

Feature Writing

Journalism 4326 | Fall 2015

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

FAB 411A

Instructor: Dr. Erika Pribanic-Smith

Office: 2114 Fine Arts Building

Hours: Tues. & Thurs., 12:30-2 p.m. & 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:

- *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (latest edition)
- Additional readings as assigned by the instructor (linked on the syllabus schedule)

Blackboard:

All course assignments will be submitted on Blackboard (<http://elearn.uta.edu>). Assignments not posted to the proper assignment portal will not be graded, and the student will receive a 0.

The instructor also will post course Power Points to Blackboard in advance of each class, but students are encouraged to take notes in class as well. All course documents are posted to Blackboard for your reference.

All grades for individual course assignments, including in-class work, will be posted to Blackboard, and course averages will be posted there periodically. Please log in regularly to check grades and announcements. No grade information will be emailed. Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester on Blackboard and seek guidance if their grade drops below satisfactory levels.

Course Policies

Grade Calculation:

Assignment	% of grade	Grading scale
Out-of-class assignments (Second drafts, 10%; Final, 20%)	30	A – 90-100 percent B – 80-89 percent C – 70-79 percent D – 60-69 percent F – below 60 percent
In-class activities	30	
Peer critiques	20	
Editorial meetings	10	
Story pitches	10	

Out-of-class assignments. Students will have three story assignments to complete outside of class. The instructor will post on Blackboard assignment sheets and rubrics detailing the specific requirements and assessment structure for each assignment. We will go over them thoroughly in class.

Writing assignments for this course will work much like a freelance assignment at a professional publication. To that end, students will submit THREE drafts of each assignment.

- *First draft.* The instructor will not grade the first draft; instead, fellow students will critique them (see below). All freelance writers should have a fresh pair of eyes examine their work (a friend, family member or colleague) before submitting to an editor for the first time. We will accomplish this step in class (although students are welcome and encouraged to have others read their work even before submitting the first draft for class).

In addition to having someone check your writing to make sure it meets assignment objectives, the critiques give you an opportunity to explore writing examples that you can learn from (both what to do and what not to do).

These should not be considered “rough drafts.” Critiques are not helpful if stories are incomplete. Therefore, although first drafts will not be graded, students who do not submit **COMPLETE** drafts will not be given other students’ work to critique and will receive a 0. Complete means that drafts meet all length and source requirements.

Critiques account for 20 percent of the final grade.

- *Second draft.* Second drafts will be evaluated for content requirements and mechanics and will comprise 10 percent of each student’s final course average. Students should have made improvements between their first draft and second draft; if the drafts are identical, second drafts will be graded more harshly, unless the student can justify why no improvements were necessary.
- *Final draft.* Final drafts will be evaluated both for content and mechanics and will comprise 20 percent of the student’s final course average. If students fail to make recommended changes between the second and final drafts, **they should expect their final draft grade to be lower than the second draft grade.**

In-class activities. 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.

Again, reading other people’s work helps us explore feature writing and learn what we like (to emulate) and don’t like (to avoid). Discussing these works in class will give students a deeper understanding of the individual stories and of feature-writing concepts. 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.

Participation in these discussions will be evaluated based on asking insightful questions and contributing informed, thoughtful comments. Students who fail arrive late will have points DEDUCTED from this grade. [See attendance policy, below.]

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. Also, students who arrive more than five minutes late on a critique day will not be given assignments to critique.

Students should not use a free absence on a critique day, unless extreme circumstances make attending class impossible.

Students who miss a critique class or who are not assigned stories to critique due to their tardiness or failure to submit a **COMPLETE** first draft by the 11 a.m. deadline will take a 0 on that critique.

Peer critiques are worth 20 percent of the student's final grade.

Editorial meetings. The instructor aims to make the feature writing experience similar to the experience of working with an editor at a professional publication as a freelance writer. Therefore, for each out-of-class assignment, each student will have a one-on-one meeting with the instructor to discuss the student's reporting progress, troubleshoot reporting issues, and strategize on writing style/story structure.

Editorial meetings occur between the submission of the feature pitch and the first draft, as students are in the reporting process. Students should come prepared to discuss ideas for the story, including character development and opportunities for color writing. Students should TAKE NOTES during the meeting and incorporate the instructor's advice when crafting the story.

Students will sign up for meeting times (which are scheduled during class time) and are expected to arrive on time. Meetings are mandatory and cannot be made up. Failure to attend a scheduled editorial meeting will result in a 0 for the meeting.

Editorial meetings are worth 10 percent of the student's final grade.

