**Advanced Topics in Writing/Storytelling (JMC: 4100:0001)**

**Topic: Health and Fitness**

**Spring 2021**

**W236 Adler Journalism Building (AJB)**

11 a.m.-12:15 p.m. MW

**Delivery mode: combination in-person and virtual instruction**

Instructor: Lillian Zier Martell (she/her)

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Zoom drop-in hours: 9-11 a.m. Tuesdays; 12:30-1:30 p.m. Thursdays; and by appointment.

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**General Catalog Course description:** Project journalism; extended magazine pieces, explanatory/investigative journalism, series for newspapers, or task-force projects by entire class on a major issue, with goal of publication.

Students will complete several projects focused on the health and fitness industry that advance their professional storytelling skills. They will produce at least one major project that will be pitched to a professional publication or organization. Students will be given wide latitude to design this project in conjunction with the professional organization(s) they hope to work with. Examples of these major projects could include a multimedia story, in-depth feature writing, in-depth explanatory or investigative journalism, or a strategic communications project.

Advanced Topics in Writing/Storytelling is a 3-credit-hour course for upper-level students. The prerequisites for this course are JMC:3400 or JMC:3405 or JMC:3410 or JMC:3411 or JMC:3412 or JMC:3413 or JMC:3414 or JMC:3415 or JMC:3420 or JMC:3425 or JMC:3430 or JMC:3435 or JMC:3440 or JMC:3445 or JMC:3460 or JMC:3470 or JMC:3490.

**Required reading:**

- Newspaper, magazine and website articles assigned throughout the semester and posted on ICON.
- The Associated Press Stylebook (2020)
  
  [https://www-apstylebook-com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/uiowa_edu/](https://www-apstylebook-com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/uiowa_edu/)

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 through the link noted above. Other readings will be posted on ICON. Assigned readings should be completed before the related class sessions.

Most stories assigned for reading will be posted in the Announcements section of ICON before 5 p.m. the day before classes meet. However, students should check ICON at 10:30 a.m. on the day of classes see if any breaking news stories have been posted. The instructor will seek to limit these morning updates to stories that are good examples of health, fitness or environmental reporting, or breaking news of critical importance that warrants discussion.
Students may seek full online access to The New York Times by registering at http://AccessNYT.com. When available, passes are renewable every 24 hours. The Associated Press news app can be downloaded free.

## 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 a professional level of:

- Journalistic writing
- Research and information gathering
- News judgment
- Ethical and professional conduct in the practice of journalism or strategic communication
- Appreciation for journalism’s role in democracy and society
- Ability to pitch stories or projects to professional organizations
- Ability to meet deadlines

### Course requirements: All assignments are designed to support the learning objectives above.

- **Major assignments:** Students will complete two major assignments: an issue story and an in-depth feature or enterprise story. One of these must be completed before **March 5**. The second must be completed by **April 30**. Either one or both can be completed as a strategic communications piece. One of the projects must be pitched to an off-campus
publication or business. Rubrics will be used to grade these assignments. Points for the major assignments will total 600.

- **Business writing:** Students will write a consumer review of a health or fitness club or a profile of an area business or nonprofit in the health, environmental or fitness industry. The story will be accompanied by still photography or short b-roll video. It may be turned in any time after the presentation on review writing (Feb. 10-12) but is due no later than 12:15 p.m. **May 5**, the last day of class. This assignment will be worth 120 points, and businesses/nonprofits will be assigned on a first-come, first-serve basis.

- **Pitches:** You will write pitches for the two major assignments and the profile or review. You will revise one of the major assignment pitches and send it to a professional organization off campus and keep track of follow-up communication with that venue. The three pitches plus the professional pitch will be worth 25 points each, or 100 points for the semester.

- **Six in-class exercises** will be completed randomly during the semester and will be worth 30 points each for a total of 180 points for the semester. If a speaker is scheduled, class attendance will be required. Attendance that day will count as one of the 30-point assignments, and students will only receive full credit if they join class on time, pay attention and engage with the speaker. Students can only make up the 30 points if they have an excused absence as outlined below in the “missed assignment policy” section.

- **Class attendance and participation:** Students who have reached the advanced level in the SJMC program are expected to meet the same expectations required in a professional setting. This means coming to class on time when it meets in person and joining virtual meetings on time when they occur. Further, professional behavior entails participating in discussions and showing awareness of your surroundings and demeanor, both in person and on camera. Students are encouraged to keep their cameras turned on during Zoom meetings, especially during small-group work.

Points are not technically assigned for attendance and participation; however, the in-class assignments will not be announced in advance, and students must attend the in-person or virtual class sessions to receive credit for these assignments. The instructor will not repeat lecture material or assignment instructions for those who miss class. Students also will be required to read stories posted on ICON before class and participate in discussions. If participation is lacking, the instructor will allocate in-class exercise points (see the previous bullet item) toward reading quizzes.

