Writing Across Cultures syllabus

jmc 3415 • writing across cultures
spring 2021 syllabus

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335-3355
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class meets: 9:30 – 10:45 a.m. Mondays and Wednesdays
Zoom link is on the ICON course website

drop-in/office hours: 11 a.m. – noon Mondays
1 – 3 p.m. Wednesdays
(Zoom — please email me ahead of time to confirm that
you'll be dropping in.)

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication office is located in E305 AJB. The Director of the School is Prof. David Ryfe, who may be contacted at (319) 335-3482.

course overview and learning goals

Journalists are often called on to cross borders—not just national ones, but borders of culture, identity, race, religion, and other markers of identity. As part of thinking about reporting and writing in a diverse global context, this class will focus on the complex issues involved in reporting on different spaces, places, and people. We will read the best cross-cultural and travel journalism, discuss concepts drawn from ethnography and social geography, and research and write feature stories for newspapers and magazines, based on students’ experiences of traversing cultural boundaries. The course will be conducted as a writing workshop. Designed for the novice writer who aspires to a career in feature journalism, this class will set you on the road to publication through its exploration of excellence in reporting and writing—from the first steps in research and interviewing to the strategies involved in establishing a rapport with your sources, developing cultural sensitivity, and understanding the ethics of in-depth reporting. We will also discuss appropriate markets for your articles and the basics of pitching free-lance stories to editors.

By the end of the semester, you will

• understand the specialized knowledge and skills involved in cross-cultural reporting
• strengthen your writing skills as you learn to write correctly, clearly, and well
• become adept at editing and revising your writing (and others')
• be able to develop strong story ideas
• understand some of the ethical and legal issues related to writing across cultures
• hone your basic reporting, interviewing and research skills
• understand concepts of diversity and intersectionality relating to audiences, sources, and issues
• understand the role of the media in translating and shaping cultures
• be able to write effective query letters
• recognize excellence in journalism

The techniques you develop and practice in this course will orient you to the practice of in-depth feature journalism and contribute to your overall preparation for work in the field. The course objectives listed above support several of the learning goals for the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, including writing and storytelling, multiculturalism, and ethics. SJMC’s learning goals are designed to contribute to your academic and professional success. You can find more information about these learning outcomes here: SJMC Assessment Plan
We regularly assess the curriculum to determine whether students are achieving these outcomes. 

There is no required text for this class. Readings are available on the course ICON website under “Modules.”

recommended


Everyone in the class is expected to own and use the latest edition of the Associated Press Stylebook. This can be purchased online or at just about any bookstore. Students also have limited online access to the style manual via the UI Libraries.

accommodations for disabilities

UI is committed to an educational experience that is accessible for all students. If you have a disability that needs accommodation, please come to my office hours to discuss it as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements in advance. A student seeking academic accommodations first must register with Student Disability Services and then meet with a SDS counselor who determines eligibility for services. A student approved for accommodations is then responsible for discussing specific accommodations with the instructor. See [https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/](https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/). I can only make accommodations for students who have been evaluated by SDS, following that office’s specific recommendations.

nondiscrimination in the classroom

UI is committed to making the classroom a respectful and inclusive space for all people irrespective of their gender, sexual, race, religious or other identities. Towards this goal, students are invited to optionally share their preferred names and pronouns with their instructors and classmates. The University 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 Human Rights Policy. For more information, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity ([diversity.uiowa.edu](http://diversity.uiowa.edu)).

electronic communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondece 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. Scroll down to k.11.)*

course web site

The class has an ICON/Canvas site that students can access using their Hawk IDs. **All assignments must be uploaded to this site on or before the deadlines in the syllabus.**

The site is password protected. Each student has access to his/her grades on this site, as well as all the course information that is online (syllabus, course calendar, etc.)

To access the ICON site, go to:

icon.uiowa.edu (please note that there is no “www” at the beginning of this URL)

log on to ICON using your Hawk ID and password

[Note: The login ID for each new account will be your HawkID. If you don't know your HawkID, you can find out what it is by calling the Customer Information Desk (384-0800), looking it up in WebISIS ([http://isis.uiowa.edu/](http://isis.uiowa.edu/)) or calling the ITS Help Desk (384-4357)].
Select the appropriate semester.
Click on “JMC 3415 Writing Across Cultures”

Most course readings will be under the “Modules” link in the left sidebar.

