

## JOUR-3005 FEATURE WRITING

Spring Semester 2020 / Tues & Thurs 11-12:20 / Old Chem 835

**Professor:** Jenny Wohlfarth

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**Office:** McMicken 13-B

**Office hours:** Appointments are best! Tu/Th 12:30-2 p.m. (exception= college meetings); Wednesdays 1-3 p.m.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course introduces basic feature-writing techniques, focusing on the strategies and skills needed to successfully pitch, develop, research, write, revise and publish compelling feature articles (estimated length: 700-1,500 words) or enterprise stories aimed at local audiences. Building on the reporting techniques you learned in the introductory news writing course, you will be developing these key skills: generating feature ideas, finding and interviewing story sources, researching topics, and sharpening the overall quality, precision and narrative elements of your reporting and writing. The prerequisite for this course is JOUR-2010 Reporting & Writing. Reminder: Students must earn a C- or above in a journalism course in order for it to count toward the Journalism Major or Journalism Certificate.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Recognize how feature stories are different from news articles in structure, approach and purpose
- Generate compelling, viable feature/enterprise article ideas for a local audience (campus, local)
- Engage in research to provide important context, background, color and perspective in your features
- Utilize a variety of interviewing techniques to draw out important, relevant and colorful information from a diverse and deep pool of knowledgeable, relevant story sources
- Write compelling feature articles that demonstrate a basic understanding and application of successful storytelling techniques (character, scene/setting, description, action/narrative, etc.)
- Critically analyze feature-writing techniques employed across modern journalistic platforms
- Consistently abide by journalistic ethical guidelines practiced in the field.

**READINGS/TEXT:** There is no required textbook for this course, but you'll be assigned readings from Bb throughout the semester that we will discuss and analyze in class. Your participation in discussions is an important part of your final grade in this course, so be sure to read assigned content *\*before\** our class sessions and actively participate in class discussions. While I'm not requiring the *AP Stylebook* for this course, as a journalism major you should already own a copy and be familiar with standard journalistic style, spelling, grammar and punctuation rules, which you'll need to follow for all assignments in this class.

**HOW YOUR FINAL GRADE IS FACTORED:** Your final grade in this course includes:

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| • Participation (attendance, participation, peer reviews, in-class work, etc.) | 30 percent |
| • Assignment #1 Campus feature (aimed @ The News Record; 700-1,000 words)      | 35 percent |
| • Assignment # 2 Local feature (aimed @ CityBeat; 1,000-1,500 words)           | 35 percent |

*Optional rewrites of either or both assignments will be factored into the 35 percent weight for each article*

**\*\* Extra credit/bonus:** If your campus feature is published in TNR, you can receive bonus points\*\*

**CLASS ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:** A significant part of your grade in this course (30 percent) is based on your active, thoughtful participation in class discussions. (This applies to class guests and panels, as well: You get points for participation only if you actively engage in the discussion by asking questions.) Your meaningful participation in class will help cultivate your ability to think critically—an important skill for a journalist. You won't get far in this field—or even in your first job interview—if you can't coherently and confidently discuss ideas and article strategies with colleagues and editors, so your active participation in class is factored into your final grade. **Multiple absences will negatively affect your final grade, as will a lack of class participation.** A note about frequent or chronic absences: If you become ill or are dealing with some other serious personal matter that is causing you to miss classes, please

let me know what's going on and keep in touch with me via email so I know the status of your situation. I'm willing to work with you under these conditions as much as possible, but if you fall too far behind, you might need to drop the course and take it another time. Missing class = missed learning opportunities.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** For each writing assignment in this class, you will find a detailed instruction document on Blackboard. (See BB "Assignments/instructions & submitting.") We will review these instructions in class, but **please take the time to review these instructions carefully before each assignment is due.** Even idea pitch assignments are graded and must follow the detailed instructions provided online. In addition, you can refer to the **grading rubric** for assignments (available in multiple places on BB: with the syllabus, also in course documents). **Formatting:** Article assignments in this class must be typed, double-spaced (unless otherwise specified in the instructions) and should follow AP style. Typos, misspellings and grammatical errors, as well as lack of reporting depth, lack of details, too few sources or weak sources, etc., will negatively affect your grade on assignments. **Submitting assignments:** Assignments will be due by class time (11 a.m.) via the Bb "Assignments/instructions & submitting" folder. Please note that \*drafts\* must be submitted in PRINT FORM in class (as noted on the schedule) for peer-review feedback sessions.

