

JOU 4308-1336
Magazine and Feature Writing
Tuesday periods 7-9 (1:55 p.m. to 4:55 p.m.), 0279 Weil Hall

Professor: Moni Basu

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Phone: 352.273.3529 (Please email me first and set up a time to talk.)

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. or by appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES

You've learned the basics of news reporting. Now it's time for some creativity and fun. It's time to write compelling human interest stories. In this course, you will report and write various types of feature stories for magazines, newspapers and online publications. You will be expected to produce several stories of various formats and lengths. You will meet visiting professional writers and editors who will share their real-life experiences with you. And, together, we will read and analyze good writing to help you become better storytellers. It's my hope that this class functions much like a magazine staff and you will collaborate with each other in producing your stories.

Strong feature writing is more difficult to pull off than straight news and requires **solid reporting and writing skills**. The most compelling stories evoke the reader's imagination and emotions. You can only grow as a writer through practice and reading as much as you can. So, our class time together will be a combination of lectures, discussion, peer editing and writing activities.

By the end of the semester, I hope you will be able to produce stories worthy of publishing.

Here are a few things we will focus on:

- How to identify and develop relevant and interesting stories
- Ways to refine and articulate your ideas and pitch them to editors
- Clear, concise and vivid writing
- Techniques for detailed reporting and thorough interviews
- Developing your own style and voice
- Good story structure and organization
- How to self-edit, receive peer feedback, fact-check and very importantly, meet deadlines

GRADING

There are no shortcuts in this class. You will be judged on the quality of your work. I will discuss the grading structure for each assignment before you begin them. Grades will be posted on Canvas. Your final grade will be determined based on the following points:

Reported essay (800-1,200 words): 200 points

Pitch: 30 points

First draft: 70 points

Final draft: 100 points

Profile (700-1,000 words): 200 points

Pitch: 30 points

First draft: 70 points

Final draft: 100 points

In-depth feature (1,500-1,800 words): 300 points

Pitch: 50 points

Story outline: 50 points

First draft: 100 points

Final draft: 100 points

In-class and other writing assignments: 100 points

Quizzes: 100 points

Class participation: 100 points; 30 of those points will be based on your magazine presentation

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

Bonus:

Your final grade for a story assignment will be bumped up by a letter if you succeed in publishing your work in a reputable media outlet. You must clear this with me.

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 you will be expected to keep up with the news and we will be **reading a LOT**. You will be quizzed on current events as well as on the reading material. Good writers are voracious readers!

Here is the reading list:

Writing Tools: 55 Essential Strategies for Every Writer, by Roy Peter Clark (available on Amazon)

The Associated Press Stylebook and Manual. (either the online version or print edition available on Amazon).

One feature story every week, assigned by me.

One weekly magazine of your choice, to read through the semester. Towards the end, you present your magazine to the class. Suggested magazines: *The New Yorker*, *New York Times Magazine*, *New York, Time*, *The Economist*, *People*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Sports Illustrated*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Oxford American*, *The Atlantic* and *The Hollywood Reporter*.

SUPPLIES

You will need notebooks and a recording device, if your phone does not have a voice recorder. You will also need to bring a pen with red ink to class for peer editing sessions. We will use email for filing your work but you may be asked to print copies of your main writing assignments and bring them to class on the due date for peer review.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

You will be writing **a reported essay, a profile and an in-depth feature**. Those are in addition to 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 idea for each story format. You will be asked to discuss or brainstorm these in class.

You will then submit a written story pitch for approval along with a plan of action that includes your sources, anticipated interviews and background research.

ACCURACY, FAIRNESS AND STYLE

This is a class in journalism -- not fiction. While you are encouraged to take creative liberties with your writing, your stories must be factually correct. You must review your stories and double check every fact. That includes the names of people, places and organizations. You are expected to have a strong command of spelling and grammar and will lose points (at my discretion) for mistakes. Your copy should be clean and polished when you turn it in. All your assignments must adhere to AP style. You will lose points for every style, spelling and grammar error in your writing assignments.

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.

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** not just the assignment but the entire class.

Plagiarism is stealing someone else's ideas or work, including chunks of 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 writing 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 30 points per day on that assignment.

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION AND DEMEANOR

As I mentioned earlier, this class will function much like a magazine staff. As such, your attendance is mandatory. 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 ring, chirp, beep or make any other sounds. Please keep laptops closed unless you are asked to write in class. Your class notes must be handwritten. Also, please refrain from eating food and other distractions in class.