To upload your files once you are in the course web site:
Click on “Assignments” in the navigation sidebar.
Go to the appropriate assignment (e.g. “Week 1”) and click on it. You should be able to upload a file or copy and paste text into a dialog box.

FYI—The topic will be locked after the deadline on the syllabus! Also, all uploaded stories are time and date-stamped by the computer, which is another way I can keep track of deadlines.

If you have any difficulties with ICON/Canvas, please check the Canvas Student Guide or call (319) 384-4357. But technical problems are not an acceptable reason for late work! Please plan on uploading your final paper at least an hour before the deadline so that there are no hiccups!

class recordings: privacy and sharing
Class sessions will 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).
Classroom policy is to have video turned on during the class session. If you have technical difficulties, please let me know.

general expectations
General expectations for all students include consistent class attendance, adequate preparation for in-class and out-of-class assignments, constructive participation (especially during article workshops), and completion of all reading and writing assignments on deadline. Please turn on your video during class time. Because the class is online, accessing ICON and Zoom with a computer tends to work better than a phone. For purposes of class communication and fulfillment of assignments, you'll need an email account and regular access to a computer and the Internet.

Important note: Deadlines are absolutely sacred in this class (as they are in the “real world” of journalism)! Late work will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per hour. No make-up work will be allowed, except in the case of an excused absence (see the policy on absences, below). In addition, final grades of “Incomplete” will not be given unless in exceptional and dire circumstances.

Other important notes: Remember that printers break, computers crash, and dogs eat homework, so plan ahead. This is both professional and courteous, and it will also save you a lot of trouble.

Be sure to back up your work, for the same reasons. Many students have lost their only copies of final projects at the very last minute, so be smart and back up.

And, finally, cell phones and other communication devices must be turned off during class.

A word on COVID: For in-person instruction, all students are expected to follow the protocols specified in the document “The Steps Forward: Returning to Campus, Fall 2020.”
ethics

Follow basic academic and journalistic ethics. Be original, be creative, and be true to your values: show me that you are a person of integrity and principle. Your writing will reflect who you are as a person. Remember that we will form lasting impressions of each other this semester.

The only real crime in this class would be cheating. It is expected that all work submitted for a grade in this course reflects the original work of the student submitting it. Students are encouraged to discuss their work with others (inside and outside of class), and to exchange drafts of papers with one another for comments and criticisms. But keep in mind that if you borrow an idea from someone else, you must cite the source, even if it is based on a conversation or correspondence. Do not use anonymous sources (exceptional circumstances that require anonymous sourcing must be approved by the instructor). Also, inventing sources/quotes constitutes plagiarism in journalism; sources used in stories will be verified by the instructor.

Plagiarism and any other activities that result in a student presenting work that is not his or her own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is reported to the departmental DEO and then to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Services in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences who deals with academic fraud according to these guidelines: www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook//ix.shtml

This course is given by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. This means that class policies on matters such as requirements, grading, and sanctions for academic dishonesty are governed by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. 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).

Any student who does not fully understand the standards of academic honesty should speak to me in advance of submitting coursework.

clas final examination policies

Final exams may be offered only during finals week. Students should not make travel plans until they are certain of their final exam schedule. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. Students should not ask their instructor to reschedule a final exam since the College does not permit rescheduling of a final exam once the semester has begun. For more information, visit https://registrar.uiowa.edu/final-examination-scheduling-policies. Questions may also be addressed to the CLAS Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum.

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.

student rights

Students have the right to make suggestions or complaints and should first visit with the instructor, then with the course supervisor if appropriate, and next with the departmental DEO. All complaints should be made within six months of the incident. https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities

student classroom behavior

We will be dealing with complex and sometimes controversial subjects during the semester, and the classroom must be a place where everyone feels secure and empowered to express
their views and feelings on these subjects. Our classrooms will be a “safe space” in which diverse perspectives are respectfully engaged and acknowledged as well as a “brave space” that supports and facilitates courageous and candid expression. Please be respectful and courteous of your classmates’ points of view, even when you disagree with them, and articulate your differing ideas thoughtfully and kindly.

The ability to learn is lessened when students engage in inappropriate classroom behavior, distracting others; such behaviors are a violation of the Code of Student Life. When disruptive activity occurs, a university instructor has the authority to determine classroom seating patterns and to request that a student exit the classroom, laboratory, or other area used for instruction immediately for the remainder of the period. One-day suspensions are reported to appropriate departmental, collegiate, and Student Services personnel (Office of the Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students).

