

Magazine and Feature Writing – JOU 4308
Course Syllabus – Fall 2013
Wednesdays 3-6 p.m.
Weimer Hall, Room 1094

Professor: Lauren Darm
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Course Description and Objectives:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the art of writing magazine and feature stories. Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the characteristics of feature stories
- Understand different kinds of features (i.e. profile, how-to, etc.)
- Identify differences in target audiences and understand how to tailor ideas to that audience
- Use a variety of research techniques while gathering information, including human sources, documents and web-based sources
- Use a variety of interviewing techniques to draw out useful and colorful information
- Integrate various non-fiction storytelling techniques into feature stories (i.e. anecdotes, colorful quotes, description, etc.)
- Soundly structure a feature story using those elements and tie them together with a clear and compelling focus
- Write tightly, clearly and colorfully
- Identify the best markets for each story
- Write query letters that sell story ideas
- Publish stories in newspapers, magazines or Web sites

Required Readings:

The following texts are required readings for this course:

- *Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines: The Pursuit of Excellence*, by Edward Jay Friedlander and John Lee (ISBN-10: 0205484662)
- *The 2013 Writer's Market*, edited by Robert Lee Brewer (ISBN-10: 1599635933)

You will be expected to read the assigned chapters/pages and be prepared to discuss them in class. As you will see further down in the syllabus, there are participation points in this course. Details on how to gain/lose those points are also detailed lower in the syllabus.

Also, you should have an *Associate Press Stylebook*. You will need to follow these style guidelines on everything you write in this course.

The Work:

You will do three feature stories in this course. Your stories, which will be double-spaced in 12-point, Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins, must be no less than 1,000 words and include at least two human sources (who you talked to) who contributed significant information to the story. Also, you need at least one additional source — a document, person or web-based source — to provide further support to your story. You must include contact information and/or citations for all sources on a separate page attached to your story.

In addition, each story will include a one-page, single-spaced query letter addressed to your targeted publication as well as an outline, first draft and peer critique. Each story will be weighted equally. Further details about formatting and the topics for your feature stories will be discussed in class.

Final Grade Breakdown:

Your final grade in the course will be arrived at through the following combination:

- **Class Participation:** **10 percent**
- **Feature Story 1:**
 - Outline 5 percent
 - First Draft/Peer Critique 10 percent
 - Final Draft/Query Letter 15 percent
 - **Total** **30 percent**
- **Feature Story 2:**
 - Outline 5 percent
 - First Draft/Peer Critique 10 percent
 - Final Draft/Query Letter 15 percent
 - **Total** **30 percent**
- **Feature Story 3:**
 - Outline 5 percent
 - First Draft/Peer Critique 10 percent
 - Final Draft/Query Letter 15 percent
 - **Total** **30 percent**

Grading:

Your writing assignments will be graded based on a “content” grade minus a “mechanics” grade. The content grade reflects the overall structure, how well you covered your chosen topic, the news value of your work, etc. And the mechanics grade is arrived at following certain point deductions for various types of errors: spelling errors, grammar errors and AP errors will result in a deduction of five points each. Factual errors, i.e. misspelling the name of a person or organization, will result in a 25-point deduction for each error.

Grading Scale:

A = 93-100 B = 84-86 C = 70-76

A- = 90-92 B- = 80-83 D = 60-69
B+ = 87-89 C+ = 77-79 F = 59 and below

Course Schedule:

Here is the basic schedule for this semester. All readings scheduled are due on the date listed on the syllabus, meaning you need to have read them prior to coming to class that day. The schedule is subject to change depending on the needs of the class.

- August 21 Introductions, syllabus and what makes magazines and feature articles unique?
- August 28 Types of newspaper feature stories and finding story ideas
Read Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines Chapters 1-2
- Sept. 4 Individual conferences about story ideas for Feature Story 1
FEATURE STORY 1 – OUTLINE DUE
- Sept. 11 Writing the newspaper feature and the value of rewriting
Read Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines Chapter 6 and 9
- Sept. 18 Writing query letters and selling your work
Read The Writer's Market pages 7-42 and 110-111
FEATURE STORY 1 – FIRST DRAFT DUE
(Please bring in two hard copies, one for me and one for your peer critique.)
- Sept. 25 Types of magazine feature stories and finding story ideas
Read Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines Chapter 3
FEATURE STORY 1 - FINAL DRAFT AND QUERY LETTER DUE
(Don't forget to include your contact sheet, outline, graded first draft and peer critique.)
- Oct. 2 Individual conferences about story ideas for Feature Story 2
FEATURE STORY 2 – OUTLINE DUE
- Oct. 9 Finding sources, researching and the art of interviewing
Read Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines Chapters 4-5
- Oct. 16 Writing magazine feature stories
Read Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines Chapters 7-8
FEATURE STORY 2 – FIRST DRAFT DUE
(Please bring in two hard copies, one for me and one for your peer critique.)
- Oct. 23 Legal and ethical considerations for feature writers
Read Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines Chapter 10
FEATURE STORY 2 – FINAL DRAFT AND QUERY LETTER DUE
(Don't forget to include your contact sheet, outline, graded first draft and peer critique.)

