JAMS 201: Media Writing  
Lecture: Monday 9-9:50 a.m., EMS E180  
Labs: Bolton Hall 531  
Spring 2019

Professor Michael Mirer  
Office: Bolton Hall 556  
Office Hours: TBD  
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@michaelmirer

Lab Instructors  
TBD  
TBD  
TBD  
TBD

Catalog Description  
Techniques and strategies for writing that can communicate effectively with media audiences; emphasizes innovation and creativity within the constraints of good grammar and style. This course fulfills the Oral and Written Communication-B requirement of UWM’s General Education Requirements. JAMS 201 is a prerequisite for the departmental major.

Professor’s Description  
This course will introduce you to media writing in its various forms, with blocks on journalistic writing, strategic communication formats and academic criticism of mediated content. This course is intended to introduce the ideas and skills that majors in the Journalism, Advertising and Media Studies Department here at UW-Milwaukee will need to be successful during their time here. Even if you are majoring (or intend to major) elsewhere on campus, the course offers practice in writing clearly, evaluating information, structuring written work and analyzing media that will be of value across fields and as a media consumer.

JAMS 201 consists of lecture (9 a.m. Mondays) and lab (labs meet on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays for 110 minutes) components. In lecture we will introduce of the ideas and theories behind media formats and how they work in the real world. In lab you will work closely with your labmates and instructors to hone practical skills. We expect this to be difficult. The tools and strategies of academic writing that got you into this room are different than those employed in media work. That takes time. I hope you will trust the process. If it helps, think of this course as aimed at starting you on the path of developing both halves of the media professional’s identity; the skills to do the day-to-day work, but also the knowledge of the field as a whole so you can speak about it clearly and address whatever future challenges the field holds.

Goals  
By the end of this course I expect you will:
  • Write clearly, cleanly and vividly using Associated Press Style
  • Be able to identify and produce content in formats consistent with journalism, public relations and advertising.
  • Understand the ways those formats are employed in the practice of storytelling
  • Understand the ways various parts of the media system interact with other, and how the formats and conventions connect to those professional missions
  • Analyze media content using the tools of media studies as a discipline
Canvas
This course will use the online service Canvas for readings, discussion and filing of assignments. The campus will be using the system exclusively starting in the Fall of 2019. Canvas is available through the UWM homepage under the “Current Students” menu. As this is a new system there may be some technical issues during the semester.

Readings
There is one required text in this course.


The AP Stylebook serves as the basic rule book for most public-facing writing. If you plan on a career in media, you will use it a lot and it is good to start familiarizing yourself with it now. All quizzes will be open stylebook. All other readings will be posted to the Canvas site. AP produces a yearly update with some changes every year. I have ordered the most current edition for the course. If you choose to use a past edition, you are still responsible for the 2018 updates.

I also expect you to keep current on news and information, both for current events quizzes in this courses and because being conversant with the news helps make your work topical. For quizzes, keep an eye on local, national and international headlines. I suggest scanning the homepages/Twitter feeds of the New York Times, Washington Post, Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel and Guardian. There is a very good chance news that will show up on current events quizzes will be tweeted through the #jams201 hashtag.

Course Components
Lecture
You cannot learn writing in a room with 127 students, but you can learn the reasoning behind why media writing looks like it does; how reporters, strategic communicators and media scholars understand the work they do; and the impact of those choices and formats on audiences. During the Monday lecture, I will introduce the week’s topic and set the context for the lab exercises that week. You will be expected to complete the week’s readings prior to the lecture. Five times during the semester you will post a short response to the readings on Canvas (more information below). I will make every effort to post the lecture slides before the meeting. All material from lectures and readings will be considered fair game for weekly quizzes and the final exam. Your TAs will be taking attendance during lecture.

Lab
In lab sections, students will apply the topics we discuss in lecture. From Week 3-Week 10, lab will begin with a style and current events quiz before getting into the meat of the topic. It is vital, therefore, that students arrive on time for labs. Labs will also provide opportunities to work on writing projects, work with groups on critiquing writing and discuss media-writing issues in a smaller setting. It is vital that students are active participants in labs. We want your opinions, your ideas, and your comments and hope that you bring possible discussion topics to labs. I do expect you to treat your lab-mates with respect when commenting on their work or working in groups. You should expect a lab assignment most weeks, which will generally be due 48 hours after your lab section ends. You will file those assignments electronically through the Dropbox in Canvas unless your TA has specified something different.