Writers learn from one another, so you are expected to come to class each week and come fully prepared to participate in activities and discussions. Because your contribution is

important, class participation makes up 100 points of your final grade. 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.

Your insights and comments should be respectful to all. 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. If you need to miss multiple classes, you will be required to provide appropriate documentation of the problem. You will still be responsible for submitting on time all assignments on their due dates and for material covered in class. 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/>

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 (home of that "other" university) and have been reporting and editing now for 35 years. I have been covering 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 series of stories on an Army chaplain at war. I'm not a super hero but I was featured in Marvel Comics' "Civil War" series. Most recently, I was a senior writer at CNN. This is my second semester teaching in Gatorland.

You can find me on:

www.monibas.com

Twitter: @TheMoniBasu

Instagram: @evilreporterchick

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

SCHEDULE

This is **an estimation** of how we will proceed this semester and it is **subject to change** depending on guest speakers and other needs of the class. Some readings are listed below; others will be assigned in class. All readings and assignments should be completed by start of class on the due date.

Week 1:

1/8: Introductions, syllabus and discussion of the characteristics of a good feature story (ledes, anecdotes, structure, interviews, details, color).

Assignment: Begin thinking about ideas for a personal essay and what magazine you will read this semester.

Reading assignment: Part 1, *Writing Tools*

“From Gandhi to guns: An Indian woman explores the NRA convention.” By Moni Basu, *CNN*

Week 2:

1/15: Generating strong ideas. What is a reported essay? In-class brainstorm for essay ideas. Discussion of Basu essay.

Due: Magazine choice and a story you like from that magazine.

Reading assignment: Part 2, *Writing Tools*

“Zoo Hopes New Polar Bear Makes Love Connection With Female” by Margaret Moffett, (Greensboro, N.C.) *News & Record*

Week 3:

1/22: Writing clearly and concisely. Developing voice and style. How to write a successful magazine pitch. Discussion of polar bear story.

In-class writing assignment: Essay pitch

Week 4

1/29: Editing. What to look for in a feature story. Peer review session.

Due: First draft of essay (70 points). Bring a printed copy for peer feedback.

Final essay pitch (30 points).

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

Week 5

2/5: Elements of a good profile. Researching and reporting your story and the art of the interview. Proust questionnaire. Begin thinking about who you might want to profile. Come to class next time with notes on three people and your plans to report the story.

Due: Final essay. (100 points)

In-class assignment: Brainstorm profile ideas.

Reading assignment: Part 3, *Writing Tools*; “Sherry Johnson was raped, pregnant and married by 11. Now she's fighting to end child marriage in America.” By Moni Basu, *CNN*

Week 6

2/12: How to grab a reader’s attention. Writing great ledes and killer kickers.

Assignment: In the magazine you are reading, find one lede that grabbed you and one you thought was poorly written. Come to class prepared to discuss.

Due: Profile pitch (30 points). Bring two copies to class with you. Peer review session.

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

Week 7

2/19: Open class discussion. Come to class with your questions and concerns. We will explore the stories on child marriage and the fighter.

Reading assignment: Part 4, *Writing Tools*

Due: Draft of profile (100 points) and profile pitch (30 points)

Week 8

2/26: Guest speaker: TBD

Week 9

3/5: Spring Break. No class. Enjoy!

Week 10

3/12: Descriptive writing. Using all your senses and details, details, details.

Due: Final draft of profile (100 points)

In class activity: Brainstorming ideas for in-depth feature

In-class assignment: Write pitch for in-depth feature story

Week 11

3/19: Storytelling. What makes a compelling story?

Long-form feature writing. Build your story. Stay organized.

Due: Pitch for in-depth feature (50 points). Bring a printed copy to class. Peer review session.

Reading assignment: “My Family’s Slave” by Alex Tizon, *The Atlantic*

Week 12

3/26: First set of magazine presentations.

Due: Final pitch for in-depth feature (50 points)
Story outline (50 points)

Week 13

4/2: Second set of magazine presentations.

Due: Draft of in-depth feature (100 points). Bring a printed copy to class. Peer review session.

Week 14

4/9: Self-editing and rewriting. Questions to ask yourself.

Week 15

4/16: How to get published.

Due: Final draft of in-depth feature story (200 points)

Week 16

4/23: Last class. Open discussion