- Oct. 30 Individual conferences about story ideas for Feature Story 3
FEATURE STORY 3 – OUTLINE DUE
- Nov. 13 Feature writing, multimedia and staying competitive in the marketplace
Read The Writer's Market pages 144-152 and 161-181
- Nov. 20 How to get a job writing feature stories
Bring in a copy of your resume
FEATURE STORY 3 – FIRST DRAFT DUE
(Please bring in two hard copies, one for me and one for your peer critique.)
- Nov. 27 **DAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS**
- Dec. 4 Course wrap-up
FEATURE STORY 3 – FINAL DRAFT AND QUERY LETTER DUE
(Don't forget to include your contact sheet, outline, graded first draft and peer critique.)

Class Policies:

1. **Attendance:** Attendance in this class is mandatory and will be taken. We are working with a class that meets only once a week. Plus, we will be doing valuable in-class activities like peer critiques and one-on-one meetings to discuss story ideas, so it is essential you attend, especially on those days designated on the schedule.

You can miss up to one class without documentation or penalty against your participation points. However, if there is an assignment due on the day you miss, your grade on that assignment could be affected. In the case of a documented/known illness, family emergency or if you have some other situation you think may constitute a reason for an excused absence, please let me know in advance.

2. **Deadlines:** Your stories are due at the beginning of class or your individual meetings on the day listed on the course schedule. This is a strict deadline, so make sure you give yourself plenty of time to write and print out your story. You must bring a hard copy of your article on the due date. No e-mail submissions will be accepted.

If, for any reason, you do think you will miss a deadline, please discuss it with me at least 24 hours in advance. Under legitimate extenuating circumstances, like the ones discussed under the attendance policy, I may agree to let you turn the story in late. However, if I have not agreed to an extension before the original deadline, 10 points will be deducted each day the story is late.

3. **Extra Credit:** In this class, you will be attempting to get your assignments published. If you succeed, you can receive up to 10 extra credit points on that assignment.
4. **Classroom Demeanor:** I want this class to be fun and energetic with great discussions. So I expect you to participate fully during discussions, either voluntarily or when called upon. If you are called upon and have not read the material, I expect you to honestly decline comment because you haven't read.

I understand college is stressful and sometimes reading will take a back seat to other classes and assignments. Because of this, you get one free pass during the semester where you can say you didn't read without penalty to your participation points. However, only two students can use their free pass during each class, so use your free pass wisely.

In addition, I expect you to be attentive and courteous to your fellow classmates and to me. Please do not engage in side conversations. Also, this is a safe space to share and express opinions. Please be polite to others while both expressing opinions and responding to them.

5. **Cell Phones and Other Devices:** Research shows students who multi-task in class end up learning a lot less and therefore get much lower grades than students who focus on taking notes and participating in class discussions. So please turn off your cell phones, no texting in class and do not use any electronic device for any reason (other than taking notes) unless I direct you otherwise. Doing so could result in the loss of participation points.
6. **Academic Integrity:** University of Florida students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty such as (but not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, reusing an assignment from another class, writing a similar paper for two classes, drawing too heavily on another's work for your own and having someone else write your paper. If you are unsure of whether something constitutes a violation of academic integrity, ask me before turning in an assignment. Ignorance is not an excuse.

My default practice for an academic integrity violation is a failing grade for the course, and the instance will be reported to the university's office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

7. **Disability Assistance:** Students with disabilities who seek reasonable accommodations in the classroom or other aspects of performing their coursework must first register with UF's Disability Resource Center. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, and you can contact them by calling (352) 392-8565.

8. **Student Success and Seeking Help:** All of your instructors have high expectations of you, including myself. We are responsible for conveying those expectations to you, but you are responsible for ensuring you meet your course obligations. But ultimately this class should be fun. Sometimes it will be draining and frustrating like it is in the communications field. However, it should also be enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling. You are always encouraged to come to me both inside and outside of class with questions, concerns and advice about this class and your assignments or the communications field in general.

Also, the UF Counseling and Wellness Center is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call (352) 392-1575.