Grading
The goal in this class is for you to produce publishable work. That standard will not change from the beginning of the semester to the end. This way you should be able to see your improvement over the course of the term reflected in your grades. It also means you should expect the grades to be lower at the beginning of the course. Here is how to read those numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>Publishable in current form with few revisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-/B+</td>
<td>88-92</td>
<td>Close to publishable with minimal work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-87</td>
<td>Strong story, needs rewriting to be publishable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-/C+</td>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>Mix of strengths and flaws, needs work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>67-74</td>
<td>Major flaws, needs major work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>59-66</td>
<td>Critically damaging flaws, needs overhaul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-58</td>
<td>Work not done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to numerical grades, TAs will be providing written feedback on assignments. My advice to you is to focus on the words more than the numbers, especially early in the semester. Listening to that advice, which will be coming from the person grading your assignments, will be vital to doing well in the course. Note also that the lab assignments only count for a quarter of the grade. Those assignments and that feedback should be preparing you for the final project.

**Grade components**

**Lecture Readings Posts (10 percent):** You will be responsible for five 200-to-300-word blog responses over the course of the semester. The weeks you choose are up to you. Posts should respond to one or more of the week’s readings, although the format is flexible. Some possible approaches would be to focus in on one of the week’s main readings, highlight a theme that appears across the readings, ask a question raised by one of the readings, or reflect personally on how these concepts align with your own experience. They should be posted by the start of lecture. The earlier I see them, the more I can address questions in the lecture. The posts may be helpful in studying for the final exam as well.

**Lab Assignments (25 percent):** Lab work will focus on learning the practical skills associated with media writing. The goal of these exercises are to introduce you the basics of media writing and get you comfortable with the various formats you will need during your time in JAMS program and in the professional world. Labs operate on the principle that you are beginners. We expect you to struggle and improve.

**Style/Current Events quizzes (10 percent):** Starting the week of Sept. 17, you will have eight weekly quizzes on current events, information from readings and lecture and AP Style. Quizzes will be open style book. Often current events and other useful information will be posted on the #jams201 hashtag.

**Final Project (40 percent):** You will select a topic of your choosing and produce a 1,000-word news story about that topic. You then will create a press release for one of the individuals and groups involved in your topic. Finally, you will produce a 750-to-1,000-word analysis of a piece of media. Overall topics will be finalized by Nov. 12.

**Final Exam (15 percent):** The final exam will focus on AP Style and be cumulative for the readings and lecture material throughout the course.

**Deadlines**

One reality of writing for media is firm deadlines and we will enforce them to get you in the habit of meeting them for lab assignments. TAs will deduct five points for work submitted in the hour after the deadline, 10 more points for the next 23 hours and then 10 more points for each subsequent day. If you
have something going on in your life and cannot meet a deadline or a University-approved activity that prevents you from meeting the deadline, please let your TA know in advance. After the deadline passes there is very little we can do for you.

**Fact Errors**
Accuracy is a cardinal value in media ethics. Small mistakes damage a reporter’s credibility and create the possibility for misinformation to spread, something that happens especially quickly in the social media era. Inaccuracies from strategic communicators undercut your future credibility as a news source. To underscore this, we impose ten-point deduction for fact errors in any assignments (misspellings of names, locations or other factual information). The deduction will be taken after the assignment has been graded.

**Attendance**
Attendance will be taken on a daily basis in both lecture and labs. In lecture, you are responsible for making sure your TA knows you are there in whatever way the TA chooses to track it. Missing too many classes, either lectures or labs, will have consequences. For those students who hope to declare their major or minor in JAMS, attendance is one way of demonstrating you are serious about their professional goals. Points will be deducted based on the following:

- 0-2 classes missed = 0 points
- 3 classes missed = -10 points
- 4-5 classes missed = -20 points
- 6-8 classes missed = -40 points
- 9-12 classes missed = -50 points
- 13-16 classes missed = -60 points
- 17 or more classes missed = -70 points

As you can see, students are allowed to miss up to two classes (either lecture or labs) with no consequences. Please use these wisely. We will not all you to make up missed work. Exceptions to this policy will be made for serious illnesses, university-approved events and religious observances, so long as you let me and your TA know about them in advance. We will make every effort to inform you if you are in danger of veering into a points penalty, but it is on you to keep track of it.

**Contact**
My office hours are TBD, but will be in Bolton 556. I will literally be sitting there waiting for you to come talk to me about the course, the University, your career plans, the future of media or the Milwaukee Bucks. If office meetings are not your speed or those times do not work for you, I will be available by appointment. I am available by email for specific questions, but please be aware that I have young children who hate going to sleep and often I will not see emails sent after 8 p.m. until the next morning. You also can reach me on Twitter (@michaelmirer). Your lab instructor also will have weekly office hours, which are listed on the syllabus.

