
Jour 403-01

CRN: 16497

Interactive Feature Writing

“Excellence Without Excuse!”

— Motto of the School of Communications

Course Overview

Some of the best writers are feature writers, and my goal is to secure your spot in this league. Feature writing is much more than “late-breaking fluff.” It goes behind the news, explains the news and often breaks news. Feature writers know how to pull a story out of thin air and give it meaning, by providing substance with a style all their own. They know how to tell a story and on which platform it works best. They can make you laugh, cry and mad as the Grinch. They can spot trends before they bubble to the surface, connect erratic dots and offer well-formed analysis when appropriate. They know how to make sense out of nonsense and put into words what people are feeling and thinking. Being naturally curious, they are often amused that they are paid to be nosy.

If this is the kind of stuff that excites you, you’re in the right class!

This is an intensive course that will help you do all of this and more for digital and print platforms, particularly for 101 Magazine. You will learn the skills necessary to succeed at any magazine as well as other journalistic environments. You will master knowledge-based reporting to bring the best research to life; conduct insightful interviews for story and to gather facts; and dissect databases. You will use this foundation to add sizzle and write feature stories of various types, including profiles, news features, how-to articles, essays, reviews, service pieces, interactive narratives, special reports and whatever we can dream up. We’ll feed our passion for good writing by savoring the best techniques of narrative or literary journalism. We’ll do lots of “listening” to the written word through in-class readings, writing and critiquing. And then we’ll celebrate what you publish — whether it’s short and sweet or long and luxurious.

3 Credit Hours

Also see the Department of Media, Journalism and Film’s Mission, Vision and Core Values at the end of this syllabus.

Spring 2015

10:10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Tuesday and Thursday, C-244

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Office Hours

- 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Monday and Wednesday
- 11:30 p.m. to 12:30 p.m. and
2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday and
Thursday
- 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday
- And by appointment

Key Dates

Midterm: Feb. 26, 2015

The midterm will involve planning, researching and writing an interactive narrative.

Final: April 14, 2015

The final will also involve planning, researching and writing an interactive narrative, but on a higher level. Work on your project throughout the semester, and publish it by the deadline.

Course Goals

In accordance with ACEJMC accreditation standards, the goals of this course include helping you learn to:

- Understand the inner workings of digital magazine publishing.
- Understand the roles of beat reporters, general-assignment reporters, staff writers of feature sections, national and foreign correspondents, bloggers, freelance journalists and their editors on the contemporary newspaper, magazine or Internet site.
- Think critically, independently and creatively about issues, events, theories and trends throughout the world
- Demonstrate refined reporting, writing, analytical, storytelling, research and multimedia skills.
- Work comfortably on deadline and/or high-pressure environments independently as well as collaboratively.
- Hone your observational skills and instincts.
- Contribute effectively to team projects, demonstrating a strong work ethic, professionalism and collegiality.
- Reflect a heightened awareness of journalistic standards, news ethics and legal considerations in your work.
- Observe the tenets of publication law, ethics and etiquette in all assignments, while working ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity across barriers such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, geography and sexual orientation.

Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of Interactive Feature Writing, you should be able to:

- Write feature articles of various lengths and know how to tailor them across media platforms for print, tablets, smart phones and computers.
- Learn how to package stories, taking into account text, visual treatments and interactivity for multimedia platforms.
- Develop and manage specialty areas or beats, and cultivate a range of sources.
- Regularly generate insightful story ideas and successfully pitch them to editors and producers through effectively written proposals and query letters.
- Achieve publication as a freelance writer.
- Demonstrate sound news judgment and diligence in continually updating, revising and expanding your work across platforms, including social media.
- Understand and analyze the influence of feature writing and magazines on newspapers and the Internet.
- Enhance your coverage by reporting on measurable changes and providing context through the use of math, statistics and computer-based reporting, including databases, spreadsheets and Internet sources.
- Employ creative storytelling techniques and write compelling interactive narratives that incorporate appropriate multimedia tools, such as basic HTML formatting and hyperlinks, audio, photos, videos, data visualization, social media, sidebars, lists, graphics or other data visualization, blogs, resources and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) methods.
- To apply narrative or literary journalism techniques in the development and writing of articles.

Instructional Methods

To fulfill the objectives of this course, you will engage in stylistic analysis, imitation and experimentation of interactive feature writing. You will learn by participating in a wide range of activities that will include:

1. Discussing news, current events and trends along with textbook readings in the context of best practices in feature writing and digital magazine publishing
2. Reading and analyzing exemplary writing to apply narrative or literary journalism techniques in your work
3. Critiquing a competitive set of magazines in a particular category, such as business, health or sports
4. Developing engaging article ideas and submitting story proposals (known as query letters in the magazine industry)
5. Writing at least six articles of various lengths and formats for publication, primarily on 101Magazine.net. This includes interactive narratives, in-depth profiles and features, breaking news features, investigations and series, short items for gazettes, blog items, departments and essays
6. Incorporating statistics and other measurable change utilizing methods such as database reporting
7. Experimenting with capturing and editing audio, video as well as using other multimedia tools
8. Working independently and in teams
9. Using social media effectively for journalism
10. Preparing physical and online portfolios

Prerequisite

Completion of Advanced Reporting & Writing with a grade of C or better. Any exception must have the approval of the instructor.

