

## **Course Syllabus**

### **JOU 4308: Magazine & Feature Writing**

Section: 3741

Term: Fall 2016

Period: W 10-E1, Wednesdays 5:10 p.m. to 8:10 p.m.

Room: Weimer Hall, Room 1076

Instructor: Sarah L. Stewart

Contact: [stewart.sarahlynn@gmail.com](mailto:stewart.sarahlynn@gmail.com); 352-514-4244 (cell); [sarahlstewart.com](http://sarahlstewart.com)

Office hours: Thursdays 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., Reitz Union Level 1 lobby

#### **Course Description & Objectives**

In this course, you'll build upon what you've already learned about reporting and writing hard news in order to craft compelling, creative, well-researched and factually sound feature articles. You'll learn how to generate ideas and refine angles for feature articles; how to pitch your ideas to magazines and newspapers; how to use research, reporting and observation to gather the details that will make your feature stories sing; how to use non-fiction storytelling techniques to keep your readers engaged; and ultimately, how to write feature articles worthy of publication.

#### **Required Reading**

There is no textbook for this course, but there will be required readings throughout the semester. I strongly recommend you also make a habit of reading at least one daily newspaper and as many magazines as you can get your hands on. The best way to learn how to write for magazines is to read them critically.

#### **Attendance/Tardies**

Attendance is mandatory. Each student will be permitted one unexcused absence during the semester; each unexcused absence beyond the first will result in a deduction of 5 points from your final grade. Absences for serious illness (with doctor's note), family emergencies or other urgent situations may be excused, at my discretion, with notification prior to the start of the class that will be missed. If you miss class on a day when something is due, you are still responsible for submitting the assignment by the start of class (via email, if you won't be there in person to submit a hard copy) to avoid late assignment penalties. You are also responsible for all material covered in class on the day of your absence; consult a reliable classmate or come see me in office hours to be sure you don't fall behind.

Class will start promptly at 5:10. Each student will be granted one-time forgiveness for a tardy of less than five minutes. Each tardy thereafter—or any tardy longer than five minutes—will count as an unexcused absence.

#### **Cell Phones & Laptops**

Please turn the sound completely off on your phone and put it out of sight. We'll normally have a short break in the middle of class, and you can use that time to

check your phone. Looking at or using your phone during class will result in a deduction from your class participation grade.

Bring your laptop to class every week, as we will have in-class writing exercises. Using your laptop during class for non-course-related activities will result in a deduction from your participation grade.

### **Late Assignments**

Unless otherwise instructed, all writing assignments are due at the start of class on the date marked in the course schedule. Every day an assignment is late will incur a 10-point reduction in your grade for that assignment. This applies to all components of the feature writing assignments that are outlined with deadlines in the course schedule. Assignments submitted on the due date but after the start of class will be considered one day late. All deadlines are strict.

I understand things happen—an idea falls through, a source stands you up, etc. That's why it's crucial to start contacting sources as soon as your idea is approved so there's plenty of time to adjust before the deadline. If an issue does arise, it is your responsibility to contact me right away so we can discuss a course of action. Don't wait until the day before the assignment is due. Short extensions may be granted, at my discretion, in rare cases when circumstances are truly beyond your control and you can prove to me it's not merely a result of procrastination.

### **Submission Guidelines**

Unless otherwise instructed, all assignments should be submitted in **both** print and digital (emailed) versions. Failure to submit both versions by the start of class on the due date will result in late assignment penalties. Use double-spaced 12-point font and include your name, the assignment title, a headline and subhead. Specific formatting guidelines will be provided in class as needed for individual assignments.

### **Grading**

Your grade will derive from a combination of class participation, quizzes and writing assignments. There will be no midterm or final exam.

### ***Class Participation = 15%***

Your participation grade will include the following factors: Taking part in class discussions, readings and activities; submitting well-developed ideas for your writing assignments by the deadlines provided; giving me and your fellow students your full attention when others are speaking; not using your phone or laptop in class for any purpose not directly related to the course; not creating distractions during class (this includes eating).

### ***Quizzes = 5%***

There will be periodic, unannounced quizzes based on the assigned readings at the very start of class. Any tardy or unexcused absence on the day of a quiz will result in a zero for that quiz.

## Writing Assignments:

### **Feature #1, The Profile = 25%**

(First Draft: 10%, Revision: 15%)

Hone key skills including interviews, observation and anecdotes by reporting and writing a 1,000- to 1,200-word profile. You'll be required to interview a minimum of three human sources for this story (in person or by phone—email doesn't count!)

### **Feature #2, The Trend Story = 25%**

(First Draft: 10%, Revision: 15%)

Go beyond the headlines to find a feature angle that will bring more depth and meaning to the day's news and trends. You'll learn to use statistics to make your feature stories stronger and will rely upon at least two human sources and one primary written source for this 1,000- to 1,200-word feature.