The guidelines for civility extend to written work, as well. Please avoid gratuitous obscenity and racist, sexist, and other discriminatory language in your writing, unless there are exceptional circumstances where such content is essential to the story. Communicate clearly with your instructor about such circumstances.

resources for students

mental health
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/
Monsoon: (866) 881-4641 https://monsooniowa.org/programs-services/on-campus-victim-services/
DVIP: (800) 373-1043 http://dvipiowa.org/resources/
Campus Police: (319) 335-5022 https://police.uiowa.edu/police/reporting-sexual-assault

academic resources for students
Writing Center: 110 English-Philosophy Building, 335-0188, http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/
Speaking Center: 12 English-Philosophy Building, 335-0205, http://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/students/speaking-center
Mathematics Tutorial Laboratory: 314 MacLean Hall, 335-0810, http://www.math.uiowa.edu/math-tutorial-lab
Campus Inclusion Team https://inclusionteam.uiowa.edu/
Student Disability Services: (319) 335-1462 https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/
Office of Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator: (319) 335-6200 https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/
CLAS Academic Programs and Student Development: (319) 335-2633 https://clas.uiowa.edu/students
Academic Resource Center: (319) 335-1497 https://uc.uiowa.edu/student-success/arc
Conversation Center: https://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/conversation-center
TRIO Student Support Services: (319)335-1288 https://diversity.uiowa.edu/trio-sss
course requirements

class participation (5% of final grade):
Class participation is an important part of this class. You will be encouraged to voice your ideas and thoughts and to contribute to the discussion of every topic. Even the shy ones will be given an opportunity to speak and interact with their classmates and the professor. Respect for others’ feelings, beliefs and values are essential to the success of the class, so please be considerate of your classmates’ different backgrounds and experiences as you discuss various points of view.

Those who are usually silent in class, or whose participation is unrelated to the readings or conceptual terms discussed in the class, will not earn the portion of the grade that is based on class participation.

attendance and compliance with deadlines (5% of final grade):
Attendance will be taken in every class. Excused absences are granted only for the following reasons: serious illness (which must be documented with a doctor’s certificate), a death in the family (again, documentation is required), or a religious holiday or Holy Day obligation. You may also request an absence for a school-related event that requires your presence, but these will only be excused if you make arrangements with the professor well in advance (examples of such events might be an out-of-town official university athletic event in which you are required to participate, or a job interview). In order for an absence to be excused, documentation must be provided (a note from a coach, letter scheduling the interview, etc.). Please let me know by email if extraordinary circumstances arise that prevent you from attending class. You 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.

The following types of situations are not considered excused absences: covering events for the DI or any other organization, social events, meetings of Greek or service organizations, entertaining out-of-town visitors, holiday plans, going to visit relatives, or any other circumstance that is extracurricular and at which your attendance is optional and secondary to your coursework.

A note on Thanksgiving and Spring Break: The University generously offers a full week for each of these scheduled breaks. Class is officially in session before and after this designated week. If you choose to extend your break, you cannot have extensions on deadlines, nor can you make up the missed work. The choice to extend a break is a choice to accept the grade penalty.
Regarding deadlines, see the note above.

responses to the readings/other in-class assignments (20% of final grade)

Reading responses
Good writers are, inevitably, avid readers. If you wish to become an accomplished writer, you must read a lot of good writing. (You can read the junk, too, but you should know it when you see it!) As a would-be published writer, you should always be reading, widely and eclectically, both fiction and nonfiction, from books, newspapers, poetry, the Web, and especially magazines.

You will have assigned readings in this class throughout the semester, and you will be asked to provide written and oral responses to the readings. Your responses will be graded on the basis of their depth, thoughtfulness, and originality. Responses should make it clear that you have read and reflected on the whole article. Reading assignments will be heavier at the beginning of the semester and ease up as you work on your longer projects. All readings will be on the course ICON/Canvas site under “Modules.”
Only half credit will be given for assignments turned in *in absentia* (unless it is an excused absence; see above).

**Format for responses:** You will receive handouts with details on how to respond to each reading. Responses are generally expected to be between 250 and 500 words in length. For each response, identify the authors of the pieces to which you are responding.

You will also be asked to write some short essays on various topics discussed in class; these will be similarly graded. Be prepared to read your responses and essays aloud in class.