Required Texts and Materials

- “Feature and Magazine Writing: Action, Angles and Anecdote”’s by David E. Sumner and Holly G. Miller (Blackwell Publishers)
- Download a free copy of “Journalism 2.0” by Mark Briggs (J-Lab, 2007) at http://www.kcnn.org/resources/journalism_20/
- Assignments, information and links posted for this class on <http://blackboard.howard.edu>
- Associated Press Stylebook
- Dictionary and thesaurus
- Style section of The Washington Post
- Daily monitoring of local and national media, from magazines to National Public Radio
- Digital camera and audio recorder (You can borrow these from the Tech Center and/or use your cell phone.)
- Portable USB storage device

Additional Reference Sources

- **Highly Recommended:**
 - On Writing Well by William Zinsser
 - The Best American Magazine Writing, compiled by the American Society of Magazine Editors (Columbia University Press, paperback, \$16.95 or less).
 - The Yahoo! Style Guide: The Ultimate Sourcebook for Writing Editing and Creating Content for the Digital World by Chris Barr (St. Martin's Griffin)
 - Writer's Market (Writer's Digest Books)
 - Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University edited by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call (Plume)
 - Elements of Style by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White (Macmillan Publishing Co.)
- Feature Writing: The Pursuit of Excellence by Edward Jay Friedlander and John Lee (Pearson). ISBN-10: 0205747809 ISBN-13: 9780205747801
- Magazine and Feature Writing by Hiley Ward (Mayfield Publishing Co.)
- The Art and Craft of Feature Writing by William Blundell (Plume)
- Writing for Story: Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction by a Two-Time Pulitzer Prize Winner by Jon Franklin (Plume)
- The Writer magazine
- Writer's Digest magazine
- The Magazine by Leonard Mogel (University of Chicago Press)
- The Magazine From Cover to Cover by Sammye Johnson and Patricia Prijatel (Oxford University Press)

Other Resources

Media Storm at <http://www.mediastorm.com>

Interactive Narratives at <http://www.interactivenarratives.org>

ProPublica at <http://www.propublica.org/>

Poynter Institute at <http://www.poynter.org>

Jim Romenesko <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45>

Richard Prince's Journal-isms <http://mije.org/richardprince>

Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism at <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/narrative/>

Investigative Reporters and Editors at <http://www.ire.org>

A Journalist's Guide to the Internet at <http://reporter.umd.edu>

<http://www.cyberjournalist.net>

<http://powerreporting.com/>

<http://www.journaliststoolbox.com>

<http://www.1stheadlines.com>

<http://www.refdesk.com>

<http://www.census.gov>

The Institute for Interactive Journalism at <http://www.j-lab.org/>

Online News Association at <http://www.onlinenewsassociation.org>

National Association of Black Journalists at <http://www.nabj.org>

Society of Professional Journalists at <http://www.spj.org>

American Society of Magazine Editors and Magazine Publishers of America at <http://www.magazine.org>

Pulitzer Prize-winning articles

“Best of Newspaper Writing” from the American Society of News Editors

Hearst Award winners and finalists at http://www.hearstfdn.org/hearst_journalism/index.php

Society of Professional Journalists Mark of Excellence winners

Tech Tips & Tricks From Sree Sreenivasan at <http://www.sreetips.com>

Video tips at <http://kirkmastin.blogspot.com/>

“Multimedia Projects You May Have Missed” by Regina McCombs at

<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=101&aid=155765>

Free online multimedia courses at <http://www.newsu.org/> and

<http://www.bbctraining.com/onlineCourses.asp>

Course Requirements

Readings and Critiques — To write well you need to read good writing. You need to listen to the written word. Everyone should come prepared to discuss pre-assigned readings. It’s also important to listen to a writer’s way with words. We will periodically read articles aloud in class, including your stories. Each of you should also find and recommend at least two articles for the class to read. Think about the origin of each story. What sparked the idea? Was it spinning off the news? New research? The writer’s curiosity? What type of reporting was done? Does the story have a point of view? Describe the main themes, story structure and narrative techniques. Does the lede work? What about the ending? Is the nut graf effective? Did the writer give you a good roadmap? How would you frame this story differently? Do the details work? Finally, did you like it? Why or why not? Keep these questions in mind for deconstruction, discussions and written critiques.