Students can only make up missed in-class assignments if they have an excused absence as outlined in the “missed assignment policy” section, and **no more than two missed assignments can be made up**. Students with University-excused absences must let the instructor know in advance and turn in the assignments before the deadline.

**Summary of points:**
Major assignments: (2X300) 600 points (60%)
Consumer review or business/nonprofit profile: 120 points (12%)
Pitches: (3X25) 75 points (7.5%)
Professional pitch: 25 points (2.5%)
In-class exercises, editing and guest speakers: (6X30) 180 points (18%)
**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 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 will reflect negatively in the student’s grade for that assignment.

All stories must be submitted for grading before they are submitted for publication. Submitting the story for publication before submitting it for class may result in a zero on that assignment. Students who are staff members for the Daily Iowan, DITV, or any other organization cannot submit stories they are doing for their employer as an assignment for this class. They can submit stories for this class to organizations they do not work for, but it is the student’s responsibility to ensure they are not engaging in activity prohibited by their employer.

**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 no more than twice during the semester. Students should be aware that absences will not be excused for minor illnesses, internships, outside job duties, etc.

**Accommodations:** Students who have documentation from Student Disability Services (SDS) for accommodations must present the documents and meet with the professor by the end of the first week of classes. Simply emailing the forms to the professor is not sufficient. For more information, please see the section titled Accommodations for Disabilities under The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Policies and Resources page at the end of the syllabus. If you have other health or personal circumstances (not covered by SDS) that might affect your ability to be successful in this course, please speak with the professor as soon as possible.
**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.

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**General expectations**

- The goal of this course is for you to leave with professional-level skills, build your portfolio and expand your network with potential employers. While the course only requires one project to be pitched to a professional venue, I encourage you to pitch your other assignments professionally or to a student organization.

- Because your goal is to publish, do not tell any source the assignment is being completed “just” for class. We will discuss how to approach sources and business contacts in the beginning stages of a project.

- This semester continues with unusual circumstances as we muddle through the pandemic together. The semester schedule will be flexible, but I intend to announce when and where we meet each week before 5 p.m. on the preceding Friday. Regardless of how each week plays out, you should set aside the scheduled class time for:
  a. meeting in person or on Zoom
  b. working on course projects when we do not meet.

- Even with the extra time provided in the schedule, you should set aside significant outside time to complete the work. Some projects may require travel, in which case you will be responsible for the arrangements. When you are working with a professional organization, be prepared to meet on their terms and on their schedule, not yours.

- As advanced students, you will not receive reminders about deadlines, class policies, or makeup work for missed classes or assignments. It is your responsibility to notify me about an excused absence or other issues and arrange to make up the work.
For the major assignments, I will keep a running list on ICON of who is working on what. Although I will not ban you from a topic that someone else is already doing, I strongly advise you to select a different topic. This is because sources do not like to do repeated interviews, and it will be more difficult for you to find a publication venue if the story has already been done.

Do not interview relatives or friends for assignments. Professional communicators must talk with a diverse range of people in a wide variety of situations, and interviewing friends and relatives is an unethical conflict of interest.

Likewise, do not select story ideas based on whom you know. If you have any affiliation with an organization, it is a conflict of interest to write about it. It may be acceptable to do a strategic communications project for an organization that you have ties to; however, it would be to your benefit to build a relationship with a new client or source.

The first draft of the major assignments must be finished stories. You cannot turn in partial stories. The peer editors should receive your best effort. They, in turn, will give you their best effort. Although I will grade the final drafts, the story rubrics will include heavy deductions for first drafts that are not complete.

Good writers are voracious readers. Set aside at least 30 minutes a day to read news stories beyond those assigned for class. 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. Seek out reliable health, fitness and environmental publications. Reading the professional publications will improve your writing skills and alert you to trends and issues that could be used for the major assignments in this class.

For those of you interested in multimedia, video stories can be found on most of the news sites listed above. Reading is the quickest way to gain knowledge, but to improve your video storytelling, analyze how these news organizations produce multimedia. Watch for innovation. Despite the newspaper industry’s troubles, the New York Times and Washington Post continue to break ground with storytelling formats.

Check ICON and campus email before each class for announcements. In case I am ill or otherwise incapacitated, I will make every effort to post an announcement 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. Chrome is the recommended browser for ICON.

Tentative course schedule: Check ICON regularly for updates on assignments.

Readings will be posted in the Announcements section of ICON by 5 p.m. the day before class meets unless there is breaking news. Check ICON at 10:30 the morning of class for updates.