Story pitches. Students will submit formal pitch letters for all out-of-class writing assignments, like they would if proposing a freelance article to a professional publication. Pitch letters must be submitted in proper business letter format. A sample letter is posted on Blackboard for reference, and students will have an opportunity to write a practice pitch in class. Pitches are worth 10 percent of the final grade.

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

Pitch letters must include all of the following components:

- a) One paragraph of 2-4 sentences explaining the story idea.
- b) An explanation of why the student is the best person to write the proposed story.
- c) A discussion of people the student could speak to as sources for the story and why those people would be the best sources for that story.
- d) A rough outline of what the story might entail.
- e) An explanation of why the target publication would be the best publication for a story on the suggested topic and why the target audience would want to read the story.

Attendance: At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, my philosophy is that students are to treat the class like a job; they are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Employees who miss work do not get paid. Students who miss class receive 0s for work completed in their absence.

Absences from class are neither excused nor unexcused. Students are given two personal/sick days to use at their discretion over the course of the semester, which will allow the student to make up work missed in class. 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 upon returning to class to set a deadline for makeup work.

Because of the inability to make up peer critiques and editorial meetings, students should not miss those classes except under extreme circumstances. If such circumstances occur, the student should consult with the instructor and be prepared to provide official documentation of the reason for missing class.

Tardiness will not be tolerated. Employees would be docked pay for arriving late to work. Students similarly will be docked points off the daily participation grade at a rate of 2 percent per minute late. In other words, students will lose a full letter grade off that day's participation exercise for every five minutes they are late.

Late work: Students are expected to adhere to deadlines as posted on the course syllabus, assignment sheets, and Blackboard. Because we work in drafts and each assignment feeds into the next, **late work will not be accepted.**

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 proving that an **unexpected emergency (such as a death, grave illness or debilitating injury)** occurred. 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.

Students should begin reporting IMMEDIATELY upon receiving an assignment and utilize workshop and editorial meeting time afforded during class to interview sources and visit sites as necessary. If sources do not respond in a reasonable time, the student should pursue alternate sources, as any journalist should. "A source did not get back to me" is not an acceptable excuse for failure to submit a story, in this class or in a professional setting.

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.

Reporting workshops: Workshops are designed to provide an opportunity during class time, when students should have no other obligations, to complete reporting for assignments. Students also have class time during editorial meeting days, other than the student's scheduled meeting time, to work on assignments. Students should use this time wisely. A report will be due via Blackboard on the day of the workshop for students to indicate what they have accomplished toward their stories. If it becomes clear that a majority of students are abusing this time, workshops will be canceled and students will be required to work in the classroom on those days.

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

On each writing assignment, the instructor will assign a content grade based on requirements spelled out in advance. Each writing assignment will include a rubric that explains exactly how the instructor will grade that assignment. Students should consult both the assignment sheet and the rubric in advance of submitting work to ensure that all requirements have been met.

A note on sources: Although they may be used for background in stories, 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. Only human sources will count toward the requirement for each story. Students should pay attention to the type of human sources required for each individual assignment as well.

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 class.

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 to ensure submission by the assigned deadlines. If students are struggling with the material or the workload, they should see the instructor during office hours or before/after class to discuss it.

Students will be provided some class time (noted as “Workshop” in the syllabus schedule) to work on reporting and writing their out-of-class stories, but students also should expect to spend some out-of-class time working on these assignments.

Being that this is a three-hour course, a good rule of thumb is to allot nine hours of time each week to out-of-class preparations for this course. This includes but is not limited to reading in advance of class discussions, completing homework assignments, and reporting and writing stories.

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, as noted in the syllabus schedule. 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>).

Disability Accommodations: UT 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)*, *The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA)*, and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*. 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 disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of a letter certified by the **Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)**. Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting: **The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD)** www.uta.edu/disability or calling 817-272-3364. **Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS)** www.uta.edu/caps/ or calling 817-272-3671.

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.

Title IX: *The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit uta.edu/eos. For information regarding Title IX, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX.*

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 visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at 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 shall be directed to complete a Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

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% 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.

Emergency Exit Procedures: Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located at the end of the hallway in either direction from the classroom. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

Instructors may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) 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.

