University of Iowa: School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
**JMC:3460:0001**  (3 semester hours)  
Arts and Culture Reporting and Writing  

**Fall 2018 Syllabus**

Monday and Wednesday  
2:00-3:15 Adler W340

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Office hours: MW 12:30-2:00  
Or by appointment

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

The aim of this course is to immerse the student in the field (ocean?) of arts journalism. Despite the title of the course, which conforms to the rest of the SJMC’s “Reporting and Writing” offerings, the bulk of this course concerns what the high-minded among us call “criticism,” and the rest of the world knows as “reviewing.” And, yes, there is a difference between those two terms, which we will address early on.

By either name, this process of coming to terms with a piece of art or entertainment dominates the work of most journalists who cover a specific form of arts/culture/entertainment as a beat, or who perhaps even cover all of it. You will likely do more writing in here than in any other journalism course you have taken, and you will eventually do some reporting as well. So, forewarned is forearmed—if you’re just looking for a course you can breeze through with minimal effort, this isn’t it.

Here is what we will do: Students will develop the skills and sharpen the instincts required for reviewing, criticizing, reporting, profiling and analyzing, and learn to apply their craft to coverage of both the popular arts and the (so-called) fine arts. I believe that such journalism represents a conversation with the culture at large, one that encompasses
trends, new releases, classics, awards shows, the responses of other arts journalists, social media and any other areas where we can distinguish a creative pulse.

For the purpose of this course, everyone will be encouraged to be a generalist, to develop a critical range that extends across the spectrum of arts typically covered in mainstream journalism (from daily newspapers to alt-weeklies to general interest publications to arts journals to blogs and websites). Students can focus more on whatever interests them most in the longer pieces, employing an expansive latitude in what qualifies as art. If your journalistic ambition is to explore the “art” of video games, graphic novels, reality TV or roadside restaurants, you’ll be permitted to write those pieces in this class (though your reporting and writing will be judged by the same standards that would apply if you were reviewing ballet or Shakespeare, not that your tone should be the same).

You will be required to write a lot of short reviews (in the 500-word range), as well as a couple of longer assignments that will extend your reach, range and scope. Occasional assignments might have all students responding to the same piece of work; most assignments will allow the students some or considerable leeway in selecting what to review.

You will also read a lot of arts journalism and read a lot about arts journalism—from critiques of coverage to reviews of reviewers to analyses of the arts and arts journalism in general. In the process, you will develop a critical eye in regard to arts coverage as well as to the arts, and you will be encouraged to apply the lessons from the writing of professional journalists to your own writing. Such readings will be posted on ICON and assigned in class.

You will additionally learn from each other, responding to students’ work in class discussions and workshop sessions, learning to recognize the wide range of valid responses to a single work—and learning to distinguish between a compelling, provocative response and one that lacks authority.

Flexibility of mind is a crucial attribute in a journalist and one that will be encouraged here. Though we will generally adhere to the syllabus as far as writing deadlines are concerned, this class will exercise the latitude to respond to current developments, engage in in-class readings and reviewing exercises, and perhaps even accommodate guest speakers as their schedules permit. Just as the working journalist often has no idea when starting work that morning what assignments might come during the day, each class period should include the possibility of surprise and spontaneity, rather than conforming to a syllabus etched in stone.

Without abandoning the role relationships of professor and student, this course will attempt to approximate the working relationship of an editor and writers, with class sessions frequently functioning like workshops, story meetings and brainstorming sessions, sometimes as viewing or listening sessions, and rarely like lecture periods.
Perhaps the most important requirement of this course is that you have fun. (That’s an order.) Your writing will be livelier and more engaging. Anyone who treats these assignments as obligations rather than opportunities will never be an arts journalist. This is an all-consuming vocation, not a 40-hour a week job. For someone who writes about entertainment for a living, working hard and playing hard go hand-in-hand. It’s a privilege to get paid to do what most people pay to do.

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. You can find more information about these learning outcomes here: http://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/undergraduate-programs/assessment. We regularly assess the curriculum to determine whether students are achieving these outcomes. This course contributes to the following learning outcomes:

3. Writing and Storytelling Learning Goal
Understand that clear, concise, correct writing is at the heart of journalistic expression and that reporting and communicating it effectively requires a knowledge and achievement of the highest, professionally-accepted standards in all work.