Features — This course will prepare you to write features of various lengths for magazines, newspapers and the Internet. All articles will be written for publication, targeted primarily to 101 Magazine. Do not wait until the last minute to publish a minimum of six to eight articles, including the final/class project. **I must see the unpublished version BEFORE your story runs in order to give you feedback for revisions and full credit for publication.** Make sure that you also submit the published clipping after your story appears. However, do not let this requirement stop you from taking assignments and building your portfolio. If you have a tight deadline (that does NOT involve procrastination), you should still try to contact me about reading your article — in or outside class.

Review previous print and other multimedia stories related to your idea. What value can you add? How is your idea different? Come up with a theme or focus statement to help you plan your research and stay on track. Draft questions. For each article, you will have two deadlines (unless you have a breaking story).

- Submit your article on the first deadline date.
- After it has been critiqued in class and approved by the instructor, submit a revision for final grading within a week or less depending on timeliness and deadlines. **Turn in a source list with contact information and fact-checking details for each article.** This is a common practice in magazine publishing and has spread to other platforms. Be prepared to explain why you chose your sources.
- Please keep in mind that you may need to do additional work on assignments accepted for publication. Review your work for story, style and, if possible, surprise.

All assignments must be typed and double-spaced with at least a one-inch margin on all sides. Include your name, email address, course name, assignment description, and date in the upper left corner. This information can be single-spaced. Include a headline, summary and tweet above your byline. At the end of your article, include a one-two paragraph self-critique. Discuss what you did well, what you'd do differently if you had more time, what you learned that you could apply to future assignments, and any triumphs or challenges (Schwalbe, 2006). In addition, please upload your articles to the Digital Dropbox on Blackboard. Make sure that you hit “send.” Do not email stories to me without permission.

Again, you must include hyperlinks and share all of your work through social networking. Strive for at least three multimedia elements, including text and photos, as appropriate to your topic. Think about the best platform on which to tell all or part of your story. What do we need to see, hear or experience in another way? Do not embed photos in your story. You will upload photos and other multimedia to 101magazine.net on WordPress. However, you can include links to sharing sites such as Flickr, Vimeo or YouTube in the dropbox so that I can preview your multimedia. (Also see More on Multimedia, below.)

Revisions should be single-spaced with a space between each paragraph. They should be block style with no paragraph indentations (similar to this syllabus). In general, I will edit articles using Track Changes under Tools on Microsoft Word. This feature will delete-cross out information that I delete and underline information that I add. I'll put any notes in brackets highlighted in yellow. After you read my edits, you can click the icon with the checkmark on your toolbar to “Accept all changes in document.” **If you see, balloons or ovals in your margins showing my deletions, go to Options under Tools to the Track Changes tab and uncheck the appropriate box to disable the balloons feature.**

Lab time — Bring your work to each class. I will try to include lab time and one-on-one feedback near the end of each class. Be prepared to read your work and to participate in constructive critiques.

Query letters — You will also pitch your ideas to international, national and local publications or websites, including 101. Find out whether the outlets prefer printed or emailed query letters. Please blind copy (bcc) ylamb@howard.edu on queries, unless mail is required. Upload a properly formatted query letter addressed to a specific editor on Blackboard each Monday, and be prepared to discuss it in class. You should pitch at least two professional publications or websites.

Keep a log of your query letters and assignments, tracking submission, acceptance, publication or rejection dates. Some publications accept only query letters; others accept completed manuscripts. In the latter situations, your package should include a cover letter/query letter, an edited manuscript and, if the publication prefers regular mail, an envelope addressed to the correct editor and a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). See the Power Point on Blackboard for more details.

More on Multimedia — Throughout the semester, you should try various forms of multimedia: photojournalism, audio, video, SoundSlides, Storify.com, Google maps, interactive timelines such as Dipity.com, data visualization and other informational graphics. You should include hyperlinks and photos or other multimedia that is original, in the public domain or obtained with written permission. (You will be responsible for fees or legal action for improperly use photos and other materials. For example, typing “Courtesy of CNN” doesn’t mean that you have permission to use an image. Plus, CNN might have paid to obtain the image through Associated Press or Getty Images, and you’ll have to pay, too.)

In addition to our in-class sessions, you should attend workshops offered by the Tech Center, faculty members and guest speakers. Take advantage of online tutorials by NewsU.org, the BBC, Lynda.com and others. To increase your proficiency with editing on Final Cut Pro and other software, you should try to shoot something small each week to post on your blog or include with your stories (i.e., :30 second, :45 second or 1:15 packages). You can start out small with photos and audio. Here’s an example: <http://www.latimes.com/videogallery/66163662/News/Georgia-teen-struggles-to-support-her-family>

You can use mobile devices such as the iPhone, Droid or a digital camera. You can also go to the Tech Center on the first floor to check out cameras. Rallies, which are abundant in Washington, are good places to practice.

