

JOU 4311-17C2
Advanced Magazine Writing (capstone)
Tuesdays periods 6-8 (12:50 p.m. to 3:50 p.m.), 101 Ustler Hall

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Office Hours: Mondays from 10-noon or anytime by appointment

The difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable, and literature is not read. – Oscar Wilde

Perhaps few people read literature but I take issue with Mr. Wilde's statement about journalism. Literature and journalism each have its merits but without doubt, the intersection between the two is wholly readable and a whole lot of fun to report and write. Some call it literary journalism or creative non-fiction. Writer John McPhee calls it the literature of fact. We'll call it narrative non-fiction and if you take this class, you will find out the reason behind my preference.

Advanced Magazine Writing. That's the name of this capstone course. But it's really about storytelling and it's my hope that by the end of our time together, you will be able to answer these questions: How do you find and tell a good story? And, how do you hook readers and make them want to keep reading all the way to the end?

Ah, yes, the art of storytelling. We will discuss how to report and write long-form narratives. We will explore best practices for interviews, research, reconstruction and immersion reporting as well as the mechanics of solid writing: organization, structure and the narrative arc. You'll be plunging into the tool kit of fiction writers developing characters and scenes, capturing dialogue and experimenting with non-linear structure (all sure to make Mr. Wilde very happy) but of course, you are all journalists (unlike Mr. Wilde) and everything you write must be true!

You will be expected to produce engaging, accurate, high-quality work that is worthy of publication. It seems a simple task. Writer Margaret Atwood put it this way: “A word after a word after a word is power.”

And yet, it’s difficult to do. You will have to work very hard to earn a high grade in this class. But I hope you will enjoy the process. And that you will be bold and brave with your writing; that you will stretch and take risks with your words and evoke your readers’ imagination and emotions. And help them make sense of the world. I will be pushing you to write not just with your brain but also with your heart and soul.

You can only grow as a writer through practice and more practice and reading everything you can. You will be reading a LOT. And you will be speaking a LOT. Our class time together will be a combination of lectures, discussion and writing activities.

Here are a few things we will focus on:

- Idea generation for relevant and interesting stories
- How to refine and articulate your ideas and pitch them to editors
- Reporting for narrative
- Style and voice
- Story organization and structure
- The use of literary devices
- Ethical issues

GRADING

I understand that grading your work is not an exact science and I encourage you to speak with me if you are distressed about a grade. That said, please note that there are NO shortcuts in this class. You will be judged on the quality of your work. Your final grade will be determined based on the following points:

Long-form story: 600 points

Here is the breakdown for the 600 points:

Story pitch: 50 points

Plan of action and story outline: 25 points each

Scene 1: 50 points

Scene 2: 50 points

First draft: 100 points

Second draft: 100 points
Final draft: 200 points

In-class and other writing assignments: 200 points
500-word reading response to book: 100 points
Class participation: 100 points

Grading scale:

| | |
|----|---------------|
| A | 925-1000 |
| A- | 900-924 |
| B+ | 875-899 |
| B | 825-874 |
| B- | 800-824 |
| C+ | 775-799 |
| C | 725-774 |
| C- | 700-724 |
| D+ | 675-699 |
| D | 625-674 |
| D- | 600-624 |
| F | 623 and below |

More information on grades and grading policies is here:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

REQUIRED READING:

There are no textbooks for this class. But as I already mentioned, you will be busy reading and your responses to the books and long-form stories you read that you will account for 150 points of your final grade. Here is the reading list:

Storycraft by Jack Hart (available on Amazon)

A narrative nonfiction book from a provided list

Assigned feature stories and podcasts

SUPPLIES

You will need notebooks and a recording device, if your phone does not have a voice recorder. We will use either Google Drive or Canvas for filing your work

but you will have to print two copies of your main writing assignments and bring them to class on the due date.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

You will be producing one highly reported and nuanced long-form narrative of at least 2,500 words and of publishable quality. Reporting notes and parts of your story are due on designated deadlines. In addition, you will be given writing exercises -- both in and out of class -- throughout the semester.