**Learning Objective 1:** Students will demonstrate the ability to gather factual story elements, and to evaluate and express them in logical, narrative forms for multiple media and audiences.

**Learning Objective 2:** Students 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.

**Learning Objective 3:** Students will demonstrate the ability to apply above concepts in a manner that is sensitive to audiences across all media.

4. Multiculturalism Learning Goal
To demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups (including communities defined by gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion and sexual orientation) in a global society in relationship to communications.

**Learning Objective 1:** Students will demonstrate an ability to produce media that serve the needs and interests of diverse communities and reflect their voices and experiences.

**Learning Objective 2:** Students will demonstrate sensitivity to and understanding of the cultures, histories, perspectives, and socio-economic and political situations of diverse groups.

**Learning Objective 3:** Students will demonstrate an ability to work with members of diverse groups to engage publicly over issues of community interest.

This class has other, course specific outcomes as well…
• To sharpen the observational, experiential and communicative skills required to respond to arts and entertainment with more than personal opinion, gut instinct and kneejerk reaction.
• To recognize the differences in depth and scope between criticism and consumer reviewing.
• To familiarize oneself with a wide range of professional arts journalism, learning what to do (and not) in the process.
• To learn how to create and construct engaging critical responses that capture and hold the reader’s attention.
• To develop the skills required to write the longer pieces that arts journalism often requires, becoming adapt at interviewing, reporting and analyzing in the process.
• To recognize the issues and elements that all arts criticism has in common, as well as the differences inherent in responding to different forms of art and entertainment.
• To learn to recognize and engage in valid critical arguments, whether or not one agrees with a particular perspective.

GRADING

Writers are judged primarily on their writing, and so will the students in this class, with 70% of the final grade determined by the grades on writing assignments. Grading will be weighted over the progression of the semester, to reward improvement from beginning to end:

Reviews: 30%
Artist or Arts-Related Profile: 15%
Enterprise Trend or Issue Feature: 25%

Review assignments should aim for 500 words. (I’m less concerned with whether you go longer than if you go significantly shorter.)

For the profile of an artist or someone involved in the arts, aim for approximately 1,000 words. For the final trend, issue or enterprise feature—which should involve multi-source reporting—aim for 1,500 words.

For both the profile and trend feature, you will have the option of revising your story to raise your grade on that assignment by as much as a letter. Only students who have presented drafts on time to participate in workshopping and who have turned in their features by deadline will be permitted to revise for a higher grade.

On all assignments, pieces will be evaluated according to incisiveness, accuracy and effectiveness (the subjective but crucial quality of how the writing grabs this reader and sustains his interest), with points deducted for errors of spelling, grammar or other violations of the Associated Press Stylebook.
Grading standards are based on the standards of the marketplace. An A paper is a publishable piece. (If I give you a C on an assignment and you can show me I’m wrong by finding a quality outlet to publish the piece, I will change that grade to an A. With no disrespect intended toward the Daily Iowan or other student publications, these don’t count.)

All work is expected to be new and original to this class (no stories previously published elsewhere or written for a different class). You will be encouraged to find outlets to publish your work, since clips will benefit a prospective journalist more than grades, but such work should be submitted here before it is accepted elsewhere. If you are trying to coordinate assignments for this class with work you’re doing for the DI or other publications, let’s discuss. I don’t want to see a review handed in that I’ve already read in the paper, without a prior conversation.

All stories are due on the deadline date, posted to dropbox (or, occasionally, discussion thread) of the ICON site. Deadlines are crucial for the working journalist, not to be violated unless permission has been negotiated in advance (which it rarely will be in this class, and only in exceptional circumstances). Late papers will be penalized a full letter grade per day. Thus a paper due on Monday that would have merited an A will receive a C if it isn’t turned in until Wednesday. Again, no revisions will be permitted on those longer assignments if they are turned in late.