You must also share your work through social networking. Be sure to follow and friend 101, HU News Service and Cover to Cover.

Midterm — For your midterm, you will complete a survey and analysis of one magazine market, or category, for presentation in class. Markets include entertainment, general interest, humor, health, regional, religious, science, sports, or men’s and women’s magazines.

To complete your analysis, you will prepare a printed outline or narrative of any length and an audio/visual presentation (including copies of the magazines and/or other visuals) on the following:

- The major publications in your market
- The types of articles published in your market
- A critique of strengths and weaknesses of the magazines, how they differ, what distinguishes the market leaders
- Demographic, circulation and other statistical information (See links on Blackboard.)
- Comparisons of print and digital versions
- Use of social media, including analytics
- A list of three story ideas for one or more magazines in this market
- The submission procedure for your preferred publication and a specific contact.
- The annual *Writer's Market* directory is extremely useful for this assignment and an invaluable tool for anyone who's serious about freelancing. It also features an extensive online component with a submission tracker. Your first paying assignment will more than cover your initial investment in this book.

Final — The final is an interactive narrative journalism project. It can be an in-depth article, series or a special report. In addition to writing the article(s), you must submit a storyboard or multimedia plan for telling and packaging your story across platforms. This includes headlines, blurbs, photos, captions, audio, video and/or other interactive elements. Plan to shoot the people, places and things featured in your article(s). You can also obtain photos from your sources and elsewhere, if available. Be sure to obtain permission and photo credits for anything that you don't shoot. Your final should have at least three multimedia elements, including the narrative — in other words, two other elements

Your final is part of the department's transmedia project on gentrification. For our class project, we'll focus on story ideas related to "The Plan," which many Washingtonians believe is a gentrifying conspiracy designed to turn the Chocolate City vanilla or at least Neapolitan. This project will also help to launch Insight, a fact-checking journalism site being developed by New York Times correspondent Ron Nixon. This site will be based at Howard. It's similar to the Pulitzer Prize-winning PolitiFact, except that it focuses on people of African descent. We'll get to the bottom line of myths, rumors, hype etc. The topic can range from the serious to the not so serious (i.e., Do black people commit more crimes? Are more black men in jail than in college? Are Beyonce and Jay Z part of the Illuminati? Is Bey flashing signs at her concerts? Is Tupac still alive?) You can investigate these ideas or one of your own in addition to the class project.

Start conducting research and talking to Washingtonians. **Your idea for "The Plan" is due no later than Feb. 16.** Be prepared to submit a draft of your final project and storyboard by **April 2.** The final version is due on April 14. Then you'll do a class presentation on the published version during the last week of class.

Portfolio — Include your published and pending articles for the semester in your portfolio, along with any acceptance or rejection letters. Everything will be returned to you. **Submit by April 16.** If you don't already have one, please set up an online portfolio and open a LinkedIn account; then link to me. **Complete both by April 21.**

Ethics: Plagiarism and Other Forms of Academic Misconduct

Please keep in mind that the School of Communications maintains a **zero-tolerance policy** on plagiarism, cheating, fabrication (including fake sources and quotations), forgeries and duplication, which also includes submitting the same work to more than one class or media outlet without prior faculty approval. **All of your work must be original and created by you.** Joint projects must be pre-approved with clarity and documentation of the division of labor.

Committing any of these infractions could result in:

- **A failing grade for an assignment or the course**
- **Suspension for a semester or more**
- **Delayed graduation**
- **Expulsion from the university and/or**
- **Revocation of your degree — even if the infraction is discovered years after you graduate.**

Plagiarism is a reprehensible offense. It is an act of dishonesty and undermines the credibility that is essential to all professional communicators. The Howard University H-Book for Academic Offenses (Section II.1.b) defines plagiarism as: “to take and pass off as one’s own the ideas, and writings of another, without attribution (without acknowledging the author).”

The copying does not have to be exact to be plagiarism. Shuffling the order of ideas, moving paragraphs around, loosely paraphrasing, or changing a word here and there does not mean you have made the work your own.

Students in the Department of Media, Journalism and Film are expected to do original analysis, reporting, writing, editing, filming or capturing of audio. This includes social media and other forms of communications. Students are expected to explicitly cite the sources of any information that is not derived from their own independent work.

Here are a few don’ts:

- Don’t use excessive citations from a single source, which can result in a copyright infringement. Put in the work to make the story your own.
- Don’t include excessively long quotations without attribution. That’s plagiarism.
- Don’t use images or audio without permission.
- Don’t assume that information widely available to the public on the Internet or through other means is fair game. This includes many instances of “common knowledge.” For example, if you’re thinking, “Everyone knows that.” Ask yourself, “How do they know?” Go to the source of the information, and cite the source.

Here’s a rule to live by: If you have any doubt about the need to cite a source, cite the source. Err on the side of over-attribution. If you don’t know, ask. In addition, please review the plagiarism information under Library System at www.howard.edu.

