

Feature Writing

Journalism 4326–Section 001 | Spring 2012

Tues. & Thurs., 2-3:20 p.m.

Architecture 319

Instructor: Dr. Erika Pribanic-Smith

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Hours: Tues. & Thurs., 9:30-11 a.m. and by appt.

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Note: Because of other department and university duties, office hours occasionally will be cancelled. Cancellations will be posted on the office door and, when possible, announced in class and/or via email.

Prerequisite: Completion of JOUR 2346 with grade of C (2.0/4.0 scale) or higher.

Course Description:

Students will develop and practice the writing and reporting skills required for creating publishable feature stories, such as developing story ideas, targeting audiences and publications, interviewing sources, and using descriptive, narrative and storytelling techniques.

Learning Goals and Objectives:

The following learning goals and objectives have been set for students in this class and all classes in the journalism sequence:

- ☐ Discuss the concepts, ideas and foundation of freedom of speech and press, including the role media play in today's society.
- ☐ Conduct research while using ethical and legal principles to produce quality work.
- ☐ Identify the theories and principles of reporting for the media, including the presentation of information via images, graphics, visual communication and the written word.
- ☐ Discuss today's news and information disseminated through various local and national media.
- ☐ Demonstrate creative, critical and independent thinking to interview sources, conduct research and write unbiased media stories.
- ☐ Discuss fundamental numerical and statistical concepts and demonstrate them in the writing and reporting of articles.
- ☐ Operate basic communication technology and software.
- ☐ Demonstrate correct Associated Press style and grammar when reporting and writing articles, and edit stories utilizing journalistic style, ethics and principles.
- ☐ Write quality journalistic stories, specifically news and feature stories, while working under deadlines.
- ☐ Critique their own work and the works of others according to the principles of accuracy, fairness, clarity, style and grammatical correctness.

Textbook and Materials:

- *Professional Feature Writing* by Bruce Garrison (latest edition)
- *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (latest edition)
- Additional readings as assigned and distributed by the instructor

****NOTE: Students need to bring their AP Stylebooks to every class.****

Course Policies

Grade Calculation:

Assignment	% of grade	Grading scale
Out-of-class assignments	30	A – 90-100 percent
In-class activities/attendance	30	B – 80-89 percent
Peer critiques	15	C – 70-79 percent
Case studies	15	D – 60-69 percent
Story pitches	10	F – below 60 percent

Out-of-class assignments. Students will have three story assignments to complete outside of class. The instructor will distribute assignment sheets detailing the specific requirements for each assignment.

Students will submit THREE drafts of each assignment:

- *First draft.* The instructor will not grade the first draft, but instead, fellow students will critique them (see below). Although first drafts will not be graded, students who do not submit COMPLETE drafts will not be given other students' work to critique, and critiques account for 15 percent of the final grade.
- *Second draft.* The instructor will grade the second draft for content requirements only. Mechanical errors will be pointed out, but no points will be deducted for them on this draft.

HOWEVER, if the instructor marks more than 10 spelling, grammar and/or style errors in that assignment, the student will be required to visit the AP, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation Lab for assistance with the final draft. When the student resubmits the assignment, he/she must also submit a form signed and dated by the lab instructor.

The second-draft grades will comprise 10 percent of each student's final course average.

- Final drafts will be graded both for content and mechanics and will comprise 20 percent of the student's final course average.

In-class activities/attendance. This course will be conducted as a seminar/workshop, requiring active participation from all students. A portion of students' learning will occur through their own processing of reading material and discussion of these materials with their peers. Participation in these discussions will be evaluated based on asking insightful questions and contributing informed, thoughtful comments.

Students are expected to read the stories assigned for discussion (signaled in **red type** on the schedule) BEFORE class in order to participate. The instructor will post in Blackboard specific questions and concepts to keep in mind while reading.

Students who fail to attend class or who arrive late will have points DEDUCTED from this grade at the end of the term. [See attendance policy, next page.]

