JMC 3413: Sports Writing

Mondays and Wednesdays 8:30 to 10:20 a.m.
University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Fall 2017

Professor Jeff Browne
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Course Description
Sports Writing is a specialty reporting class for undergraduate students aimed at teaching the basics of sports reporting and writing across multiple platforms, covering breaking news, covering a beat and incorporating digital media techniques.

Learning Objectives
- Develop timely and relevant story ideas for a variety of audiences.
- Gather information from a diverse range of sources in an ethical manner.
- Distill that information into accurate, clear and engaging stories.
- Write in a variety of styles, from game stories to features to alternative forms, for a variety of media.
- Use digital media technologies to produce audio, video, photo and graphical stories.
- Incorporate social media to promote your work and to gather information about your beat and about the news media.
- Use data to create a final in-depth story package.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and communicating about under-covered groups in society.

Resources
You will need to purchase two texts:
You will also need to bring with you to class:

- AP Stylebook and Libel Manual, 2013 or newer. This is also available as a Smartphone app for about $30. Bring this to every class. Or memorize it. Your choice.

The Work/Grading

You will be graded in five areas, each of which consists of different assignments. The areas:

1. Five major writing/multimedia assignments.
2. Regular curation of sports stories from other sources.
3. Critiques of sports stories.
4. Analysis and opinion pieces.
5. Attendance and participation.

You may earn up to 1,000 points for the semester, and your final grade will be determined on your percentage of those points earned:

- A (93 to 100 percent); A- (90 to 92); B+ (87 to 89); B (83 to 86); B- (80 to 82); C+ (77 to 79); C (73 to 76); C- (70 to 72); D+ (67 to 69); D (63 to 66); D- (60 to 62); F (0 to 59).

A factual mistake, including the misspelling of a name (of a person or an organization), an incorrect date or location, a math error or any other similar factual error in a story, will result in an automatic F for that assignment. In newsrooms, journalists who make too many mistakes get fired. This classroom policy will prepare you for that brutal world.

Major Assignments (450 points)

This group of assignments will combine your skills as a reporter and writer with what you’ve learned so far about producing multimedia content. Details for each assignment will be discussed in advance of each assignment, but know that live stories (high school and UI) will be due via ICON four hours after the end of the event. Each story will also require several sources, both human and non-human, depending on the story. In other words, do a lot of interviews, and do just as much research. These stories are due in draft form at 8:30 a.m. on the days they are due. After a short peer-editing session, the final versions are due at 10:20 a.m. on that same day.

- Live high school event coverage, completed before Monday, Sept. 11 (50 points). This must be accompanied by another newspaper or internet story from the same event.
- University of Iowa game advance (fall varsity sport) by Wednesday, Sept. 27 (50 points)
- Live University of Iowa varsity event with sidebar by Monday, Oct. 9 (100 points). This must be accompanied by another newspaper or internet story from the same event.
- Multimedia Story #1 (UI winter season preview with Audio) by Monday, Oct. 30 (100 points).
- Multimedia Story #2 (Profile with Video) by Wednesday, Dec. 6 (150 points). This is a profile of a UI student-athlete, but it doesn’t need to be a varsity athlete. We’ll talk.

Sports Curation (120 points)

Every other week beginning Wednesday, Sept. 6 and ending Nov. 15, you will complete an assignment in which you will curate and link to the five best or most important sports stories you
read or watched during the previous week. There are many ways to approach this assignment, and there are several models from which you can choose. We will discuss those during the first week of the course, but one fun model comes from The Daily Skimm. The tone of your summaries is up to you, but keep them short (50 to 75 words per item) and with a sports-savvy audience in mind. Each is worth 20 points. These are due at 8:30 a.m. on these dates: Sept. 6, Sept. 20, Oct. 4, Oct. 18, Nov. 1 and Nov. 15.

