

BEGINNING REPORTING CMMNA A250-004
Spring 2006

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CM 311
Class: TTh, 2:00pm - 3:15pm
Office hours: M-Th 3:15-5:15pm

"...today's history is written the very moment it happens. It's transmitted immediately through the press...to be interpreted and heatedly discussed. For this reason I like journalism. For this reason I fear journalism. What other profession allows you to write history at the very moment it happens and also be its direct witness? Journalism is an extraordinary and terrible privilege."

From "Interview with History" by Oriana Fallaci.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

To learn to report is to learn to discover the world. This course will be challenging, maddening, frightening, thrilling--in short, a grand adventure. In our post-Katrina city, all the conundrums of our society are being debated in terms of poverty, race, class, urban life and landscape, environmental concerns and educational reform. The rebuilding of a major metropolis is the greatest national story since the Great Depression and the New Deal. Major media outlets are opening offices in New Orleans. The stories you will write for this class are the same stories being covered by national newspapers. Therefore, much of the course will be taught in the streets of New Orleans, as our city now offers unprecedented learning opportunities for young journalists.

During this course you will acquire the skills to take excellent notes, to rapidly synthesize large amounts of information, and to organize that information into a coherent story structure. You will learn basic interview techniques that will serve you in any profession that involves people (law, medicine, education, law enforcement, psychology).

Throughout the course we will also explore and debate the concept of "news": who makes it and the duty of the reporter to generate story ideas and dig up the news that rarely makes the headlines.

You are expected to be an active participant in the classroom rather than the passive receptacle of anyone's so-called wisdom. Your voice will be heard and your ideas taken into account. So be awake, be ready, carry a notebook and pen with you at all times, and please, wear your running shoes.

PROFESSOR BIO: Ten years journalism experience in Central America for various US and Latin media outlets (print and broadcast). Foreign news stringer for TIME magazine and the *San Francisco Chronicle* in Guatemala from 1992-95. Author of "Guatemala: The People, Politics and Culture," freelance writer since 1988 and currently a columnist for *The Anniston Star*. Recipient of the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund for Writers in New York for second book in progress, "Into the Mangrove." Writing instructor in a women's prison and at two universities: the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and Auburn University in Alabama.

REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance: It's the early bird reporter who catches the juicy worm of a story. Arrive on time. Tardiness will cost you half an absence. Five absences earns a grade of "C," six, a "D," and seven, an "F." Please check your Loyola email account daily for readings.

Deadlines: Deadlines are sacrosanct in our profession. **I do not accept late papers.** Turn in all papers at the beginning of class on due date. If you cannot attend a class and a paper is due, place in my mailbox before the class period or give to another student to turn in.

Required Tools of the Trade:

- Strunk, William and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style* (4th ed.)
- New Orleans Times-Picayune*. Please subscribe and read the paper daily. Knowledge of local and world news is paramount in this course.
- The New York Times*. Register at nytimes.com and check it daily. I will assign readings from this website.
- Associated Press Stylebook*, edited by Norm Goldstein.
- A small tape recorder (optional, but strongly recommended).

Types of Assignments and Course Structure

Be prepared to spend considerable time working outside of class. We will spend the first part of the course on the basics. By the fourth week I will give you an off-campus story assignment and you will practice your reporting skills in the street under my supervision. You will also work with a "buddy," a classmate who serves as your copy editor and sounding board (and you will do the same for them). We will make six reporting trips together as a class in the greater New Orleans area and our goal is to publish a package of the best class stories on these visits.

Daily reading of the newspaper is paramount. Please do all assigned readings and be prepared to discuss current events in class. Several surprise quizzes will be given. There will be a midterm and a final story project in lieu of a final exam.

GRADES:

Writing assignments (in-class and homework)	60%
Participation	10%
Midterm and Quizzes	20%
Final Story Project	10%

Grading scale: A (92-100), B (83-91), C (79-82), D (73-65), F (below 65)

Note: Students can earn a maximum of five grade points per story for rewrites. Students will also receive five grade points for any classroom work published in a major U.S. newspaper (maximum of two publications—college publications

do not qualify). Two grade points will be awarded for an excellent column published in The Maroon (maximum of one column).

POLICIES:

- A. Absences:** Students are responsible for all work missed. Please get the phone number or email of a student in the class and call them for missed work and lectures (use the buddy system).

- B. Style:** All papers must be typed, double-spaced, in 12 point Times and on white paper. Turn in two copies of every homework assignment. The instructor will grade one and return it to you; she will keep the other. Each paper should have name, date of assignment and “slug” in the right-hand corner. Spelling, grammar and neatness are crucial to your grade. Computer spellcheck programs are not enough. Proofread papers and have your copy editor read before turning in. I will also ask you to email me some of your papers.

- B. Ethics and Plagiarism:** University policies apply to all work. See *Undergraduate Bulletin 2003-2005*. As this is a journalism course and journalism is about the pursuit of truth, any student who steals work or makes up any part of a story will automatically fail the course.

- C. Courtesy:** Be professional. Be present. No cellphones, food or Internet surfing in class.

- D. Extenuating circumstances:** Life happens. See me privately in case of extreme difficulties.

- E. Disabilities:** A student with a disability that qualifies for accommodations should contact Sarah Mead Smith, Director of Disability Services at 865-2990 (Academic Resource Center, Room 405, Monroe Hall). A student wishing to receive test accommodations (e.g. extended test time) should provide the instructor with an official Accommodation Form from Disability Services before the scheduled test date.

The Department of Communications at Loyola University New Orleans complies with national accrediting standards designed to help prepare students to understand and relate to issues of interest to women and minorities in a multicultural, multi-ethnic and otherwise diverse society.

***LECTURE AND ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE:**

Week 1, Jan. 9	Introduction: start basics segment.
Week 2, Jan. 16	MLK assignment: Speeches, quotes.
Week 3, Jan. 23	More basics: leads.
Week 4, Jan. 30	Hunting: the story idea. First field visit.
Week 5, Feb. 6	Interview techniques.
Week 6, Feb. 13	Second field visit
Week 7, Feb. 20	Story due, Midterm
Week 8, Feb. 27	Mardi Gras Interviews
Week 9, Mar. 6	Third field visit.
Week 10, Mar. 13	Story evaluations (outlines). Fourth field visit.
Week 11, Mar. 20	Story structure workshop.
Week 12, Mar. 27	Bias lecture, Fifth field visit.
Week 13, April 3	Final field visit.
Week 14, April 10	Draft process, Easter break.
Week 15, April 17	Editing-Rewriting workshop.
Week 16, April 24	Final exam week. Stories due.

*Schedule subject to change depending on surprise guest speakers, news cycles, rewrites and class fieldwork.