Furthermore, students are expected to model the honest and 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 class assignments
- ☐ 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

As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course. –Erika J. Pribanic-Smith

Week	Dates	Topics/Class Readings/Due Dates
1	Aug. 27	Introductions/Course Overview
2	Sept. 1	What is a Feature? Reading for discussion: "The Wreck of the Lady Mary, Chapter 1," The Star-Ledger (Newark, NJ), 21 September 2011 (http://www.pulitzer.org/archives/9151) – MAKE SURE TO READ THE SIDEBAR "ABOUT THIS STORY." It will be part of the discussion.
	Sept. 3	Freelancing and Writing the Feature Pitch
3	Sept. 8	<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
	Sept. 10	**Interview Prep Homework due by 2 p.m.** Workshop: Feature Interviews
4	Sept. 15	Storytelling and the Feature Lead Readings for discussion: "The girl in the window," St. Petersburg Times, 3 August 2008 (http://www.tampabay.com/features/humaninterest/article750838.ece) "Crossing Over," Los Angeles Times, 22 August 1999 – READ CHAPTERS 1 & 2 ONLY (http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2000-Feature-Writing)
Sept. 14: Census date	Sept. 17	Writing Workshop: Feature Leads
5	Sept. 22	<u>HOMEWORK GIVEN: COLOR OBSERVATION</u> Descriptive and Color Writing Discussion Readings for discussion: "Still Life," Texas Monthly Magazine, May 2009 (http://www.texasmonthly.com/story/still-life) "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) "Dry-aged Beef is a New Trend in Restaurants Around the Country," Bon Appetit, June 2013 (http://www.bonappetit.com/test-kitchen/ingredients/article/dry-aged-beef-is-a-new-trend-in-restaurants-around-the-country)
	Sept. 24	<u>HOMEWORK GIVEN: PRACTICE FEATURE PREP</u> **Color Observation Homework due by 2 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Descriptive and Color Writing
6	Sept. 29	Reporting Workshop: Practice Feature
	Oct. 1	**Practice Feature Prep due by 2 p.m.** **Practice Feature due by 11:59 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Practice Feature

7	Oct. 6	<u>TRAVEL FEATURE ASSIGNED</u> Travel Features Discussion Readings for discussion: “Born on the Bayou,” American Way Magazine, Summer 2015 (http://magazines.aa.com/content/born-bayou#SiBj82wlwh8lvFfx.97) “Rafting the Grand Canyon,” National Geographic Traveler, August/September 2015 (http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/river-dance-rafting-the-grand-canyon/)
	Oct. 8	Reporting Workshop: Travel Feature
8	Oct. 13	**Pitch for Travel Feature due by 11 a.m.** Travel Writing Editorial Meetings
	Oct. 15	Travel Writing Editorial Meetings
9	Oct. 20	**Travel Feature First Draft due by 11 a.m.** Peer Critiques: Travel Feature
	Oct. 22	**Travel Feature Second Draft due by 11:59 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Travel Feature
10	Oct. 27	<u>ART-OF-LIVING FEATURE ASSIGNED</u> Service Features Discussion Readings for discussion: “Zach’s Journey” series, <i>Dallas Morning News</i> (PDF in course materials on Blackboard; look for story components boxed in red, and read the whole series of 5 stories)
	Oct. 29	** Travel Feature FINAL DRAFT due by 11:59 p.m. ** Workshop: Travel Feature Writing/Art-of-Living Reporting
11 Nov. 4 Last day to drop	Nov. 3	**Pitch for Art-of-Living Feature due by 11 a.m.** Art-of-Living Editorial Meetings
	Nov. 5	Art-of-Living Editorial Meetings
12	Nov. 10	**Art-of-Living Feature First Draft due by 11 a.m.** Peer Critiques: Art-of-Living Feature
	Nov. 12	**Art-of-Living Feature Second Draft due by 11:59 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Art-of-Living Feature
13	Nov. 17	<u>SEASONAL FEATURE ASSIGNED</u> Seasonal Features Discussion (Readings provided in class)
	Nov. 19	**Art-of-Living Feature FINAL DRAFT due by 11:59 p.m.** Workshop: Art-of-Living Writing/Seasonal Reporting
14	Nov. 24	**Pitch for Seasonal Feature due by 11 a.m.** Seasonal Feature Editorial Meetings
	Nov. 26	THANKSGIVING (No Class)
15	Dec. 1	Seasonal Feature Editorial Meetings
	Dec. 3	**Seasonal Feature First Draft due by 11 a.m.** Peer Critiques: Seasonal Feature
16	Dec. 8	**Seasonal Feature Second Draft due by 11:59 p.m.** Writing Workshop: Seasonal Feature
FINALS	Dec. 15	**Seasonal Feature FINAL DRAFT due by 11:59 p.m.**

Emergency Phone Numbers:

In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at **817-272-3003** (non-campus phone), **2-3003** (campus phone). You may also dial 911. Non-emergency number: 817-272-3381.