JAMS 306: Feature and Magazine Article Writing

Delivery: In-person, supplemented by the Canvas course platform.

Instructor: Erik Gunn
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About the Instructor
My name is Erik Gunn. You are welcome to call me Erik.

I work full time as an independent freelance journalist for regional and national magazines, newspapers, and online publications. I have taught this class since the Fall 2014 Semester. A more complete biographical statement is on the JAMS 306 Canvas site.

Prerequisites
Junior standing; declared JAMS major/minor or English major.

Catalog Description
Using interviews, analysis and observation to produce feature and profile stories.

Instructor’s Description and Course Objectives
Course Objectives
1. To provide experience in writing feature stories suitable for publication.
2. To expose students to examples of published feature articles as models for the craft.
3. Through both reading and practice, to provide opportunities for students to expand their journalism skills, including:
   • news judgment and critical thinking;
   • fact-gathering through primary and secondary sources, including interviews, direct observation, and documents;
   • storytelling that is accurate, concise, and compelling;
   • mastery of standard mechanics for contemporary professional writing;
   • a commitment to the ethical practice of journalism and to the role of journalists at a time of extraordinary change in society, culture, and media technology.

Course Content and Scope
JAMS 306 is taught with a journalism focus; work produced for the class is to be grounded in journalistic style, practices, and principles.
JAMS 306 gives equal attention to the two primary components of professional journalism:

- **Reporting** – the collection, verification, evaluation, analysis, and interpretation of factual information about people and subjects of interest and importance, with emphasis on depth, breath, and thoroughness, both in information gathered and sources consulted.
- **Writing** – presenting the reporter’s findings engagingly to readers, with emphasis on accuracy, coherence, conciseness, clarity, and creative storytelling.

**Course Readings and Materials**

**Required**

- *Additional required reading materials* include articles and text excerpts, the selection of which evolves continually. All are posted on the class Canvas site in PDF or URL Link form; all and more are also found in the JAMS 306 Sharepoint Library, linked from the Canvas site.

**Recommended**

A partial list follows of sources for assigned text excerpts. Purchase of these books is not required, but they are recommended resources for writers of nonfiction.

- David Fryxell, *How to Write Fast (While Writing Well)* (Cincinnati, Writer’s Digest Books, 1992)
- Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird* (New York, anchor, 1995)
Evaluation and Grades
Assessment in the class has three broad components, summarized below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percent of grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation/Effort</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attendance [10%]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Participation &amp; In-class assignments [5%]</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Effort [5%]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Assignments</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Several short written assignments are included throughout the course; some are free-standing; others provide scaffolding for Projects. Their point values range upward from 5 points. An assignment contributes to the overall Short Assignments grade component according to its relative point value.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I. Profile story (800-1,000 words) [10%]</td>
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<tr>
<td>- II. Place/Institution-centered story (1,000-1,200 words) [20%]</td>
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<tr>
<td>- III. Magazine/Long-Form story (1,500-2,000 words) [30%]</td>
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<tr>
<td>This project constitutes the final assessment tool</td>
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Every assignment includes a statement or a rubric (or both) explaining how it will be graded.

Assignments will state whether they are graded on a “Pass/Fail,” “Pass/Low-Pass/Fail,” an A-to-F letter grade scale, or another appropriate scale.

For assignments receiving letter grades, and for the course as a whole, grade levels are based on the percentage of points earned against the total number of points possible as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage/points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>92-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-91%</td>
<td>A-minus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-89%</td>
<td>B-plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82-87%</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-81%</td>
<td>B-minus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78-79%</td>
<td>C-plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72-78%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-71%</td>
<td>C-minus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68-69%</td>
<td>D-plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62-67%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-61%</td>
<td>D-minus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59% or lower</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Updated 11/14/2018
A schedule summarizing topics for and assignments due at each class meeting is posted as a separate document.

Class Policies

Out-of-class requirements:
Major projects and many shorter written assignments require students to conduct original research and reporting in the community: contacting and interviewing people in the manner of professional journalists; researching and synthesizing information from relevant public documents related to assignments; and observing public and private events relevant to the subjects of assignments.

Some assignment deadlines and dates for 1-on-1 conferences fall outside of the weekly class meeting dates; review the course schedule for details.

Attendance, Participation, and Effort:
- Absences (10% of the grade) are by default unexcused, with the following exceptions:
  - Medical need. Appropriate documentation is required.
  - Certain non-medical circumstances. Requires 1) an advance request, and 2) my written agreement that your reason for absence is sufficiently compelling to warrant excusing it.
- Being late or leaving class early without prior approval: 25% deduction from student’s attendance score for the day.
- Participation and Effort demonstrates your willingness to engage with the course material and with the assignments. Components include
  - Responsiveness to questions, to opportunities for dialogue in class, and when asked to discuss your work with other students.
  - Effort demonstrated in applying yourself to assignments.
  - Completion of In-Class assignments throughout the semester, which cannot be made up in the event of absence.

Late Assignments:
- Assignments are to be submitted on time.
  - Work submitted late without an approved extension may be accepted, but the grade will be penalized according to the assignment rubric.
  - Extensions may be granted only if requested in advance of the due date, and then only for sufficiently compelling reasons in my judgment.

Procedures, Expectations, and academic Misconduct
- The class Canvas site is the central organizational tool for this course. All assignments, calendars, reading, resources, reminders and relevant news will be posted there.
All assignments will include an Assignment Note with instructions on requirements, deadlines, rubrics, and submission procedures.

All assignments will be submitted digitally through the Canvas site. In some cases, printouts also will be required, which will be specifically explained in the Assignment Note.

The following requirements apply to each of the three Projects and for all Short Assignments that are exercises in journalism.

- Students will produce work based on their original reporting and written in a journalistic style and format.
- Work for the class must be original to the class. Work previously submitted for another class, for an employer, or for any other context will not be accepted.
- Students should avoid source conflicts of interest. Unless there are sound reasons to which I have agreed to in advance, people interviewed for stories cannot be family members or close friends.
- No material may be fabricated or invented. People and places presented in stories as existing must exist. Information presented as coming from interviews must come from actual interviews with those people.
- A list of human and written sources, as well as personal observation that took place as part of the reporting process, must accompany every piece of journalism written for the class, from the very first assignment. Details of how the source list is to be formatted and displayed are found in the Formatting Supplement to this Syllabus.
- Plagiarism – presenting the ideas and words of another person as your own without properly citing and quoting the original – is unacceptable in academia and in journalism. Plagiarism can be grounds for failing an assignment or the course.

You can find UWM’s page for students on Academic Misconduct here: [https://uwm.edu/deanofstudents/conduct/conduct_procedures/academic-misconduct/](https://uwm.edu/deanofstudents/conduct/conduct_procedures/academic-misconduct/)

You can find a link to UWM’s Uniform Syllabus Policy here: [http://uwm.edu/secu/syllabus-links/](http://uwm.edu/secu/syllabus-links/).

**Statement of time investment for this class**

This class meets the university’s standards for in-class and out-of-class workloads. The estimated total semester workload is just under 140 hours. Reading for this class requires less time than many. Most out-of-class time is spent on reporting and writing assignments.

- Lecture: (twice a week, 75 minutes a lecture): 37.5 hours
- Reading: 20 hours
- Short assignments: 30 hours
- Projects: 50 hours

Updated 11/14/2018