JOU4308: Magazine and Feature Writing Course Syllabus: Fall 2023
Instructor: Nila Do Simon
Email: ndosimon@ufl.edu
Office Hours: Video conference, by appointment through email request
Class Time: Mondays, 12:50p-1:40p; Wednesdays, 12:50p-2:45p
Class Location: Zoom via Canvas
Please let me know if you have a name or preferred pronouns that differ from the class roll information.

WELCOME!
Everyone has a good story to tell. Let's find it and write it. Together.
This course will build upon your reporting foundation and give you the tools to create narratives with soul and authenticity.

You will learn the types of features exist in the expanding media world in print, online, on social media and more. You'll learn the basics of pitching to editors and how to craft profiles, reported personal essays and longer features. You will meet visiting professionals who have experience pitching, writing, reporting, editing and fielding pitches. Most importantly, your love of feature writing and reading will expand.

Some basics we'll cover:
● Developing feature ideas and where to find ideas
● Researching and reporting a feature
● Getting sources and making use of the time you have with them
● Understanding your voice and style, and how that applies to what you write and for where
● How to use anecdotes, color and imagination in your writing
● How to get published

Reading: This is a reading-intensive course. I've never met one good writer who isn't also a good reader. We will have routine and required reading assignments, often on a weekly basis. Sometimes these recommendations may even come from you.
In addition, your participation grade will largely reflect the quality of your engagement level in these discussions. Thankfully, the reads are going to be so thought-provoking that you'll want to share your personal take to the class. And we'll want to hear from you.

Student-generated reading selections: Each week, a different class member will be selected to suggest a feature article that the entire class will read and discuss. That class member will lead the discussion and field feedback and thoughts from fellow peers with the goal of having engaged conversations on what makes that specific article unique and a good read (and conversely, what you think could have been better about it).
Pro tip #1: Select articles from credible, established news sources.
Pro tip #2: Articles must be no less than 1,000 words.

Attendance: Attendance is required for the success of this class. You are expected to be on time for class and to attend each class. That said, if you absolutely must miss class for a valid, excusable reason, it's your responsibility to advise me via email of the circumstance before class begins.

Cameras On: Please have your camera on during class to keep our communication and engagement strong. Everyone will get more out of the class if we're more connected. In addition, a portion of your participation grade will reflect your consistent ability to keep your camera on.
If you have privacy concerns, poor Wifi, anxiety about being spotlighted or other concerns, please message me directly so we can figure a comfortable solution.
Also, all classes are recorded.

Attention and Participation: Your participation grade will be based on how much you engage with our class discussion and the quality of the engagement, as well as during peer workshops and assignments.

Assignments and Deadlines: Assignments are expected to be completed and turned in by deadlines discussed in class. You will lose 5% of total points for each assignment for every day it's late. If you're having trouble with a source or an assignment, communicate with me at least 24 hours before the deadline so we can problem-solve.

Accuracy and Honesty: You are expected to report and write original, factual work. You are expected to gather information from diverse sources. Please try to conduct interviews in person or on the phone. If a source is only willing to conduct an interview via email, communicate with me before agreeing to this.

Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest: They will not be tolerated. If you do choose to take this path, your grade will be reflective of this decision. You are expected to abide by the UF Honor Code.

AI-Generated Content: Please see above response for "Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest." One more time for emphasis: Don't do it. Your grade will reflect this decision.

Email Response Policy: Please allow at minimum 48 hours for a response to emails. Emails or messages sent on Saturdays and Sundays will be answered at the earliest on Monday.

Submission Guidelines: Unless noted otherwise, all assignments should be uploaded to Canvas via a link to an *editable* Google doc. Please make sure to provide edit access to me before uploading to Canvas. Each Google doc should be named LASTNAME_FIRSTNAME_ASSIGNMENTDATE, ie. Swift_Taylor_ReportedEssay100123

Grading:
You'll be graded out of a 1,000-point scale. Each assignment will be graded on the quality of your work, reporting, story structure, incorporation of feedback on final drafts, style, creativity and sometimes more.

Short profile (about 300 words):
- 150 points
    - 75 points (first draft)
    - 75 points (second draft)

Reported feature (up to 1,000 words)
- 250 points
    - 125 points (first draft)
    - 125 points (second draft)

Feature story pitch
- 100 points

Feature story (minimum 1,500 words)
- 350 points
    - 175 points (first draft)
    - 175 points (second draft)

Participation
- 150 points

Extra credit: Periodically, and often without preamble, there will be short quizzes throughout the semester for extra credit and the opportunity to boost your point total.