All instances of plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct are documented in the student’s academic record, filed in the dean’s office and require a meeting with the instructor and the chair and/or assistant chair of the Department of Media, Journalism and Film at minimum. The department will seek the immediate suspension of any student whose academic record includes previous punishment for plagiarism or similar misconduct.

Accommodations Under ADA

Howard University is committed to providing an educational environment that is accessible to all students, in accordance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). If you have any disabilities that require an accommodation, please contact the Office of the Dean for Special Student Services (ODSSS) for verification and determination of how you would need to be accommodated at (202) 238-2420.

Grading

The quality and quantity of assignments will constitute 85 percent of your grade (including 15 percent for the final project and 15 percent for publishing a minimum of six to eight stories in addition to the grades for these clips). All assignments will be graded on quality, enterprise, creativity, thoroughness, news value, grammar and AP style. You should interview a minimum of five to 10 sources per story, depending on the length and complexity. Make it a practice to rewrite, edit and proof your stories several times before submission. Deadline observation is essential. A missed deadline could lower your course grade by one letter. Each article is worth 100 points: quality of writing (30); depth of content and quality of research (20); originality, organization or quality of focus (15), multimedia and hyperlinks (15) and mechanics (20), including Associated Press style, spelling, punctuation, grammar and typographical errors (Sumner, 2006).

Assignments should be free of spelling, grammatical and Associated Press style errors. Each such error will result in the loss of 1 point. As a measure of its importance, up to 20 points may be deducted for an ineffective or incorrectly structured lead. Failure to properly organize content, such as use of the inverted pyramid style when it is called for, may also result in significant point losses. Content-organization mistakes in other formats may also result in significant point losses, depending upon the severity of the error. Up to 15 points may be deducted for wordiness, imprecise word selection and other language usage mistakes.

Assignments will receive an “F” if they are late; contain significant errors of fact; misspell the name of a person, place or institution; or fail substantially to meet the requirements of the assignment.

Work deserving of an A meets all of these qualities at a minimum and is publishable with light editing. What does it take to earn an A in this course? You must demonstrate excellence by delivering such work on a regular basis and/or showing continued progress by challenging yourself and raising the bar. It also means coming to class, coming to class on time and coming prepared to participate. Also see the rubric on Blackboard and at the end of this syllabus for more details.

Attendance, punctuality and adherence to deadlines are mandatory and will affect your final grade.

Classes will regularly feature lab assignments, discussions, critiques, guest speakers and possibly quizzes, which will cover current events as well as handouts, readings and other information presented in class or on Blackboard. Late assignments will be accepted within a week of the deadline -- only with approved documentation of an emergency or medical reason. If you miss a class, please consult with another student for notes. You are also expected to check Blackboard at least two to three times a week. Also consider downloading the Blackboard app and setting it to send alerts.

Course Grade

- 25% Assignments
- 15% Midterm project
- 15% Final project
- 15% Fulfillment of publication requirement
- 10% Class participation, attendance and punctuality
- 10% Weekly query letters
- 5% Multimedia and SEO (including hyperlinks, tags and social media)
- 5% Portfolio(s) and LinkedIn account

Course Outline

Week 1: Historical Overview; Course Outline; Magazine vs. Newspaper Features; Print vs. Web; Understanding Your Audience; Query Letters

SUMNER/MILLER — 8. Where to Begin: The First 100 Words. 6. To Market, To Market: Shopping Your Words Around. 7. Pitch-Perfect Query Letters. 19. Advancing Beyond the Slush Pile.

Assignment: Log onto <http://blackboard.howard.edu> using your student identification number (without the @ sign) and your Bison password. Check the announcements, and update your email address. Your Howard email address is linked to Blackboard, which is the preference of the university. However, if you use a different email more often, you must indicate your preference within Blackboard so that you don't miss any correspondence. If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard, please use the tutorials. **Deadline: Jan. 13.**

Read in Class on Jan. 15: "Mrs. Kelly's Monster" by Jon Franklin of the Baltimore Sun — a Pulitzer Prize winner. (If you missed class for this story or the article by Isabel Wilkerson on Tuesday, write a one to two-page critique of each piece.)

Read: Complex magazine's profile of Kendrick Lamar and be prepared to discuss on Jan. 22. For comparison, also read the profiles by GQ and The New York Times Magazine. (Word to the wise: Read or be prepared to write a critique.) Some students recommend reading in the order listed below. Here are links:

GQ: <http://www.gq.com/moty/2013/kendrick-lamar-men-of-the-year-rapper>

NYT Magazine: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/29/magazine/kendrick-lamar-hip-hops-newest-old-school-star.html?_r=0

Complex: <http://www.complex.com/covers/kendrick-lamar-interview-turn-the-page-2014-cover-story/>

Week 2: Building Idea Files and Making Your Ideas Work for Publication

SUMNER/MILLER — 1. What Makes a Story Interesting? 2. How to Find an Original Idea, 3. Strong Angles and Focused Ideas.