### **Feature #3, The Front of Book Short = 30%**

(Query Letter: 5%, First Draft: 10%, Revision: 15%)

Often the best tactic for breaking into a magazine is by way of the short articles published in the front section, aka the front of book. You'll master the challenge of writing an engaging, meaningful article in 400 words or less—and you'll pitch it to a carefully targeted publication.

## Grading criteria:

### **Query Letter:**

Writing mechanics (spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure, AP style): 50 points

Content (strength of lede; description and development of angle; effectiveness in targeting market; clarity of targeted magazine, department and editor): 50 points

### **First Drafts:**

Writing mechanics (spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure, AP style): 50 points

Content (success in meeting primary assignment goals; strength of lede, nut graf and ending; use of transitions; quality of reporting; use of storytelling techniques; use of active, non-superfluous language): 50 points

### **Revisions:**

Writing mechanics (spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure, AP style): 50 points

Content (success in meeting primary assignment goals; strength of lede, nut graf and ending; use of transitions; quality of reporting; use of storytelling techniques; use of active, non-superfluous language; **improvement** upon first draft): 50 points

### Deductions:

Spelling and fact errors indicate a lack of attention to detail—and attention to detail is the bread and butter of feature writers. A spelling error in your query letter, first drafts or revisions will result in an automatic **10-point deduction** from your grade for that assignment. Fact errors (misspelling of a proper noun, incorrect numerical figures or any untruth) in your query letter, first drafts or revisions will result in a **25-point deduction** from your grade for that assignment.

### Extra Credit:

The primary purpose of this course is for you to be able to write publishable feature stories. It is my goal for each of you to get at least one of your assignments from this course published. I'll add **5 points** to your grade on any assignment published in the Alligator or other student-run publication and **10 points** on an assignment published in any other local or regional magazine, newspaper or website.

To encourage you to swing for the fences, you'll earn a **25-point bonus** on any assignment published in a national magazine or website—or with proof of planned publication, if publication date is beyond the end of the semester. If you're unsure whether your targeted publication would be considered student, local/regional or national, check with me before pitching.

### **Grading Scale**

See current UF policies for assigning grade points at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

A 90-100	C+ 77-79	D 64-66
B+ 87-89	C 74-76	D- 60-63
B 84-86	C- 70-73	E 0-59
B- 80-83	D+ 67-69	

### **Course Schedule**

*Schedule is subject to change.*

#### Aug. 24

Introductions, syllabus. What is a feature story?

#### Aug. 31

The basics: Focused angles, compelling ledes, strong nut grafs, and logical structure. Discuss Feature #1, The Profile.

#### Sept. 7

Reporting skills: Interview techniques and the power of observation. Present ideas for Feature #1.

#### Sept. 14

The art of the anecdote.

Sept. 21

Profile workshop. Also: How to use statistics to make stories stronger. Discuss Feature #2, The Trend Story.

Sept. 28

**DUE: First draft of Feature #1.**

Individual conferences. I'll meet one-on-one with each of you regarding your Feature #2 ideas and to answer any questions at this stage.

Oct. 5

Dissecting the magazine: Learning to read like a writer. Discuss Feature #3, The Front of Book Short.

Oct. 12

How to pitch: Writing query letters, figuring out where to send them. Present ideas for Feature #3; progress report on Feature #2.

Oct. 19

**DUE: Revision of Feature #1.**

Peer critique. Also: Using structure and transitions to establish a logical flow.

Oct. 26

**DUE: First draft of Feature #2.**

Thinking (and writing) like an editor. Also: Q&A with a special guest from the magazine industry.

Nov. 2

**DUE: Query letter for Feature #3.**

Storytelling techniques: Narrative thread, strong endings.

Nov. 9

**DUE: First draft of Feature #3.**

We'll reconvene for one-on-one conferences to discuss revision of Feature #2 and to answer any other questions at this stage.

Nov. 16

**DUE: Revision of Feature #2.**

Peer critique. The key elements of other types of features.

Nov. 23

Thanksgiving Break. No class.

Nov. 30

Making a living as a freelance writer. Q&A with a special guest who does just that.

Dec. 7

### **DUE: Revision of Feature #3.**

Peer critique. Semester wrap-up.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

### **Online Course Evaluation**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

### **Academic Honesty**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions, including plagiarism: *A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to: 1. Quoting oral or written materials including but not limited to those found on the internet, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. 2. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.* **Plagiarism or academic deception of any kind will result in a failing grade for the course.** Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult the instructor.

### **About Me**

A little over a decade ago, I sat exactly where you do now, as a student in Magazine & Feature Writing at UF. Since then I've made a career of writing features, first for local newspapers and later for national magazines and websites. I practice what I teach: I'm currently both an adjunct lecturer and a full-time freelance writer for publications including *Travel + Leisure*, *Outside*, *Backpacker* and *Martha Stewart Weddings*.