You may find in your reporting that an idea is not working out. That's why you will be expected to come up with more than one long-form idea. You may be asked to discuss or brainstorm these in class.

You will also submit a written story pitch for approval along with a plan of action that includes how you will choose your characters and anticipated reporting challenges.

At the end of the semester, you will be expected to publish your piece. You should strive to see your story in a magazine, newspaper or online publication.

ACCURACY, FAIRNESS AND STYLE

Even though we will be immersed in techniques borrowed from the world of fiction, never forget that this is journalism class. You must review your stories and double check every fact. Inaccuracies or fabrication will not be tolerated. You are expected to have a strong command of spelling and grammar and will lose points for mistakes. Your copy should be clean and polished when you turn it in.

You are also expected to engage in storytelling that is fair, complete and based on information gathered from diverse sources. A greater understanding of societal differences will help you become reporters who are sensitive, culturally aware and better equipped to write across differences. Please pay attention not just to race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation but also to class, age, education, geography, occupation and religion.

It's always best to conduct interviews in person. You may also speak with people by phone but avoid email interviews.

Your work must adhere to AP style. If you do not already own *The Associated Press Stylebook and Manual*, please buy one (either the online version or print edition available on Amazon). You will lose points on your assignments for style errors.

HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

The media plays a vital role in our democracy. The public depends on journalists for news and a deeper understanding of the world around them. As such, there is nothing more important than our honesty, fairness and credibility.

I cannot stress this enough: Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest will not be tolerated and **you will fail** the class.

By now, I'm sure all of you know the basic ethics code of journalism. But just in case: Plagiarism is stealing someone else's ideas or work, including copy from the Internet. Fabrication is the use of invented information or the falsification of material. Conflicts of interest include writing about your roommate, boyfriend, parents, business partners or others with whom you have close relationships or financial ties. If you are unsure about whether you are facing a conflict of interest, please discuss with me.

You are expected to abide by the **UF Honor Code**, which you can read here: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

DEADLINES

In the world of professional journalism, deadlines are critical, as they will be in this class. On deadline dates, your assignments will be due within the first 5 minutes of class. After that, your piece will be considered a day late and you will lose 10 points per day for shorter assignments and 30 points per day for the first and final drafts of your long-form story.

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION AND DEMEANOR

This class meets only once a week. As such, your attendance is mandatory. You will lose all 100 points for participation after two unexcused absences and 300 points from your final grade if you miss three classes or more.

You are expected to arrive to class on time and behave in a manner that is respectful to me and your fellow students. Please refrain from using cell phone or any other devices that beep like horns, ring like church bells, croak like crickets or make any other sounds. You may use laptops but please limit their use to material pertinent to class. Also, please refrain from eating food and other distractions in class.

Writers learn from one another, so please come to class each week and come fully prepared to participate in activities and discussions. Your insights and comments will help you and others learn and grow. Please note that participation doesn't just mean speaking a lot; you will be judged on the quality of what you say and how focused you are in class, even when you are not speaking.

Absences for serious illness, family emergencies and other urgent matters will be excused only if you notify me before class begins. Instructions for all assignments will be given in class so it's in your best interest to make it to class each week.