Assignment: News Feature. Write a feature story or profile pegged to something in the news, something that people are talking about, an anniversary or something coming up. Try to go behind the news to look at the how, why and/or impact. Be prepared to read your article in class. **Deadline: 5 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 21.**

Week 3: Story Structure: Features & Profiles, Variations and Formulas Narrative/Literary Journalism

SUMNER/MILLER — 12. Profiles: Slices of Life. 13. Writing Nonfiction Narratives.

Assignment: Begin writing and sending out weekly query letters each Monday. Ideas for class assignments and query letters can be on the same topic. **Deadline: Jan. 26.**

Assignment: Write a two-page critique of a print or online magazine or feature section. **Deadline: Jan. 29.**

Suggest: Choose at least one winning entry in the Hearst competition for the class to read. Post your link on the discussion board on Blackboard. **Deadline: Jan. 30.** Weigh in with your comments, and pick your top three so that we can decide on a few must-reads. **Deadline: Feb. 2.**

http://www.hearstfdn.org/hearst_journalism/competitions.php?year=2014&type=Writing

Week 4: Anecdotes and Interviews

SUMNER/MILLER — 5. Talking Pointers: How to Conduct Great Interviews. 9. Action, Brevity and Style. 10. Anecdotes: Mining for Gold.

Deadline: Submit query for in-depth profile by Feb. 2. Your profile should be a minimum of 1,500 to 2,500 words. It can be on anyone — from an unknown crossing guard to a famous person. Make sure that it's someone who will permit you to hang out with him or her. Possible subjects on campus could include a custodian, hospital employee, shuttle driver, librarian, cafeteria worker or switchboard operator; administrators such as the president; or professors ranging from Dr. Greg Carr to filmmaker Haile Gerima. Finding someone off campus would be wonderful.

Assignment: Write an interesting Black History Month article, linking the past to the present or highlighting history in the making. Pitch it to 101 Magazine, the Howard University News Service or elsewhere. Think outside the box. I don't want to hear about George Washington Carver and the peanut, unless you're breaking new ground. **Deadline: Feb. 3.**

Critique: Read the following article and backgrounder on your own. Prepare to critique in class on Thursday, Feb. 5.

“How I Wrote the Story”: <http://www.jhartfound.org/blog/dealing-with-dementia-how-i-wrote-the-story/>

Article: <http://fierceforblackwomen.com/2014/11/11/dealing-with-dementia-a-sons-journey-in-caring-for-his-mother/>

Suggest: An article for the class to read from “Best American Magazine Writing” or the ASME site. Post your link on the discussion board on Blackboard. **Deadline: Feb. 6.** Weigh in with your comments, and pick your top three so that we can decide on a few must-reads. **Deadline: Feb. 9.**

Most recent winners and finalists of National Magazine Awards:

<http://www.magazine.org/asme/national-magazine-awards/winners-finalists/recent>

Master List:

<http://www.magazine.org/asme/national-magazine-awards/winners-finalists>

Week 5: Building Research Files; Computer-Assisted Reporting; Fact-Checking

SUMNER/MILLER — 4. Digging Deep for Original Stories. 20. Before You Hit the “Send” Button: A Checklist.

Tentative Guest Speaker: Robin Givhan, Pulitzer Prize-winning fashion correspondent, Washington Post.

Assignment: Submit a backgrounding memo on the person you are profiling. See guidelines at the end of the syllabus. **Deadline: Feb. 12.**

Week 6: Ethics and Legal Considerations; Service Journalism/How-to Articles

SUMNER/MILLER — 14. Eliminating the Ho-Hum From the How-To; pages 7, 20-21, 49-53.

Deadline: Submit query for a 1,500-word, in-depth feature for class project on “The Plan” by Feb. 16. This will be your final project.

Week 7: Midterm Projects and Conferences (Schedule 10 minutes with Professor Lamb)

Deadline: Submit in-depth profile by Feb. 23.

Deadline: Midterm Projects due on or before Feb. 26. Presentations on Feb. 26.

Week 8: Interactive Narratives

SUMNER/MILLER — 18. Long-Form Digital Storytelling.

Deadline: Submit query for a 500 to 750-word how-to article by March 4.

Week 9: The Long & Short of It – Writing Tightly and Brightly in 300 Words or Less; How to Condense Articles

SUMNER/MILLER — 11. Briefs: Shortcuts to Publication. 17. Building a Story Blog.

Homework: Condense your profile into 300 words or less. Write a 200-250 word article or blog item for 101.

Deadline: March 24.