**DEADLINES:** Journalists live by deadlines, so we'll treat them seriously in this class. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due by class time on the designated deadline date. **Any late assignments will automatically receive a one-letter grade deduction penalty. No assignments will be accepted more than a week after the deadline. There are no extensions on the final/rewrite deadlines, which are due as noted on the syllabus schedule.** Please be aware that you will need to plan wisely to meet your deadlines. While you're putting the finishing touches on the first assignment, you should already be conducting background research and setting up interviews for the second assignment. You will need to work on various stages of assignments simultaneously. As a journalist, you'll need to be able to juggle multiple assignments, so this is an important skill for you to develop to work in this field.

**OPTIONAL REWRITE(S):** I believe in the value of revisions and I believe in second chances, so you will have the **option of revising one or both of your article assignments** for a final submission at the end of the semester, giving you a shot at improving your initial grade on either or both assignments. This option is available to you if you meet the original deadline for each assignment. If you choose to rewrite an article, the depth and quality of your reporting and writing must show **significant** improvement to merit a grade increase. Your final grade will reflect revisions. (See "How Your Final Grade is Factored" above.)

**GRADING:** Assignments will be given letter grades, using UC's standard plus/minus grading system. Please review the **grading rubric for article assignments** on Bb. To earn an "A," an assignment must:

- Be your original work that is well-written, informative and engaging
- Have a well-crafted, targeted, clear and effective lead, body and conclusion
- Skillfully employ strong, colorful, firsthand quotes from multiple, diverse interviewed sources
- Demonstrate your understanding of the target publication's audience, format, style and tone
- Incorporate vivid details, anecdotes, examples and in-depth research
- Illustrate your comprehension of feature paragraph structure, transitions and organization
- Follow AP style and be free of typographical, grammatical, stylistic and spelling errors.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** UC has a strict policy prohibiting plagiarism; **all work you submit in this class must be your own original writing.** Plagiarized work (as well as falsified interviews) will result in an F on the assignment and possibly for the course. UC's Journalism program is devoted to preparing students for professional work. This mission demands the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Violations will result in severe penalties. These are serious offenses that can ruin your college experience and adversely affect your professional career. I will report any documented instances of plagiarism or other dishonesty to the department head and appropriate office at UC. Beware: the availability

of easy information online makes academic dishonesty a more slippery slope than ever. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me. Copying and pasting information from the Internet without full attribution is plagiarism. **If you plagiarize any part of an assignment, you will fail that assignment and possibly the entire course.** Please familiarize yourself with the University's **Student Code of Conduct** ([www.uc.edu/studentlife/conduct/conduct.html](http://www.uc.edu/studentlife/conduct/conduct.html)).

**PUBLISHING YOUR WORK & BUILDING YOUR PORTFOLIO:** One of the final requirements for Journalism Majors before graduation is submitting a digital portfolio, an online compilation of the work that you've done in your journalism classes at UC. The assignments you complete in this class could be compelling pieces to include in your final portfolio when you are a senior. The campus feature assignment, in particular, is designed with the intent that you will submit the article for consideration by the News Record (TNR). If your work is accepted by TNR, that can jumpstart your efforts to build up your credentials while you are progressing through the Journalism Major curriculum. (We'll also work on resume writing in this class to help you prepare for an internship or job search.) In this introductory feature writing course, you will be introduced to the \*basics\* of pitching ideas to editors for publication. For more advanced feature writing instruction and tips for publishing your work professionally, consider taking JOUR-4075 Magazine Writing as one of your Journalism Major electives. In that class, you get more hands-on practice with writing queries, pitching ideas beyond a local audience and working with editors.

**LAPTOP POLICY:** Your laptop can be a great tool for note-taking and accessing online articles we discuss in class, but if you are using it for other reasons or it becomes a distraction to me or your classmates, I will ask you to close it/put it away. I don't want your laptop to be a barrier preventing you from participating in class discussions. This goes for your phone, too: Please don't let any digital device be an obstacle preventing you from being fully engaged in what we're doing in class.

**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE CLASSROOM:** The world is a beautifully diverse place, filled with people of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, ages, gender identities, socioeconomic statuses, sexual preferences, skin colors, religious beliefs, abilities/disabilities, body sizes, hair colors, shoe styles, Facebook statuses, political persuasions, beverage preferences and cell phone plans. I want all of you to feel included and warmly welcomed in this class. My hope is that we will all treat one another with respect and patience and that we will not only tolerate our unique differences, but also appreciate, celebrate and learn from them. ☺ Please let me know if this is not happening. **Religious observance:** If you want to be excused for an absence related to a religious holiday that is important to you, please notify me in writing in advance.

**SPECIAL NEEDS POLICY:** If you have special needs that might affect your participation in this course, such as a visual/hearing/physical impairment, communication disorder, learning disability or mental health issue that might affect your performance in this course, please let me know at the beginning of the semester so we can set up reasonable provisions to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to meet the requirements. Some accommodations require prior approval by UC Accessibility Services. Any deadline extensions that are allowed due to a disability will require an agreement that we discuss in advance.