The remaining 30% of the final grade will reflect class attendance and participation, presence of mind as well as body. Any ungraded assignments and discussion-board postings will be included within this grade. Prompt attendance (i.e. at the start of the class) is MANDATORY. Participation in class discussion will figure as heavily in this grade as attendance. If you can’t be here, are going to be late or need to leave early, let me know in advance.

Some of the closest calls in final grading are deciding between A/A-, A-/B+, B+/B etc., with the decision typically determined by class performance (and extra credit).

For extra credit, you have the option of writing a 3-5 page paper (750-1250 words) analyzing your own critical perspective, why you like what you like and don’t like what you don’t like, how you feel the arts function (or should function) within society. Including work from other critics with whom you agree or disagree could help bolster your analysis. Showing how this course has helped shape your perspective (or not) should be a component.

There will be no final exam.

TEXTBOOK

This semester is going to be a lot of fun for at least one of us. I had previously taught this course several times without using any textbook, because there was none on the market
that I considered suitable for teaching journalistic coverage of a wide range of arts. I have since found one—but I had to write it to do so. The text was largely inspired and shaped by my teaching of this course and interactions with students within it, and now I’m happy to be able to inflict the printed version on a fresh group of students.


A couple of notes: My book contract called for a flat fee with no per-sale royalties, so I’m not trying to squeeze any extra nickels and dimes out of you by assigning. And we’ll augment the journalistic examples in the textbook (and skip some) by assigning the reading of more current reviews and features, ranging far beyond *The New York Times* (though including plenty from the NYT as well).

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences:
Policies and Procedures

Teaching Policies & Resources — Syllabus Insert

**Administrative Home**
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 other policies. These policies vary by college ([https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook)).

**Electronic Communication**
Students are responsible for official correspondences sent to their UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for all communication within UI (*Operations Manual, III.15.2*).

**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 should then discuss accommodations with the course instructor ([https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/](https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/)).

**Nondiscrimination in the Classroom**
UI 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 at diversity@uiowa.edu or diversity.uiowa.edu.

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 the UI email address.

CLAS Final Examination Policies
The final exam schedule for each semester 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 final exam information. No exams of any kind are allowed the week before finals. (https://clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/teaching-policies-resources-examination-policies.)

Making a Complaint
Students with a complaint should first visit with the instructor or course supervisor and then with the departmental executive officer (DEO), also known as the Chair. Students may then bring the concern to CLAS (https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities).

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 must uphold the UI mission and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment must be reported immediately. For assistance, definitions, and the full University policy, see https://osmrc.uiowa.edu/.
COURSE CALENDAR

Week one (8/20)
Introduction and syllabus. Initial reviewing discussion and exercises.

Week two (8/27)
Read AC, Intro and Chapter 1.

Week three (9/3, Labor Day holiday)
Read AC Ch 2 (popular music) and Ch 3 (classical music et al.)

Week four (9/10)
Music reviews due and discussed. Read Ch 4 (visual arts). Discuss differences btw spatial and temporal arts.

Week five (9/17)
Short response on spatial and temporal arts due. Read AC Ch 5 (theater) and AC 6 (film)

Week six (9/24)
Read film reviews and brainstorm personality profiles.

Week seven (10/1)
Film reviews due and discussed. Read intro to Pt II, Ch 9 (profiles) Discuss personality profiles.

Week eight (10/8)
Read and discuss assigned profiles. Discuss interviewing techniques.

Week nine (10/15)
Mon, March 21: Workshop profiles. Read Ch 8 (books)

Week ten (10/22)
Profiles due and discussed

Week eleven (10/29)
Profiles returned, WILD CARD review (art, theater, book, other to be approved) due.

Week twelve (11/5)
Optional profile revisions due. Read Ch 10 (enterprise stories) and epilogue
**Week thirteen (11/12)**
TV reviews due and discussed, brainstorm enterprise stories.

**Week fourteen (11/19)**
Thanksgiving break.

**Week fifteen (11/26)**
Workshop enterprise stories

**Week sixteen (12/3)**
Final enterprise stories due and discussed this week. No final exam—stories returned and optional revisions due during finals week. Discuss extra credit, due right after exam week.