Case studies. The best way for students to become good writers is to read and analyze other people's writing. In addition to analyzing examples of feature writing from professional publications as assigned for class discussion, students will select three stories to pick apart at a deeper level on their own. Specific questions to be answered in each case study will be distributed when that study is assigned.

On the date that a case study is due, each student will give a 5-minute presentation on the story that he/she studied. The presentation will account for 10 percent of each case study grade. Students who miss the presentation date due to an excused absence or free unexcused absence will be required to present at another class session within seven days, IF HE/SHE SUBMITTED THE CASE STUDY ON TIME OR REQUESTED AN EXTENSION IN ADVANCE DUE TO A DEATH OR MEDICAL EMERGENCY.

Students who miss the presentation date due to any other unexcused absence or who submit their case studies late without an extension will receive a zero on the presentation portion of the case study grade.

Peer critiques. Another way that students will analyze other people's writing is by critiquing each others' out-of-class story assignments. Specific questions to be answered in each critique will be provided when the student receives the story to be analyzed.

It is important to note that **students who do not submit their own writing assignments will not be given another student's assignment to critique.** Students who arrive more than five minutes late on a critique day also will not be given assignments to critique. Other arrangements will be made for students who miss a peer critique day due to an excusable absence, if the student strictly follows the procedure for excusing an absence.

Students MAY NOT TAKE A FREE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE ON A PEER CRITIQUE DAY. Students who miss a critique class due to unexcused absence or who are not assigned stories to critique due to their tardiness or failure to submit an assignment will take a 0 on that critique.

Story pitches. Students will submit formal pitch letters for all out-of-class writing assignments. Pitch letters must be submitted in proper business letter format.

Before crafting the letter, the student must decide on a target PROFESSIONAL publication where the story would be a good fit. The letter should be addressed to an editor at that publication.

Pitch letters must include all of the following components:

- a) One paragraph of 2-4 sentences explaining the story idea.
- b) A list of 6-8 people the student could speak to as sources for the story and why those people would be the best sources for that story.
- c) A rough outline of what the story might entail.
- d) A one-sentence explanation of why the target publication would be the best publication for a story on the suggested topic.

Story pitch grades are all or nothing; partial credit will not be given for pitch letters that are not formulated correctly or that do not contain some of the necessary components.

Attendance: Attendance will be taken each day. For each unexcused absence (beyond one freebie for the term), students will have one full percentage point deducted from the in-class assignment/attendance grade (up to a total of 10 percent).

STUDENTS MUST PRESENT APPROPRIATE DOCUMENTATION **UPON RETURNING TO CLASS** FOR THEIR ABSENCES TO BE EXCUSED (see next page). To take advantage of the one free unexcused absence, students must submit the freebie form (in the syllabus folder on Blackboard) **upon returning to class** to avoid the absence counting against them.

Keep in mind that an excused absence (or free unexcused absence) does NOT excuse the student from work completed that day. It is the student's responsibility to check Blackboard for Power Points and in-class assignments completed during the absence. Failure to submit makeup work will result in a 0.

Students should consult the instructor to set a deadline for makeup work.

Students who miss a case study presentation date due to an excused absence or free unexcused absence will be required to present at another class session within seven days, IF HE/SHE SUBMITTED THE CASE STUDY ON TIME OR REQUESTED AN EXTENSION IN ADVANCE DUE TO A DEATH OR MEDICAL EMERGENCY. Students MAY NOT TAKE A FREE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE ON A PEER CRITIQUE DAY.

Tardiness will not be tolerated. **STUDENTS WHO ARE MORE THAN FIVE MINUTES TARDY WILL BE COUNTED ABSENT for the attendance grade** but should remain in class to complete that day's work.