1,000-point grading scale

A: 925-1,000	C: 725-774
A-: 900-924	C-: 700-724
B+: 875-899	D+: 675-699
B: 825-874	D: 625-674
B-: 800-824	D-: 600-624
C+: 775-799	E: 0-599

Each will require a first draft and final draft that will be weighed equally on your grade. We'll discuss grading rubrics for each assignment as each is assigned.

How to lose points: An easy way to obtain point deduction is by submitting assignments after the due date. Deadlines in journalism are important. You will lose 5% of total points for each assignment for each day it's late.

How to lose substantial points: See section on "Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest." Once again: Don't do it.

How to earn points: Participate. You'll also be graded on participation, which includes attendance, keeping your camera on, and quality input during class discussions about, and not limited to, weekly readings and weekly lectures.

Writers learn from one another. Because your contribution is important, class participation makes up 150 points of your final grade. You will lose 5% of total points for every unexcused absence. Excused absences may include serious illness, family emergencies and other urgent matters only if you speak with 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 only be given in class, so it's in your best interest to make it to class each week.

Extra credit: Once in a while, there will be surprise quizzes and assignments throughout the semester where you can try to boost your grade.

You are welcome to schedule private meetings with me to discuss grades.
Comments on your work will be delivered either via comments in Google Docs or during class.

On plagiarism and professionalism: Like in every other class at the J-School, plagiarism will not be tolerated. There are, in fact, very few things that I will not tolerate, and plagiarizing or any form of cheating is one of them, so let me be perfectly clear: If you are caught plagiarizing (stealing someone's work or ideas, verbatim or not, without attribution), fabricating (making up people, sources, quotes, anecdotes, etc.), using AI-generated content, or engaging in conflicts of interest (using as sources your parents/roommates/people to whom you have some personal connection in a non-personal story), then you will receive an automatic failing grade. No questions about it.

Additionally, you are expected to be accurate, and your prose should be in accordance with the most up-to-date AP Stylebook. You will lose points for obvious errors. I won't deduct a specified number of points for spelling/grammar errors (though I will point them out), but an accumulation that suggests carelessness will affect your grade. I will discuss rubrics with each assignment that offer specifics on what qualifies as "an accumulation," how many points you'll lose for fact errors, etc.

CLASS SCHEDULE
The schedule below is fluid and may change

Week 1:
Wednesday, Aug. 23
Lecture topics: Introductions, syllabus review + What is a feature? An overview of different types of features
Homework: Read "He Ran Marathons in Prison. Boston's Was Easier" by Patricia Leigh Brown, then be prepared to discuss the article on Monday, Aug. 28, including specifics on what stuck with you about the story and how it made you feel after finishing it

Week 2:
Monday, Aug. 28

Lecture topics: Deep dive into different types of features, part I: The personal essay, how-to, news features, investigative, opinions, etc.
Homework: Read "[The Celebrity Photographer Who Put Down His Camera To Bake For His Community](#)" by Ella Quittner + specifics on what stuck with you about the story and how it made you feel after finishing it

Wednesday, Aug. 30
Lecture topics: What's a profile, and what makes the best ones so enjoyable
Homework: Student 1's selected article + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 1's selected article + Ideas for your profile piece

Week 3:
Monday, Sept. 4: NO CLASS, Labor Day.

Wednesday, Sept. 6:
Lecture topics: Deep dive into different types of features, part II: Trend pieces, opinions, etc.
What's due before class begins on Sept. 6: Ideas for your profile piece + Topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 1's selected article
Homework: Read Ryan Pfeffer's [profile on DJ Khaled](#) for the Miami New Times AND his NYT [Modern Love article](#) + One to two bullet-pointed topics each about Ryan Pfeffer's DJ Khaled profile OR his Modern Love article

Week 4:
Monday, Sept. 11
Guest speaker Ryan Pfeffer, editor of Infatuation Miami
Lecture topics: Elements of compelling features: Descriptive writing that's created by using your senses and details, details, details
What's due before class begins on Sept. 11: Topics about Pfeffer's articles

Wednesday, Sept. 13
Lecture topics: Using voice and style to your advantage
Homework: Read Wesley Lowery's [profile on Machine Gun Kelly](#) + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Lowery's profile on Machine Gun Kelly

Week 5:
Monday, Sept. 18
Lecture topics: Organizing a feature: Adding science to the art of writing, part I
What's due before class begins on Sept. 18: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Lowery's profile on Machine Gun Kelly

Wednesday, Sept. 20
Lecture topics: Organizing a feature: Adding science to the art of writing, part II

What's due before class begins on Sept. 20: Profile first draft
Homework: Read Israel Gutierrez's [feature on former Miami Heat player Ray Allen](#) + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Gutierrez's piece