Students will work with a peer editor on the Mondays after 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 potential publication and grading by the instructor. To ensure the process runs smoothly, the first drafts must represent writers’ best efforts, and the peer editors will help polish the stories to a professional level.
This schedule outlines weekly topics and deadlines. The delivery mode -- in person or on Zoom -- will be announced on ICON on Fridays for the following week.

Jan. 25, 27: syllabus review, small-group brainstorming for story ideas

Feb. 1, 3: pitch writing

Feb. 8, 10: review writing. (The review or profile may be pitched and completed any time after this presentation, but the pitch must be turned in by 12:15 p.m. April 21 and the story must be turned in by 12:15 p.m. May 5, the last day of class. Keep in mind that the revision of the second major assignment is due the same day. Students are encouraged to complete the review or profile assignment early in the semester.)

Feb. 15, 17: profile writing; pitch for first major assignment due by 12:15 p.m. Feb. 17

Feb. 22, 24: content and copy editing in preparation for peer editing

March 1, 3: instructional break Tuesday, March 2. This week is set aside for working on the first major assignment due March 5. Class will not formally meet. No instructor drop-in hours on March 2. Use the regular class times and the Thursday drop-in hours to speak with the instructor via Zoom.

March 5 (Friday): first major assignment due by noon

March 8: Peer editing begins at 11.
March 10: revised major story due by 12:15 p.m. March 10.

March 15, 17: political writing and the effects on health care and the environment

March 22, 24: business writing applied to health and fitness

March 29, 31: trends and how-to stories

April 5: tracing the numbers – a closer look at where information originates
April 7: small-group brainstorming for story ideas

April 12: Pitch for second major assignment due by 12:15 p.m. April 12.
April 14: Instructional break; no instructor availability on this date. Use drop-in hours on Tuesday/Thursday.

April 19: A look at the latest journalism tools and apps
April 21: Pitch for review or profile must be turned in by 12:15 p.m. April 21. (It may be turned in any time during the semester after the Feb. 8-10 review-writing presentation.) One-on-one meetings with instructor via Zoom.
April 26, 28: One-on-one meetings with instructor via Zoom.
April 30 (Friday): second major assignment due by noon.

May 3: peer editing at 11 a.m.
May 5: revised major assignment due by 12:15 p.m. May 5. Review-writing assignment may be done any time after the Feb. 8-10 review-writing presentation but must be turned in by 12:15 p.m. May 5.

No final exam for this class.

SJMC Social Media:

Follow SJMC on social media to stay in the loop about activities/events, scholarships, internships, awards, current students, alumni and more:

FACEBOOK:  https://www.facebook.com/UISJMC/
INSTAGRAM:  https://www.instagram.com/iowa_sjmc/
TWITTER:  https://twitter.com/UIOWA_SJMC
LINKEDIN: https://www.linkedin.com/school/19128785  (Shortened version)
OR https://www.linkedin.com/school/university-of-iowa-school-of-journalism-and-mass-communication

Teaching Policies & Resources — College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Information for Undergraduates

Absences and Attendance
Students are responsible for attending class and for contributing to the learning environment of a course. Students are also responsible for knowing their course absence policies, which will vary by instructor. All absence policies, however, must uphold the UI policy related to student illness, mandatory religious obligations, including Holy Day obligations, unavoidable circumstances, or University authorized activities (https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/attendance-absences). Students may use this absence form to aid communication; the instructor will decide if the absence is excused or unexcused (https://clas.uiowa.edu/sites/default/files/ABSENCE%20EXPLANATION%20FORM2019.pdf).

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 (https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code).
Accommodations for Disabilities
UI is committed to an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (such as mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related condition) by registering with Student Disability Services (SDS). The student is then responsible for discussing specific accommodations with the instructor. More information is at https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/.

Administrative Home of the Course
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the administrative home of this course and governs its add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and related policies. Other colleges may have different policies. CLAS policies may be found here: https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Communication and the Required Use of UI Email
Students are responsible for official correspondences sent to the UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for all communication within UI (Operations Manual, III.15.2).

Complaints
Students with a complaint about an academic issue should first visit with the instructor or course supervisor and then with the Chair of the department or program offering the course; students may next bring the issue to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. For more information, see https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities.

Final Examination Policies
The final exam schedule is announced around the fifth week of classes; students are responsible for knowing the date, time, and place of a final exam. Students should not make travel plans until knowing this information. No exams of any kind are allowed the week before finals. Visit https://registrar.uiowa.edu/final-examination-scheduling-policies.

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 (diversity.uiowa.edu).

Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community must uphold the UI mission and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment must be reported immediately. For assistance, please see https://osmrc.uiowa.edu/.