Excused absences:

Students may be excused from class with proper documentation for the following reasons:

- ☐ **Religious holidays.** A memo **MUST BE TURNED IN BEFORE** the holiday to count as an excused absence.
- ☐ **Documented medical excuses** (a doctor's note or prescription). This may include a documented medical excuse for a family member or pet.
- ☐ **Documented legal excuses** such as a jury duty notice or court summons.
- ☐ **Death in the family.** Students must provide a funeral program and the phone number of the funeral home for verification. Unfortunately, a few unscrupulous students in the past have forged these documents, so the instructor has to have the phone number to call and verify.
- ☐ **Car accidents.** Students must submit a copy of the report filed with the police department.
- ☐ **Course-related activities for other university classes.** Students must provide a dated letter of request from the instructor of the conflicting class **BEFORE** the absence.
- ☐ **University competitive events** (athletes, not fans). Students will need to submit a letter from the coach or athletic department **BEFORE** the absence.
- ☐ **Paid employment excuse.** The student's supervisor must request the absence in a signed letter on business letterhead. Students may have only **ONE** of these during the semester, and it needs to be cleared **BEFORE** the absence.
- ☐ **Job/internship interview.** Students must turn in a memo **BEFORE** the absence. A business card or letter on company letterhead confirming the interview must be turned in as well (this can be submitted after the absence). Students may only have **ONE** of these during the semester.

Work Expectations: This course is intensive. Students often will be working on several projects and/or homework assignments at the same time in addition to keeping up with readings for classes and quizzes.

Effective communication requires practice, so students can expect to write every week (if not every day) and to complete both out-of-class and in-class assignments. Students will need to begin their projects in advance and not start working on them the night before they are due. If students are struggling with the material or the workload, they should see the instructor during office hours to discuss it.

Assignments will be submitted via Blackboard. Students must have access to a computer to submit assignments as well as to communicate via e-mail. Students do not have to own a computer, but they must be able to access a computer and Internet connection on campus or off campus.

Late work: Any assignment submitted even one minute after the deadline will be lowered 10 percent. The assignment will continue to drop 10 percent for every calendar day it is late (including weekends).

Therefore, an assignment due at 5 p.m. that is submitted between 5:01 p.m. on the due date and 5 p.m. the following day will have 10 percent deducted. Twenty percent will be deducted for assignments submitted between 5:01 p.m. on the second day and 5 p.m. on the third day.

An out-of-class assignment that is more than three days late without prior permission will not be graded, and the student will receive a zero on the assignment.

Because assignments are submitted electronically, students are expected to submit assignments even if they will not attend class on the due date. If **extreme circumstances** prevent a student from completing an assignment on time, the student must request an extension **AHEAD OF TIME** if at all possible and present documentation as outlined for absences (above).

Note that only **unexpected emergencies (such as a death, grave illness or debilitating injury)** will excuse a student from completing an assignment; because of the length of time students are given to

complete assignments, they should plan accordingly for religious, personal or professional obligations that may arise around the time that an assignment is due.

Computer and Internet malfunctions will NOT be given consideration for late assignments. Students should give themselves plenty of time to complete assignments so that they may regroup in the wake of a technological snafu.

Grading procedures:

Effective media writing requires objectivity, credible sources, and careful attention to spelling, grammar, AP style, and factual accuracy.

On the final draft of each out-of-class writing assignment, the instructor will assign a basic content grade based on requirements spelled out in advance. Each writing assignment handout will include a rubric that explains exactly how the instructor will grade that assignment.

Points for spelling, grammatical, stylistic, and factual errors will be deducted from the content grade as follows:

- ☐ Spelling – 1 percentage point per error (2 percent for name misspellings)
- ☐ Grammar – 1 percentage point per error
- ☐ AP Style – 1/2 percentage point per error
- ☐ Fact errors – 5 percentage points per error

A note on sources: Unless otherwise specified, each story must have at least five **HUMAN** sources **CITED WITHIN THE STORY**. The following do NOT count as official sources: information that has been printed in books, newsletters, magazines, newspapers, or the Internet, or information that has been broadcast on television or the radio.