Week 6:
Monday, Sept. 25: NO CLASS, Yom Kippur

Wednesday, Sept. 27
Guest speaker Israel Gutierrez, personality with ESPN and formerly The Miami Herald, Sept. 27
Lecture topics: Developing a voice; specifically, your voice
What's due before class begins on Sept. 27: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Gutierrez's piece
Homework: Student 2's selected article + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 2's selected article + Ideas for your reported feature

Week 7:
Monday, Oct. 2
Lecture topics: Generating story ideas: Finding patterns + finding the soul
What's due before class begins on Oct. 2: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 2's selected article + Ideas for your reported feature
Homework: Read Pamela Colloff's [The Innocent Man Part I](#) + One to two bullet-pointed topics you want to discuss about Colloff's feature story

Wednesday, Oct. 4
Lecture topics: The art of the interview, part I: Advanced feature interviewing; asking good questions
What's due before class begins on Oct. 4: Topics you want to discuss about Colloff's feature story + profile second draft

Week 8:
Monday, Oct. 9
Lecture topics: The art of the interview, part II: Listening and observing
Homework: Student 3's selected article + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 3's selected article

Wednesday, Oct. 11
Lecture topics: How to grab a reader's attention: Writing great ledes, relevant nut grafts and memorable kickers – and the power of verbs
What's due before class begins on Monday, Oct. 11: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 3's selected article

Week 9:
Monday, Oct. 16
Lecture topics: Great beginnings, middles and ends

Wednesday, Oct. 18

Lecture topics: Quote, unquote: How quotes can make (or break) a story

What's due before class begins on Oct. 18: Reported feature first draft

Homework: Read Amanda Heckert's [ode to her grandmother's cornbread dressing](#) + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Heckert's cornbread piece

Week 10:

Monday, Oct. 23

Guest speaker Amanda Heckert, executive editor of Garden & Gun

Lecture topics: The importance of fact-checking

Homework: Student 4's selected article + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 4's selected article

Wednesday, Oct. 25

Lecture topics: Feature ethics, covering diverse communities; immersive reporting and gaining trust

What's due before class begins on Oct. 25: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 4's selected article

Week 11:

Monday, Oct. 30

Lecture topic: The art of the pitch

What's due before class begins on Oct. 30: Reported feature second draft + Ideas for your feature story

Homework: Feature story pitch + Student 5's selected article + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 5's selected article

Wednesday, Nov. 1: NO CLASS, but I will hold office hours during class hours for anyone who requests a meeting

Week 12:

Monday, Nov. 6

Lecture topic: Intro to short-form features

What's due before class begins on Nov. 6: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 5's selected article

Homework: Student 6's selected article + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 6's selected article

Wednesday, Nov. 8

Lecture topics: Headlines and subheads

What's due before class begins on Nov. 8: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 6's selected article

Homework: Student 7's selected article + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 7's selected article

Week 13:
Monday, Nov. 13
Lecture topics: Self-editing: What to keep and what to ditch
What's due before class begins on Nov. 13: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 7's selected article

Wednesday, Nov. 15
Lecture topics: Writing for specific audiences
What's due before class begins on Nov. 15: First draft of your feature story

Week 14:
Monday, Nov. 20
Lecture topics: Open class discussion: What problems are you running into with editing your feature? What questions do you have about features? Pitching? Revising?

Wednesday, Nov. 22: NO CLASS. Thanksgiving break. Enjoy!

Week 15:
Monday. Nov. 27: NO CLASS, but I will hold office hours during class hours for anyone who requests a meeting

Wednesday, Nov. 29
Lecture topics: Building your story and how to stay organized + in-class workshop with a writing buddy
Homework: Student 8's selected article + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 8's selected article

Week 16:
Monday, Dec. 4
Lecture topics: Open class discussion on final draft of feature story
What's due before class begins on Dec. 4: Topics that you'd like to discuss about Student 8's selected article

Wednesday, Dec. 6
Lecture topics: Feature writing careers
What's due on Dec. 6: Feature story second draft

Diversity Statement
Journalists are responsible for telling the stories of individuals who make up any given community. We serve, help and inform everyone. In order to best carry out these ideals, we must exhibit respect,

inclusiveness and an understanding for all people. These expectations during field work will also be carried into this classroom. Our differences will serve as a strength that we embrace as we discuss relevant story ideas, developing contacts within a community or even storytelling techniques. Exposure to different perspectives, values, ideals and experiences will make us all better, more compassionate and understanding journalists — and people. We all learn best and maximize our outcomes when we feel comfortable. Please let me know what I can do to make sure you feel respected and welcomed in this space.