand to gain the most – not just a good grade but personal and professional development.
**Tentative course schedule:** The instructor may extend discussion of certain topics if needed for the students’ benefit, or interject discussion of high-profile breaking news stories. Check ICON regularly for updates on assignments.

Readings from newspapers, magazines and news websites will be added each week. Most reading assignments will be posted to ICON the Friday evening before class, but breaking news stories may be assigned until noon the day of class.

Students will work with a peer editor in class on the Mondays that the first drafts of stories are due. Student editors should use a substantial portion of the class period to thoroughly edit the stories and help their peers prepare the stories for the class website, potential outside publication and grading by the instructor. **This process is subject to change if the class time is not used productively.** To ensure the process runs smoothly, the first drafts must represent writers’ best efforts, relying on the peer editors to help polish the stories to a professional level. If this system does not work effectively for a substantial number of students, deadlines for the first draft will be moved to 8 a.m. the preceding Thursday, and the instructor will assign an initial grade that can be raised by up to 10 points after the peer-editing.
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<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1: Aug. 22, 24</strong></td>
<td>Introductions, course overview and syllabus review. Begin discussing issues related to health and start brainstorming story ideas. Discuss <strong>interviewing</strong> and <strong>personality profiles</strong>.</td>
<td>Check ICON for reading assignments. Sample writing on Wednesday: not for grade</td>
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| **Week 2: Aug. 29, 31** | **Issue stories**  
Applicable ethical and legal issues will be reviewed. Editing procedures and expectations will be covered, including a review of the AP Stylebook. Review of lead writing. | Before class on Monday, read the SPJ Code of Ethics: [https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp](https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp). Be sure to note areas in the ethics code where you need clarification or want discussion. Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 1 with the instructor on or before Wednesday, Aug. 31. Check ICON for other reading assignments. |
| **Week 3: Sept. 7 (No class Monday: Labor Day)** | **Public Affairs stories**  
Understanding the beat structure of newsrooms. | Before class, read "Covering a Beat" posted on ICON. Check ICON for reading assignments. |
| **Week 4: Sept. 12, 14** | **Opinion writing**                                       | First draft of Assignment No. 1 due by **noon Monday, Sept. 12**.  
Final draft of Assignment No. 1 due by **noon Wednesday, Sept. 14**.  
Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 2 with the instructor on or before Wednesday, Sept. 14. Check ICON for reading assignments. |
| **Week 5: Sept. 19, 21** | **Review writing**                                        | Check ICON for reading assignments.  
Secret shop local fitness clubs and write short reviews. Reviews due by **noon Thursday, Sept. 22**.  
Post the first round of stories to the class blog by the end of class time Wednesday. |
| **Week 6: Sept. 26, 28** | **Trends and how-to stories**  
Review of story forms, such as the inverted pyramid, hourglass and various feature formats. | First draft of Assignment No. 2 due by **noon Monday, Sept. 26**.  
Final draft of Assignment No. 2 due by **noon Wednesday, Sept. 28**.  
Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 3 with the instructor on or before Wednesday, Sept. 28. Check ICON for reading assignments. |
| **Week 7: Oct. 3, 5** | **Other types of stories, including but not limited to historical overviews, disaster coverage, crime coverage and obituaries** | Check ICON for reading assignments. Post the second round of stories to the class blog by the end of class time Wednesday. |
| **Week 8: Oct. 10, 12** | **Political writing**                                    | First draft of Assignment No. 3 due by **noon Monday, Oct. 10**.  
Final draft of Assignment No. 3 due by **noon Wednesday, Oct. 12**.  
**LECTURE QUIZ No. 1 to be given at the** |
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<tr>
<th>Week 9: Oct. 17, 19</th>
<th>Alternative story forms: Q&amp;As, participatory journalism, vignettes, etc.</th>
<th>Clear your story idea for Assignment No. 4 with the instructor on or before Wednesday, Oct. 12. Check ICON for reading assignments.</th>
<th>Post the third round of stories to the class blog by the end of class time Wednesday.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 10: Oct. 24, 26</td>
<td>In-depth interviewing: Digging below the surface.</td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 4 due by <strong>noon Monday, Oct. 24</strong>. Final draft due by <strong>noon Wednesday, Oct. 26</strong>. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
<td>Post the fourth round of stories to the class blog by the end of class time Wednesday.</td>
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<td>Week 11: Oct. 31, Nov. 2</td>
<td>Journalism blogs and other social media as journalism tools</td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 5 due by <strong>noon Monday, Nov. 7</strong>. Final draft of Assignment No. 5 due by <strong>noon Wednesday, Nov. 9</strong>. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
<td>Post the fifth round of stories to the class blog by the end of class time Wednesday.</td>
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<td>Week 12: Nov. 7, 9</td>
<td>Short- and long-form features</td>
<td>First draft of Assignment No. 4 due by <strong>noon Monday, Oct. 24</strong>. Final draft due by <strong>noon Wednesday, Oct. 26</strong>. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
<td>Post the fourth round of stories to the class blog by the end of class time Wednesday.</td>
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<td>Week 13: Nov. 14, 16</td>
<td>Public records, open meetings Numbers and databases: Tracing the numbers</td>
<td>Teams to be assigned for the final project on Monday, Nov. 14. Clear your project idea with the instructor on or before Wednesday, Nov. 16. Check ICON for reading assignments.</td>
<td>Post the fifth round of stories to the class blog by the end of class time Wednesday.</td>
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<td>Break</td>
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<td>Week 14: Nov. 28, 30</td>
<td>Class time for work on project. Students will remain in class while the instructor is present both days this week and use the time for planning and research related to the final project.</td>
<td>LECTURE QUIZ No. 2 to be given at the beginning of class Nov. 28. Class time for work on project. Note: This project should take a significant time commitment outside the allotted class times to complete an “A” level presentation.</td>
<td>Project presentations</td>
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<td>Week 15: Dec. 5, 7</td>
<td>Project presentations</td>
<td>Project presentations</td>
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<td>Finals Week</td>
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<td>There is no final for this class.</td>
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The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Policies and Resources

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 -- The University of Iowa is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (which include but are not limited to mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related conditions). 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. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between the student, instructor, and SDS. See http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/ for 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.

**For more information** visit: http://clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/teaching-policies-resources-syllabus-insert