Week 10: Spring Break

Week 11: Introduction to Columns, Essays, Special Interest Articles and Reviews

SUMNER/MILLER — 15. Making a Timely Calendar Connection. 16. Writing About Trends and Issues.

Critique: Bring in a review of your choice and discuss in class. **Deadline: March 24.**

Read: Columns by Leonard Pitts Jr. at http://www.miamiherald.com/leonard_pitts/

Tentative Guest Speaker: Leonard Pitts, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist, Miami Herald.

Deadline: Submit condensed profile and 200-250 word article by March 24.

Deadline: Submit how-to article by March 26.

Attend: Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Watchdog Workshop from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 28, in the Digital Auditorium at the Blackburn Center. This regional conference includes a session on gentrification for the department's transmedia project and for "The Plan" class project. Registration is free for Howard students. You can also apply to attend a computer-assisted or database reporting session on Sunday morning in room 221 of the School of Communications.

Week 12: Presenting Your Masterpieces: Special Sections, Special Issues, Packages and Treatments

Assignment: Draft of final project and storyboard. **Deadline: April 2 or earlier.**

Week 13: Work on Final Projects

Assignment: Write an insightful, well-reported review, column or essay. **Deadline: April 6.**

Week 14: So, You Want to Be a Feature Writer? An Inside Look

SUMNER/MILLER — 21. Careers in Magazine Publishing.

Attend: Field trip to local newspaper, magazine and/or Internet site.

Deadline: Final project due by April 14.

Deadline: Submit portfolio with your published work for the semester by April 16.

Week 15: Final Projects, Presentations and Critiques

** Please note that the syllabus is subject to revision, especially in response to news events*

Backgrounding Assignment

Assignment: The Manti Teo case pointed to the importance of backgrounding even everyday people. This assignment will help you learn how to do that. It might also yield interesting story ideas. Complete a written backgrounding memo on the person you plan to profile. **Deadline: Feb. 12.**

Answer as many questions as possible on the link below, including information on finances and campaign donations if you choose a politician. Mention anything that surprised you, and include the documents that you used (or links to the sources).

What to include:

All of these questions are on the link with sources: <http://www.reporter.org/desktop/tips/johndoe.htm>

Full name and any nicknames
Birthplace, date and parents
High school
Colleges and degrees
Marriages; names of spouses; dates of divorce
Places lived and with whom
Involvement in a lawsuit, bankruptcy, divorce, probate, criminal or traffic violations
Real estate owned, purchased or sold
Home phone number
Social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
Professional licenses (doctor, lawyer, etc.)
Website
Gun ownership
Inventor
Holds a copyright
Medical or scientific researcher
Pilot
Votes
Party affiliation
Incarceration record
Sex offender
Investigated by FBI
Voting record if a politician (also see other questions for elected officials)
Has been a federal lobbyist or hires one
Works for government
Military record
Works for a charity or nonprofit:
Works for a private company
Business licenses
Securities and Exchange Commission filings (publicly traded companies)

Story Rubric

Objectives	Accomplished 10 points	Skilled 8-9 points	Developing 6-7 points	Needs Improvement 5 points or less
Research	Excellent archive search for fresh angle on the story, background information — including statistics — to put the story in a larger context.	Adequate archive search for fresh angle on the story, background information — including statistics — to put the story in a larger context.	Minimal archive search for fresh angle on the story, background information — including statistics — to put the story in a larger context.	No archive search for fresh angle on the story, background information — including statistics — to put the story in a larger context.
Effective and Appropriate Lead	Lead is original and catchy; fits well with the rest of the story; invites readers into the piece; contains a strong nut graph if lead is not a summary lead.	Lead is appropriate to story and fairly effective at getting attention; shows some signs of originality; contains an effective nut graph, if necessary.	Lead is adequate but not extremely catchy or original; or there is no nut graph, even though it is necessary.	Lead is neither original nor catchy; is boring, overused or trite, or is inappropriate to story; no nut graph.
Adequate Use of Sources and Interviews	Evidence of reporter trying to get as many sources as necessary to present all sides in the story adequately; all are identified; info is properly attributed; all info is accurate, thorough; uses best sources.	A minimum of five to 10 sources are used and clearly identified in story; most information is attributed to sources; information is accurate.	Four or fewer sources are used; some sources are improperly identified or some info or opinion is given without attribution; most info is accurate but may not be as thorough; missing key sources; may use too general info.	One or fewer sources used in story; or sources are improperly identified; much info is given without attribution; inaccurate or vague info.
Quotes Show Evidence of Careful Reporting	Strong evidence of good research and interviewing by the use of effective, storytelling quotes that cover a broad range of the topic; good use of quote-transition formula.	Most quotes show evidence of effective interviewing and use of good follow-up questions; quotes are interesting and storytelling is good.	One or two of the quotes show evidence of good interviewing, but most do not help propel the story.	Quotes are short, weak or ineffective; no evidence of follow-up questions being asked.
Effective Organization and Flow (deals with structure)	Story is in inverted pyramid form with info in descending order of importance or another effective format; strongly organized with clear transitions and logical connections that create a sense of being tightly woven together.	Story is organized and most transitions and connections are clear, but either organization is somewhat lacking or the sense of flow is somewhat abrupt or story is not in inverted pyramid or another effective format.	Story lacks strong organization, jumps around too much or lacks effective transitions; not in inverted pyramid or another effective format.	Story is choppy; organization is unclear; few effective transitions; not in inverted pyramid or another effective format.
Clear Focus and Unity (deals with content)	Focus of story is clear; nothing detracts from primary focus; everything contributes to overall angle.	Focus is fairly clear, but one or two areas detract from the primary angle.	Story lacks strong sense of unity and focus; several areas seem to detract from angle.	No clear angle; story is rambling and awkward.
Interesting and Effective Writing Style	Writing is strong and effective with a clear voice and a variety of sentence structures. Piece is tightly written. It has active verbs, vivid word choice, original writing and short paragraphs.	Writing is adequate but not compelling or original; may be wordy or voice may be unclear; diction and sentence structure may not be as sophisticated or vivid; may have non-journalistic paragraph structure.	Writing is rather bland; lacks a clear voice and/or sense of originality; is wordy or redundant. Diction and/or sentence structure may be repetitive; little use of journalistic style	Writing lacks a clear voice and original style; use of non-journalistic paragraph structure.