STUDENT RESOURCES

If you need a little extra help with writing, organizing and editing your stories, the **UF Writing Studio**, located at 302 Tigert Hall, may be able to help. You can also get online tutoring. For more information, go to:

<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

Your mental health is extremely important. The **UF Counseling and Wellness Center** is free for all students. Please use this fantastic resource if you are having trouble coping. You can reach a support staff member between 8am-5pm Monday through Friday at [352-392-1575](tel:352-392-1575). The center's address is 3190 Radio Road. You can see all the services the center provides at:

<https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the **Disability Resource Center** 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. Call 352-392-8565 or go to: www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/

ABOUT ME

I began my career as a journalist in Tallahassee (yeah, home of that “other” university that I confess I may still be rooting for) and have been reporting and editing now for 35 years. I covered the Iraq War since its inception in 2003. On several trips, I was embedded with the U.S. Army and earned the moniker, Evil Reporter Chick -- affectionately, of course. My e-book, *Chaplain Turner’s War* (2012, Agate Publishing) grew from a narrative series on an Army chaplain at war. I’m no super hero but I was featured in Marvel comics’ “Civil War” series. Most recently, I was a senior writer at CNN. This is my first semester teaching in Gatorland. If there’s anything else you want to know, I am happy to oblige but you will get a good idea of my life by checking out my social media accounts.

You can find me on Twitter: @TheMoniBasu

Instagram: @evilreporterchick

And my journalist Facebook page: <https://bit.ly/2KCXScJ>

I’m a narrative nonfiction junkie. I love good writing and am here to help you become better writers. I want you to reach out and ask for help. I will make myself available.

SCHEDULE

This is **an estimation** of how we will proceed this semester and the schedule is **subject to change** depending on guest speakers and other needs of the class. Some readings are listed below; the weekly longform reading will be assigned in class and we will begin each class with a dissection of that story. All readings and assignments should be completed by the start of the due date class. I have listed only the deadlines for your main story; other writing assignments are TBD.

Week 1:

8/28: Introductions and syllabus. What is narrative?

Reading assignment: Chapters 1 and 20, *Storycraft*

“A Most American Terrorist: The Making of Dylann Roof.” By Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, *GQ*

Week 2:

9/4: What is the story really about? Generating strong ideas

Due: Story ideas. In-class brainstorm

Reading assignment: Chapters 10, and 5, *Storycraft*

Week 3:

9/11: Reporting for narrative: Narrowing the lens and finding the right characters

In-class assignment: Turn a topic into a story

Reading assignment: Chapters 6, 7 and 8, *Storycraft*

Week 4

9/18: Reporting for Narrative: Immersion versus reconstruction

Due: Reporting plan for long-form story (25 points)

Reading assignment: Chapters 2, 3 and 4, *Storycraft*

Week 5

9/25: Ethics

Due: Outline for long-form story (25 points)

Reading assignment: Chapter 14, *Storycraft*

“These Crossings Are Nothing But Fatal” by Moni Basu, *CNN*

Week 6

10/2: Writing descriptive scenes. Writing cinematically. Using all your senses. Metaphors and details, details, details!

Due: One scene from your long-form story (50 points)

In class assignment: Writing with description

Reading assignment: Chapters 11, 12 and 13, *Storycraft*

Week 7

10/10: How to grab a reader’s attention. Writing great ledes. The end is just as important as the beginning.

In-class assignment: rewriting ledes

Reading assignment: TBD by next week’s guest speaker, Jan Winburn

Week 8

10/16: Guest speaker: CNN Digital editor Jan Winburn.

Jan is one of the best narrative editors around. Come to class with LOTS of questions.

Reading assignment: “The Fighter” by C.J. Chivers, *The New York Times Magazine*

Week 9

10/23: Open class discussion. We’ll talk about anything you’d like.

Due: Second scene from your story (50 points)

Week 10

10/30: Organizing your story. Structure and the narrative arc

Due: 500-word narrative response to book. (100 points)

In-class readings of your responses

Week 11

11/6: Developing your voice and style

Due: First draft of your story (100 points)

Assignment: Listen to This American Life and The Moth

Week 12

11/13: Self-editing and rewriting

Week 13

11/20: No class this week. But please make an appointment for a story conference with me.

Due: Second draft of story (100 points)

Week 14

11/27: How to get published. Guest speaker. TBD

Week 15

12/4: Last class. Open discussion.

Due: Final draft of long-form story (200 points)