**Academic Misconduct**
In the professional media world plagiarism or other forms of dishonesty will turn your name into a punchline and your career into a class example in an ethics seminar. I hope you will be aiming higher. At the university level, plagiarism fits into a larger group of issues called academic misconduct. The university defines academic misconduct as
an act in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation, uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise, forges or falsifies academic documents or records, intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others, engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance, or assists other students in any of these acts.

Prohibited conduct includes cheating on an examination; collaborating with others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules of the course; submitting a paper or assignment as one's own work when a part or all of the paper or assignment is the work of another; submitting a paper or assignment that contains ideas or research of others without appropriately identifying the sources of those ideas; stealing examinations or course materials; submitting, if contrary to the rules of a course, work previously presented in another course; tampering with the laboratory experiment or computer program of another student; knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above, including assistance in an arrangement whereby any work, classroom performance, examination or other activity is submitted or performed by a person other than the student under whose name the work is submitted or performed.

Canvas automatically checks assignments against online sources for plagiarism, but we reserve the right to dig further into work when we suspect academic misconduct. Cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the College of Letters & Science with a recommendation for disciplinary action. If you have questions about what qualifies as plagiarism, talk to your TA or to me sooner rather than later. A full explanation of the disciplinary policy can be found on the university websites: https://uwm.edu/academicaffairs/facultystaff/policies/academic-misconduct/.

Accommodations
Students who need special accommodations should talk with me as soon as possible, especially as quizzes start next week. They should also contact the Accessibility Resource Center. More information is available at this link: http://www4.uwm.edu/sac/.

Incompletes
A notation of "incomplete" may be given in lieu of a final grade to a student who has carried a subject successfully until the end of a semester but who, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond the student's control, has been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of term work. An incomplete will be granted only after the student and instructor have agreed upon a date by which the missing work will be completed.

Other University Policies
Links to other university policies are available at the following: http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf

Time Statement
The average student should expect to devote about 145 hours during the course of the semester to this class. This is an average expectation, and some students may need to devote more time to class. Here is the general breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Time in hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam and quiz prep</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Schedule (DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Jan. 28: Introduction to media writing and storytelling

Readings

Lab: Greetings; Introduction and the nuts and bolts of media writing
Assignment: AP Style and Grammar quiz

Feb. 4: Introduction to Journalism and News Values

Readings

Lab: Quiz 1; News values discussion and exercises.

Feb. 11: Leads and Structure

Readings
- Lead Example handout

Lab: Quiz 2; Leads handout; Story Structures from Harrower
Assignment: Breaking News Leads; Breaking News Story

Feb. 18: Information gathering

Readings
- Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism: The Art of the Interview

LAB: QUIZ 3, Scavenger Hunt
Assignment: Feature Story

Feb. 25: Writing for broadcast

Readings
Lab: Quiz 4; Building Radio stories
Assignment: Radio Script (Extra Credit for recording it?)

Mar. 4: Strategic communication
Readings
LAB: QUIZ 5, Writing Press Releases and understanding their structure
Assignment: Press Release

Mar. 11: Audiences
Readings
LAB: Quiz 6, Crisis Communication
Assignment: Producing a crisis communication plan (group assignment)

Mar. 25: Writing for Advertising
Readings
LAB: QUIZ 7, Introduction to the creative memo;
Assignment: Produce a creative memo

April 1: Social media across the fields
Readings
• Complex.com: NBA Social Media http://www.complex.com/sports/2015/04/nba-social-media
LAB: Quiz 8. Introduction to the final project; Research and pitch time.

April 8: Major Declaration Week
No Readings
LAB: Meeting with JAMS Faculty; Finalize Final Project Pitch

April 15: Writing about the media – Perspectives and approaches to media studies
Readings

No Labs; Extra office hours to work on final project issues.
Assignment: Short media analysis

April 22: Writing about the media – Modes of analysis
Readings
LAB: Final Project progress meetings (TAs will set deadlines for drafts)

April 29: Media Ethics/Media Law
Readings
- SPJ Code of Ethics
- Public Relations Code of Ethics
- Advertising Association Code of Ethics
LAB: Review for Final Exam; Work on Final Projects

May 6: Final Exam in lecture

Labs: Final Project in-progress presentations.
Final Projects due: May 15, 2019.