Critiques of Stories from “The Best American Sports Writing)” (100 points)
This group of five assignments will each follow a format that I will provide during the first class period. Each assignment will be worth 20 points, and are due at 8:30 on these dates: Aug. 28, Sept. 13, Oct. 2, Oct. 16 and Nov. 8).

Analysis and Opinion (225 points)
This group of assignments will allow you to write your opinion, but only if it’s supported by evidence and interviews. These stories are due in draft form at 8:30 a.m. on the days they are due. After a short peer-editing session, the final versions are due at 10:20 a.m. on that same day.

- A mid-season analysis of either an NFL team or a University of Iowa fall varsity sport by Monday, Oct. 23 (50 points). This will require research. It’s not just an opportunity for you to blow off steam. You may choose to do this as a podcast or video blog.
- Statistical Analysis (with informational graphic) by Monday, Nov. 13 (100 points). This is an enterprise story in which you delve into a current issue in sports using statistics to make a point. We’ll talk about it more as the assignment approaches, but know that it will require extensive research and interviews, as well as the production of an informational graphic that will help your readers understand the issue better.
- A column about any aspect of sports media that you would like to commend and/or critique by Wednesday, Nov. 29 (75 points).

Attendance and Participation (105 points)
Every class period will be worth 2 points — one point for attendance, one for participation in discussions — for a total of 60 attendance points in the semester. You may note that we have only 29 class meetings, not 30. Labor Day is a free 2 points for everybody. In addition, we’ll do three in-class writing assignments based on prompts. Each of those is worth 15 points, or 45 points total.

Extra Credit (up to 30 points)
Every Wednesday during the 15–week semester, I’ll post a prediction contest on the course ICON site for Iowa football, NFL football, Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, Big Ten volleyball and other sports events. The winner of each week’s contest will earn 2 points extra credit.

Class and University Policies
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 https://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 includes but is 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 https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/ for information.

Nondiscrimination in the Classroom

The University of Iowa is committed to making the classroom a respectful and inclusive space for all people irrespective of their gender, sexual, racial, religious or other identities. Toward this goal, students are invited to optionally share their preferred names and pronouns with their instructors and classmates. 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, diversity@uiowa.edu, or visit diversity.uiowa.edu.

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
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.

The Full Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1
Monday, Aug. 21
In class: Getting acquainted, syllabus review, AP style for sports
Reading homework: Bring two pieces of writing to class that inspire you to become a sports writer — one sports story and one passage from a short story or a novel (sports or non-sports)

Wednesday, Aug. 23
Due before class: Clip and copy stories that inspire you.
In-class: Guest Speaker; Homework discussion; Writing prompt #1: Game story
Reading homework: “Essentials” Preface and Chapters 1-2
Prediction contest: Online

Week 2
Monday, Aug. 28
In class: Sports writing basics, Writing prompt #1 discussion, critique assignments and curation assignments
Reading homework: “Best” Calkins, Knight, Ballard, Friedman, Cross

Wednesday, Aug. 30
Due before class: Critique #1 (Calkins, Knight, Ballard, Friedman, Cross)
In class: Leads, critique discussion
Reading homework: “Essentials” Chapters 3-6
Writing Homework: Curation #1
Prediction contest: Online

Week 3
Monday, Sept. 4 (LABOR DAY)
No class (2 free points for attendance and participation)

Wednesday, Sept. 6
Due before class: Curation #1
In class: Middles, curation discussion, reading discussion, event story assignment
Reading homework: “Essentials” Chapters 7-11
Writing homework: High school story
Prediction contest: Online

Week 4
Monday, Sept. 11
Due before class: HS event story
In class: Peer editing and re-writing, reading discussion
Reading homework: “Best” Saslow, Moskowitz, Wiewiora, McKnight, Van Leuven
Writing homework: Critique #2

Wednesday, Sept. 13
Due before class: Critique #2 (Saslow, Moskowitz, Wiewiora, McKnight, Van Leuven)
In class: Sidebars, advances and follows; critique discussion
Reading homework: “Essentials” Chapters 12-13
Prediction contest: Online