Behavior expectations:

Students are expected to remain focused on the task at hand for the duration of class each day.

Students will be asked to leave the class if they are engaging in any of the following activities:

- ☐ Using cellphones or Smartphones for ANY reason. Keep it silenced and in your pocket/bag for the duration of class.
- ☐ Speaking out of turn.
- ☐ Studying or working on assignments for other classes.
- ☐ Reading any sort of print media (unless required to do so for a lab activity).
- ☐ Utilizing the computer for any reason other than in-class assignments.
 - When the class is not working on an assignment, keep the monitor off and mouse upside down.
 - When the class IS working on an assignment, do not use the computer to check email or social media, surf the Web, IM, or anything else unrelated to the assignment.

Students who are asked to leave will be counted as absent for that day (no freebie allowed) and will not be given an opportunity to make up missed work.

Department, College, and University Policies

Drop Policy: Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/ses/fao>).

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Student Support Services: UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline by calling 817-272-6107, sending a message to resources@uta.edu, or visiting www.uta.edu/resources.

Electronic Communication: UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

Student Feedback Survey: At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory will be asked to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS) about the course and how it was taught. Instructions on how to access the SFS system will be sent directly to students through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback data is required by state law; student participation in the SFS program is voluntary.

Final Review Week: A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10 percent or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

Academic Integrity: At UT Arlington, academic dishonesty is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated in any form, including (but not limited to) “cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts” (UT System Regents’ Rule 50101, §2.2). Suspected violations of academic integrity standards will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student’s suspension or expulsion from the University.


Communicators’ professional reputation is their greatest strength. Honesty and ethical behavior build a positive professional reputation. Students are expected to model the ethical behavior in this course that they would be expected to follow as professional communicators. In addition to examples of cheating, plagiarism and collusion described in the student handbook, the following behaviors in this class also constitute academic dishonesty:

- ☐ Making up sources, information or quotes except as explicitly specified for certain class assignments
- ☐ Failing to properly attribute quotes and ideas to their sources
- ☐ Asking someone to lie about a student interviewing him or her
- ☐ Getting other people to write or edit class assignments except as explicitly authorized by the instructor
- ☐ Lying to a source to get information
- ☐ Copying a published story or using information from a published news account, Web page, database, research paper or press release without proper attribution
- ☐ Turning in a story students already have published or written for another class

Course Schedule & Due Dates

The course schedule is tentative and is subject to change.

Week	Dates	Topics/Class Readings/Due Dates
1	Jan. 17	Introductions/Course Overview
	Jan. 19	<u>HOMEWORK GIVEN: FEATURE IDEAS</u> What is a Feature? and Finding Good Feature Ideas <i>Professional Feature Writing</i> : Ch. 1 & 3
2	Jan. 24	**Feature Ideas Homework due by 2 p.m.** Freelancing and Writing the Feature Pitch <i>Professional Feature Writing</i> : Ch. 18 & 19
	Jan. 26	Writing Workshop: Feature Pitches
3	Jan. 31	<u>HOMEWORK GIVEN: INTERVIEW PREP</u> Conducting the Feature Interview Readings for discussion: "A wicked wind takes aim," Chicago Tribune, 5 December 2004 (http://www.pulitzer.org/archives/6902) "Milestone's gone," Chicago Tribune, 6 December 2004 (http://www.pulitzer.org/archives/6903) – MAKE SURE TO READ "ABOUT THIS SERIES" AT THE END OF THIS ARTICLE
	Feb. 1	CENSUS DATE
	Feb. 2	**Interview Prep Homework due by 2 p.m.** Reporting Workshop: Feature Interview
4	Feb. 7	Storytelling and the Feature Lead <i>Professional Feature Writing</i> : Ch. 5 Readings for discussion: "The girl in the window," St. Petersburg Times, 3 August 2008 (http://www.pulitzer.org/archives/8417) "Crossing Over," Los Angeles Times, 22 August 1999 – READ CHAPTERS 1 & 2 (http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2000-Feature-Writing)
	Feb. 9	Writing Workshop: Feature Leads
5	Feb. 14	<u>HOMEWORK GIVEN: COLOR OBSERVATION</u> Descriptive and Color Writing Discussion <i>Professional Feature Writing</i> : Ch. 6 Readings for discussion: "Still Life," Texas Monthly Magazine, May 2009 (http://www.texasmonthly.com/2009-05-01/feature2.php) "Off the Waffle," Etude (online literary publication), Summer 2010 (http://etude.uoregon.edu/summer2010/off-the-waffle) "Toxic Water Numbers Days of a Trailer Park," New York Times, 5 May 2003 (http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/05/us/toxic-water-numbers-days-of-a-trailer-park.html)
	Feb. 16	**Color Observation Homework due by 2 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Descriptive and Color Writing
6	Feb. 21	Avoiding Clutter Disease Reading for discussion: "Pearls Before Breakfast," Washington Post, 8 April 2007 (http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2008-Feature-Writing) ADDITIONAL READING TO BE ANNOUNCED
	Feb. 23	Writing Workshop: Practice Feature

