Magazine and Feature Writing – JOU 4308
Course Syllabus – Spring 2014
Mondays from 1:55-4:55 p.m.
Weil Hall, Room 0273

Professor: Lauren Darm
Office: Weimer Hall, Room G038
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Course Description and Student 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:

• Follow the Story, by James Stewart (ISBN-10: 0684850672)

You will be expected to read the assigned chapters/pages and be prepared to discuss them in class. Both of these texts are crucial to understanding what you will be doing on your assignments and in class. Also, as you will see further down in the syllabus, there are participation points in this course. So do not neglect to do the readings.
You should also have an *Associated Press Stylebook*. You will need to follow these style guidelines for everything you write in this course. In addition, please bring your laptop to each class. You will need it to complete in-class assignments.

**The Work:**
Here are descriptions for the main assessments in this course:

- **Three Feature Stories**: Your stories, which will be double-spaced in 12-point, Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins, must range from 1,000-1,200 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, web-based source, or it can be a third person — to provide further support to your story.

  These sources must be credible. For instance, you cannot use your friends, family or classmates (both former and present) as personal sources. The websites or documents you use must also be reputable sources (e.g. not Wikipedia). You must include contact information and/or citations for all sources on a separate page attached to the first and final drafts of 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 (following a topic approved by me in advance), 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.

- **Blogs**: You will be designing a WordPress blog and writing at least 10 posts ranging from 200-300 words throughout the semester. Like with your feature stories, you will be expected to provide commentary and peer critiques to your fellow classmates’ blogs. Additionally, you will be promoting your blog posts on Twitter, meaning you must have a Twitter account for this class.

  Being able to blog and effectively use social and new media (especially as a means to tell stories and promote your work) is a necessary skill in this now increasingly digital industry, and you will learn to master both in this class. Further details about the topics, deadlines and other expectations for your individual blogs will be provided in class.

**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. (These deductions add up fast, so be
mindful of them.) Factual errors, i.e. misspelling the name of a person or organization, will result in a 25-point deduction for each error.

**Final Grade Breakdown:**
Your final grade in the course will be arrived at through the following combination:

- **Class Participation:** 5 percent
- **Outlines:** 5 percent
- **Blog Posts:** 15 percent
- **Feature Story 1:**
  - First Draft 5 percent
  - Query Letter 5 percent
  - Final Draft 15 percent
  - **Total** 25 percent
- **Feature Story 2:**
  - First Draft 5 percent
  - Query Letter 5 percent
  - Final Draft 15 percent
  - **Total** 25 percent
- **Feature Story 3:**
  - First Draft 5 percent
  - Query Letter 5 percent
  - Final Draft 15 percent
  - **Total** 25 percent

**Grading Scale:**

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<tr>
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<td>90-92</td>
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<td>59 and below</td>
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**Class Policies:**

1. **Attendance and Tardiness:** Attendance in this class is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of class. 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 and arrive promptly, especially on those days designated on the schedule.

   Excessive tardiness and unexcused absences will affect your participation points. You can miss 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, like a legal or military obligation, athletic participation or religious holiday, 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, print out your story and make it to class on time. You must submit your assignments electronically through Sakai, and bring in a hard copy to class on the due date.

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, up to four days after deadline. After four days, your grade on that assignment will be a zero.

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 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 or completing in-class assignments) unless I direct you otherwise. Yes, communications is a technology-driven field, and there will be times where we will use technology as part of class, but it should be a learning tool not a distraction. Using devices for unexcused reasons 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 of sources or information from sources, reusing a story from another class, writing a similar article 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. Also, please refer to the University of Florida’s guidelines regarding academic honesty at http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/. Ignorance is not an excuse.

My default practice for an academic integrity violation is a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the entire 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 the University of Florida’s Disability Resource Center. The center will provide documentation, and then you must meet with me, so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, and you can contact them by calling (352) 392-8565. For more information, visit http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/.

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. You are responsible for ensuring you meet your course obligations. Sometimes it will be draining and frustrating like it is in the communications field. But ultimately, it should also be enjoyable and purposeful.

You are always encouraged to come to me both inside and outside of class with questions or concerns 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. For more information, visit http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/.

9. **Online Course Evaluation Process**: Just as I give feedback on your work throughout the semester, I would also like to get feedback from you on the quality of instruction in this course. Because of this, students are expected to complete 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.
**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.

Jan. 6  
**Introductions, syllabus and what makes magazine and feature stories unique**
Discuss first story assignment

Jan. 13  
**Types of feature stories and finding story ideas**
*Read Follow the Story Chapters 1-2*

**FEATURE STORY 1 – PITCH TOPIC**

Jan. 20  
**HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**

Jan. 27  
**Individual conferences about story ideas for Feature Story 1**

**FEATURE STORY 1 – OUTLINE DUE**

Feb. 3  
**Writing feature stories**
*Read Follow the Story Chapters 5-7 & 12*

Feb. 10  
**Writing query letters and selling your work**
Discuss second story assignment
*Read The Writer's Market pages 7-42 and 110-111*

**FEATURE STORY 1 – FIRST DRAFT DUE**
(Please submit your draft with your source list on Sakai and bring in a hard copy for your peer critique.)

Feb. 17  
**Feature writing and multimedia**
Discuss blogging assignment
*Read The Writer's Market pages 144-152 and 161-181*

**FEATURE STORY 1 - FINAL DRAFT AND QUERY LETTER DUE**
(Please submit your query letter and draft with your source list on Sakai and bring in hard copies to class.)

**FEATURE STORY 2 – PITCH TOPIC**

Feb. 24  
**Individual conferences about story ideas for Feature Story 2**
Discuss returned drafts

**FEATURE STORY 2 – OUTLINE DUE**
March 3  
**SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**

March 10  
Taking your feature stories to the next level  
Discuss third story assignment  
*Read Follow the Story Chapters 8-11*

**FEATURE STORY 2 – FIRST DRAFT DUE**  
*(Please submit your draft with your source list on Sakai and bring in a hard copy for your peer critique.)*

March 17  
Finding sources, researching and the art of interviewing  
*Read Follow the Story Chapter 4 & 13*

**FEATURE STORY 2 – FINAL DRAFT AND QUERY LETTER DUE**  
*(Please submit your query letter and draft with your source list on Sakai and bring in hard copies to class.)*

**FEATURE STORY 3 – PITCH TOPIC**

March 24  
Individual conferences about story ideas for Feature Story 3  
Discuss returned drafts

**FEATURE STORY 3 – OUTLINE DUE**

March 31  
Catch up week  
*If there is any material we need to cover in further detail, this is the week we will discuss it. If everything is on schedule and nothing needs to be discussed, class this day will be cancelled.*

April 7  
Legal and ethical considerations for feature writers

**FEATURE STORY 3 – FIRST DRAFT DUE**  
*(Please submit your draft with your source list on Sakai and bring in a hard copy for your peer critique.)*

April 14  
How to get a job writing feature stories and staying competitive in the marketplace  
*Bring in a copy of your resume*

**FEATURE STORY 3 – FINAL DRAFT AND QUERY LETTER DUE**  
*(Please submit your query letter and draft with your source list on Sakai and bring in hard copies to class.)*

April 21  
Course wrap-up and presentations  
Discuss returned drafts