Week 5
Monday, Sept. 18
In class: Writing prompt #2: the advance; advance assignment parameters
Writing homework: Curation #2
Reading homework: “Essentials” Chapter 17

Wednesday, Sept. 20
Due before class: Curation #2
In class: Stylistic problems — the worst story you can imagine, advance prompt discussion, curation discussion
Prediction contest: Online
Reading homework: “Essentials” Chapter 18

Week 6
Monday, Sept. 25
In class: Sports reporting ethical issues discussion
Writing homework: UI event advance story

Wednesday, Sept. 27
Due before class: UI event advance
In class: Peer editing and re-writing
Reading homework: “Best” Brant, Browning, Mooney, Wertheim and Rodriguez, Fainaru and Fainaru-Wada
Writing homework: Critique #3
Prediction contest: Online

Week 7
Monday, Oct. 2
Due before class: Critique #3 (Brant, Browning, Mooney, Wertheim and Rodriguez, Fainaru and Fainaru-Wada)
In class: Critique discussion

Wednesday, Oct. 4
Due before class: Curation #3
In class: Columns, curation discussion
Prediction contest: Online
Writing homework: UI event story and sidebar

Week 8
Monday, Oct. 9
Due before class: UI event story and sidebar
In class: Peer editing and re-writing
Reading homework: “Essentials” Chapter 14

Wednesday, Oct. 11
Writing prompt #3: The sports column
Prediction contest: Online
Reading homework: “Best” Barry, Borden, Popplewell, Rosenberg, Branch, Starr
Writing homework: Critique #4

Week 9
Monday, Oct. 16
Due before class: Critique #4 (Barry, Borden, Popplewell, Rosenberg, Branch, Starr)
In class: Critique discussion
Writing homework: Curation #4

Wednesday, Oct. 18
Due before class: Curation #4
In class: Enterprise stories, curation discussion, mid-season analysis assignment
Writing homework: Mid-season analysis
Prediction contest: Online

Week 10
Monday, Oct. 23
Due before class: Mid-season analysis column (NFL or UI varsity sport)
In class: Peer editing and re-writing
Reading homework: “Essentials” Chapter 15

Wednesday, Oct. 25
In class: Advance story review and assignment
Writing homework: UI winter sport advance
Prediction contest: Online

Week 11
Monday, Oct. 30
Due before class: UI winter sport advance
In class: Peer editing and re-writing
Writing homework: Curation #5

Wednesday, Nov. 1
Due before class: Curation #5
In class: Curation discussion, features and profiles
Prediction contest: Online
Reading homework: “Essentials” Chapter 14

Week 12
Monday, Nov. 6
In class: Weekend review, reading discussion, statistical analysis story
Reading homework: “Best” Rushin, Jones, Thompson, Van Natta and Wickersham, Ehrlich, O’Brien
Writing homework: Critique #5

Wednesday, Nov. 8
Due before class: Critique #5 (Rushin, Jones, Thompson, Van Natta and Wickersham, Ehrlich, O’Brien)
In class: Critique discussion, lab time to work on informational graphic
Writing homework: Statistical analysis story
Week 13
Monday, Nov. 13
Due before class: Weekend review, Statistical analysis story with informational graphic
In class: Peer editing and re-writing
Writing homework: Curation #6

Wednesday, Nov. 15
Due before class: Curation #6
In class: Profile story assignment, sports media column assignment
Prediction contest: Online

Week 14
Monday, Nov. 27
In class: Weekend review, lab time on profile or sports media column
Writing homework: Column about sports media
Reporting homework: Gather information for final profile

Wednesday, Nov. 29
Due before class: Column about sports media
In class: Peer editing and re-writing
Prediction contest: Online
Reporting homework: Gather information for final profile

Week 15
Monday, Dec. 4
In class: Weekend review, lab time on final story
Writing homework: Profile story with video

Wednesday, Dec. 6
Due before class: Profile with video
In-class: Peer editing and re-writing
Prediction contest: Online