All essays and responses must be composed on a computer. No handwritten responses will be accepted. All responses should be legible. As in all journalism classes, deadlines are sacred! Late work is not graded.

**paired/group presentations (10% of the final grade)**

There will be a series of oral presentations by students during the semester. Pairs or trios of students will read an assigned chapter and report on it to the class, discussing its main points and its relevance to the course. The use of audiovisual materials and illustrations of the points made in the chapter are encouraged. Presentations will be roughly 30 minutes long. Each presentation will cover:

1. A *quick* summary of the main points of the assigned reading
2. Key *current* information about the culture or topic being discussed (based on outside research)—e.g. statistics, geographical information, cultural information, etc.
3. Important issues for journalists regarding this culture or topic (chapter + outside research)
4. Relevant up-to-date examples drawn from various media (the Web, but also TV clips, print media, etc.)
5. Resources for journalists (chapter + outside research)

Presentations will be graded on the depth and thoughtfulness, the extent and quality of original research conducted for the presentation, the relevance of the examples, and the presentation itself—organization, clarity, and so on. Zoom presentations can be deadly, so make yours lively, interactive, and informative, using visuals, video, and important information.

If a group provides a handout with resources, be sure to list specific resources that will help someone who wants to research the group or topic: actual URLs for web sites, actual names of organizations dealing with the group/topic, actual names of relevant scholarly journals. Don’t just say “government agencies” and leave it at that! (Obviously there are government agencies that deal with the issues and topics we’ll cover in this class; the group’s job is to locate the relevant ones and provide the class with that information.) For example, if the presentation is on South Asian Americans, then one resource would be the South Asian American Policy and Research Institute (http://saapri.org)

**articles (60% of final grade)**

This is a writing class, so the majority of the grade is based on your written assignments. You will be asked to write three long stories and several short ones during the course of the semester. The length and complexity of the long stories will increase as the semester progresses. The last article is weighted most heavily, and is expected to “showcase” what you have learned in the course of the semester. The categories of long articles you will write include:

- A first-person experience article (10 points)
- A personality profile (20 points)
- An in-depth feature that is either (a) a human interest story, (b) an investigative story, or (c) a remarkable “enterprise” story that defies categorization. (30 points)
All stories must address a cross-cultural issue and be approved by the instructor in advance. No last-minute topic changes will be accepted. A key aspect of long-form feature journalism is developing the manuscript, revising, editing, and reworking, so once a story idea is approved, the writer must stick with it until its completion. Again, deadlines are set in stone! Late stories lose a letter grade for every hour they are late.

grading

Set high standards for yourself, as grading will be rigorous in this course. You will receive letter grades for each element of your work, with A for exceptional/outstanding work, B for very good/above average work, C for acceptable work, D for unacceptable but passing, and F for failing. Plus and minus grades will be used. The +/- system is used in this class. Stories will be graded partly on mechanics (grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence fluency, transitions, language use, organization of the article, etc.) and partly on content (background research, use of sources, depth of reporting, etc.).

Extra credit: You will receive up to half a letter grade of extra credit on each assignment if you add a multimedia package to your story (a video, audio/podcast, photographs, a map, a slide show, infographic, or some other relevant and informative multimedia enhancement). The amount of extra credit awarded will depend on the quality of the multimedia addition and the effort that went into its creation.
course calendar

- This semester, all readings are online under “Modules” on the ICON/Canvas course website.
- Please note that this schedule is subject to change depending on circumstances. It is the student’s responsibility to attend class and check email and the ICON site regularly to be sure to keep up with any changes.
- If readings are assigned, then written reading responses are due at the next class meeting, even if the syllabus doesn’t specify it.

week one
Monday 1/25 — Introductions, syllabus, anthology, etc.

Reading for Wednesday:

Response #1: Wilson, Garrison; “What is a culture?” (due 1/27 by 9:30 a.m. on ICON).

Wednesday, 1/27—Responses due. Discussion of excellence in travel writing, definitions of culture and cultural crossing.

Readings for next Monday:

week two
Monday, 2/1—Reading responses due; discussion of great travel and cross-cultural writing; discussion of theses and angles.

Readings for Wednesday:
Zylistra, Nicole. “The Snowball Church.” Story written for JMC 3415; reprinted with permission of the author.