**NOTE ABOUT STRESS/ANXIETY/MENTAL HEALTH:** Everybody experiences stress and anxiety (me, too!), and stress is very common among college students, especially when assignment deadlines pile up, around midterms/exams, etc. **Please know that your overall well-being and your mental health are very important to me.** If you are experiencing a level of stress or anxiety that you can't seem to manage, please let me know. I can steer you toward campus resources that might help you better manage that stress and anxiety. Please don't disappear from class. Come talk to me! I'm part of your support system. ☺

**CONFERENCES:** Planned conference opportunities have been built into our schedule so we can talk one-on-one about your writing and your progress in the course. Please know that you are welcome to schedule additional conferences with me during the semester. I'll love getting a chance to know you one-on-one.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

*Please check Blackboard regularly for reminders and updates (i.e. class cancelation due to bad weather/road conditions).*

Jan. 14	Course overview, introductions, learning goals and barriers
Jan. 16	BB overview, course schedule, and basics of feature writing vs. news articles
Jan. 21	Campus feature ideas: how to find, develop, refine and target them. Discuss: 3 campus features.
Jan. 23	Brainstorming ideas for article assignment 1 (campus feature). Discuss: "Mrs. Kelly's Monster."
Jan. 28	Developing sources, background research. Discuss: "Pearls Before Breakfast."
<b>Jan. 30</b>	<b>HOMEWORK DUE: IDEA PITCHES FOR ASSIGNMENT #1 (campus feature) – BB Journal 1</b> In class: Brainstorming Part II: speed pitching, generating source lists.
Feb. 4	Research & interviewing strategies. Discuss "All She Has, \$150,000, Is Going to a University."
Feb. 6	*Class guest: Amber Hunt, crime/investigative reporter/podcaster, The Cincinnati Enquirer
<b>Feb. 11</b>	<b>HOMEWORK DUE: SOURCE LIST ASSIGNMENT #1 (campus feature) – BB Journal 2</b> In class: Interviewing techniques. Develop ?s for campus story sources. Discuss "Life on the Land."
Feb. 13	Story structure, leads and strategies. Discuss "A Boy of Unusual Vision."
Feb. 18	Brainstorm/discuss ideas for local feature stories. Discuss "A Muslim Leader in Brooklyn."
<b>Feb. 20</b>	*SPJ Lunch w/ Pros: FREE PIZZA! Diversity in the Newsroom/Challenges for Journalists of Color <b>HOMEWORK DUE: IDEA PITCH ASSIGNMENT #2 (local feature) – BB Journal 3</b>
<b>Feb. 25</b>	<b>HOMEWORK DUE: DRAFT OF ASSIGNMENT #1 (campus feature) – *in print form*</b>
<b>Feb. 27</b>	<i>No class.</i> <b>HOMEWORK DUE: ASSIGNMENT #1 (campus feature) – BB Journal 4</b>
March 3 & 5	<i>No class. Individual conferences to discuss Assignment 1 (campus feature) and idea pitches</i> This week: Start on research & source lists for ASSIGNMENT #2 (local feature).
<b>March 10</b>	<b>HOMEWORK DUE: SOURCE LIST FOR ASSIGNMENT 2 (local feature)—BB Journal 5</b> In class: Magazine markets, queries and pitching ideas to editors.
March 12	*SPJ Lunch w/ Pros: FREE PIZZA! Panel discussion: Some Bad-Ass Female Journalists
March 15-22	<i>SPRING BREAK! No class. ☺</i>
March 24	Narrative techniques. Discuss "First Born, Fast Grown: The Manful Life of Nicholas, 10."
March 26*	*Writer's Insight Session: Keith BieryGolick / Cincinnati Enquirer
March 31	Writing and rewriting; editing and revising. Troubleshooting Assignment 2. Resume tips.
<b>April 2</b>	<b>HOMEWORK DUE: DRAFT OF ASSIGNMENT #2 (local feature)—*in print form*</b> <i>**April 3 is the last day to withdraw from a spring course.</i>
April 7	HOMEWORK DUE in class: Bring *print* copy of resume for peer review.
<b>April 9</b>	<b>HOMEWORK DUE: ASSIGNMENT #2 (local feature)—BB Journal 6</b> *SPJ Lunch w/ Pros: FREE PIZZA! Panel discussion: Covering the LGBTQ Community
April 14 & 16	<i>No class. Individual conferences to discuss ASSIGNMENT #2 (local feature)</i>
April 21	In-depth/immersion reporting: Discuss: "Enrique's Journey." Brainstorm immersion reporting ideas.
April 23	Last day of class! ☺
<b>April 28</b> (exam week)	Optional rewrites: Assignments #1 (campus story) & #2 (local feature) due via <b>BB Journal 7 &amp; 8</b>