Associated Press Style	No errors in Associated Press style (quotes, datelines, scores, numbers, money, percentages, time, commas, addresses, etc.)	Few (one or two) style errors.	Three or more style errors.	Five or more style errors.
Mechanics: Grammar, Spelling and Proper Formatting With Byline and Credits for Multimedia.	Story is well edited and virtually flawless with no spelling errors; includes the proper spelling of all names. Proper formatting with byline and credits.	Story is spell checked and all names are correct; contains few grammatical errors. Proper formatting with byline and credits, or missed one criteria.	Story is spell checked and all names are correct; contains several grammatical errors. Proper formatting with byline and credits, or missed two criteria.	Names are misspelled, which are major factual errors, or spell check was not run or contains many grammatical errors. Proper formatting with byline and credits, or missed three or more criteria.
Interactivity: Multimedia, Social Media and Hyperlinks	Excellent use of photo(s), hyperlinks and other multimedia (i.e., audio, video, graphics, interactive tools) as appropriate for the story or elements of the story. Excellent use of Facebook, Twitter and other social media.	Adequate use of photo(s), hyperlinks and other multimedia (i.e., audio, video, graphics, interactive tools) as appropriate for the story or elements of the story. Adequate use of Facebook, Twitter and other social media.	Minimal use of photo(s), hyperlinks and other multimedia (i.e., audio, video, graphics, interactive tools) as appropriate for the story or elements of the story. Minimal use of Facebook, Twitter and other social media.	Little to no use of photo(s), hyperlinks and other multimedia (i.e., audio, video, graphics, interactive tools) as appropriate for the story or elements of the story. Little to no use of Facebook, Twitter and other social media.

Sub-total

_____/100

Points deducted for missed deadlines or other reasons

TOTAL_____/100

Comments:

Department of Media, Journalism and Film

Mission, Vision and Core Values

The Howard University Department of Media, Journalism and Film provides a professional and supportive scholarly environment informed by the African-American experience in which students learn to become exemplary practitioners, leaders and entrepreneurs who serve the profession and society. The department strives to graduate students empowered with the skills and tools necessary to understand and address social, political, economic and cultural injustices, particularly involving African Americans and other people of color.

Vision

Howard University's Department of Media, Journalism and Film strives to be "a best in class" professional program. Faculty, students and alumni will have a far-reaching and rewarding impact on their disciplines, industry and society.

Core Values

In the Howard University Department of Media, Journalism and Film, teaching and mentoring students is our first priority. The Department strives to provide students an educational experience that will transform them into accomplished globally aware leaders.

The Department strives to instill in students a sense of professional and intellectual curiosity, critical-thinking skills and a commitment to life-long learning, given the ever-changing communications technology.

The Department strives to equip students with best in class professional skills and values traditionally associated with the communications media. These values include:

- **Integrity** – ethical conduct in practice, teaching, service and personal lives
- **Leadership** – serving as a role model and taking responsibility for the images you create
- **Respect and civility** – fair and equitable interpersonal relationships among faculty, staff, students and community members
- **Collaboration** – mutually beneficial relationships at the department, school, university, media and community levels, both locally and internationally
- **Professional practice** – excellence in knowledge generation, analysis, innovation, entrepreneurship and dissemination
- **Advocacy** - advocating for and raising awareness of the communication needs and the rights of marginalized communities, both locally and internationally.