Wednesday, 2/3—Reading responses due. Discussion of how to create a sense of place.
Short writing assignment #1—A sense of place (begin in class)

Reading for Monday: Chapters in *Journalism Across Cultures* and other readings assigned for group presentations (see ICON group assignments and related readings).
week three

Monday, 2/8 — Conducting research for the assignments in this class; Tim Arnold, UI Libraries.

Reading for Wednesday:

Wednesday, 2/10 — Reading responses due; writing assignment #1 due; PIRs Alison Overholt and Seth Wickersham.

Readings for Monday:

Cannibal Tours

week four

Monday, 2/15—Discussion of how to define culture and how it relates to societies and identities. Intersectionality.
Crenshaw, The urgency of intersectionality


Readings for Monday:

week five

Monday, 2/22—Reading responses due in class. Discussion of first-person journalism.

Readings for Wednesday:

Wednesday, 2/24—Responses to readings due. Discussion of writing personal experience pieces; Story #1 guidelines handed out.

week six

Monday, 3/1—Story ideas (personal experience) due in writing in class. Brainstorming and evaluation of story ideas.

For Wednesday:
Work on story #1. Outline and source list due online.
Wednesday, 3/3—PIR Andre Perry in class.
Readings for Monday:
Parts 1 and 2 (“The decision” and “The separation”) of “The Boy Monk” by Anh Do and Teri Sforza, from The Orange County Register, January 19-22, 2003. Access the article under “Links” on the class web site, or at The Boy Monk

Please note: A draft of story #1 (personal experience) needs to be uploaded to the web site by midnight on Monday, 3/8. You need to read your group members’ drafts before class on Wednesday, 3/10.

week seven

Monday, 3/8—Reading responses due in class. Story workshopping guidelines handed out.


Readings for next Monday (it's a good idea to start these early):
Parts 3 and 4 of “The Boy Monk” from The Orange County Register

Wednesday, 3/10—Story #1 workshopped in class. Attendance is important and will be part of the story grade!

Readings for Monday:
Parts 3 and 4 of “The Boy Monk” from The Orange County Register

week eight


Readings for Wednesday:

Wednesday, 3/17—Final version of Story #1 (personal experience) due online by 9:30 a.m.
Guidelines for Story #2 handed out in class
Student presentation #4 (MAP students): “Spies like us.”

Readings for Monday:
week nine

Monday, 3/22—Reading responses due. Writing personality profiles; come to class with confirmed ideas for a personality profile about someone from another culture. These should be submitted in writing—short paragraphs explaining why the person is worth profiling, what the fresh angle on the story is, whether there’s a bigger picture or thesis to the story, and how the topic relates to the class. Also please upload a video clip of your profile subject saying hello to the class for the profile assignment.

Readings for Wednesday:

Wednesday, 3/24—Reading responses due. Discussion of readings.

week ten


Wednesday, 3/31—Class meets. First draft of Story #2 workshopped in class.

week eleven

Monday, 4/5—Work on Story #2. Meet with Prof. Durham to review optional second draft.
Final version of Story #2 must be uploaded by midnight on Tuesday, 4/6.

Readings for Wednesday:
Harriet McBayde Johnson. (2003, February 16). Unspeakable conversations (Should I have been killed at birth?) *New York Times Magazine*. This story is on ICON under “Modules/Week 11” as usual, but you can also find the story at: [http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/843688/posts](http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/843688/posts). You may be interested to see her picture.

Reading responses due; discussion of reading.
Discussion of Story #3

Readings for Monday:

week twelve

Monday, 4/12—Outline of Story #3 due in class (with sources); responses to readings due.
Readings for Wednesday:

Wednesday, 4/14 — No class (non-teaching day for the University of Iowa)
Readings for Monday:

week thirteen
Monday, 4/19 — Discussion of Story #3 outlines (continued) or query letters; responses to readings due in class


Reading for Wednesday:

Wednesday 4/21 — Reading responses due; discussion of story progress; work on Story #3 draft.

week fourteen
Monday, 4/26 — First draft of Story #3 must be uploaded by 9:30 a.m. or earlier
Wednesday 4/28 — Workshop first draft of Story #3 in class.

week fifteen
Monday, 5/3 — Work on Story #3; optional second draft of Story #3 can be shown to Prof. Durham for comments. Groups are also free to workshop their second drafts

Wednesday, 5/5 — Attendance required. Story #3 due in class and online; wrap-up, evaluations, etc.

Good luck with your future adventures in writing across cultures! Send a postcard!!