7	Feb. 28	<u>TRAVEL FEATURE AND CASE STUDY ASSIGNED</u> Travel Features Discussion <i>Professional Feature Writing: Ch. 12</i>
	March 1	**Pitch for Travel Feature due by 5 p.m.** MIDTERM INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES
8	March 6	**Case Study 1 (Travel Feature) due and presented**
	March 8	Reporting Workshop: Travel Feature
	March 13	NO CLASS
	March 15	NO CLASS
9	March 20	**Travel Feature First Draft due by 11 a.m.** Peer Critiques: Travel Feature
	March 22	**Travel Feature Second Draft due by 5 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Travel Feature
10	March 27	<u>HUMAN INTEREST FEATURE AND CASE STUDY ASSIGNED</u> Human-Interest Articles/Profiles Discussion <i>Professional Feature Writing: Ch. 7 & 8</i> Readings for discussion: "A Eulogy for Takoma Park's 'fox guy'," Washington Post, 22 December 2011 (http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/a-eulogy-for-takoma-parks-fox-guy-eccentric-loner-and-animal-lover/2011/12/22/gIQA87OfHP_story.html) "A Muslim leader in Brooklyn," New York Times, 5 March 2006 (http://www.pulitzer.org/archives/7138) "A strange tourist attraction," National Public Radio, 23 January 2011 (http://www.npr.org/2011/01/23/133109831/taking-a-walk-into-the-lives-of-indias-street-kids)
	March 29	** Travel Feature FINAL DRAFT due by 5 p.m.** Workshop: Travel Feature Writing/Human Interest Reporting
	March 30	LAST DAY TO DROP
11	April 3	**Pitch for Human Interest Feature due by 5 p.m.** Reporting Workshop: Human Interest Feature
	April 5	**Case Study 2 (Human Interest Feature) due and presented**
12	April 10	**Human Interest Feature First Draft due by 11 a.m.** Peer Critiques: Human Interest Feature
	April 12	**Human Interest Feature Second Draft due by 5 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Human Interest Feature
13	April 17	<u>SERVICE FEATURE AND CASE STUDY ASSIGNED</u> Service Features Discussion <i>Professional Feature Writing: Ch. 13</i>
	April 19	**Human Interest Feature FINAL DRAFT due by 5 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Human Interest Feature
14	April 24	**Pitch for Service Feature due by 5 p.m.** Reporting Workshop: Service Feature
	April 26	**Case Study 3 (Service Feature) due and presented**
15	May 1	**Service Feature First Draft due by 11 a.m.** Peer Critiques: Service Feature
	May 3	**Service Feature Second Draft due by 5 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Service Feature
FINALS	May 8	**Service Feature FINAL DRAFT due by 4:30 p.m.**

