

COURSE: JRNL 3220/FEATURE WRITING

DAY/TIME: T/TH

SPRING SEMESTER 2005

INSTRUCTOR: Trish O’Kane
Tel. 334-844-2853
okanemp@auburn.edu

OFFICE HOURS: 11:00-12:00am, T-Th in Tichenor 215.

“Tell the truth as you understand it. If you’re a writer, you have a moral obligation to do this. And it is a revolutionary act—truth is always subversive.”

Anne Lamott

PREREQUISITES: JRNL 101 (AP Style) and JRNL 2210 (Beginning Newswriting)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Feature writing is more time-consuming and in-depth than news reporting. In this course you will learn the art of the interview, how to research and write an in-depth profile on a person and their passion, and how to write a community feature on a social issue. The class will be dynamic and interactive, with lectures, special speakers, individual conferences and creative writing exercises. Expect the unexpected.

We will try to get one of your stories published. **This course requires that you spend a considerable amount of time off-campus (at least 3-4 hours weekly).** This is a tough course. We believe in “work, hard work.” The instructor will individually coach every student in private conferences to help improve writing skills and assist with the publishing process. Every student in this class is a writer for the semester. Feature writing will allow you to be more creative, challenge yourself and grow as a thinker.

COURSE GOALS

1) To develop skills for thinking up feature ideas and sources; 2) to learn interviewing techniques; 3) to learn to write in-depth features that are publication quality; and 4) to pass all these skills on to a high school student during the service learning component and make a difference.

INSTRUCTOR BIO

Trish O’Kane worked as a journalist for 10 years in Central America and has published widely in English and Spanish on politics, economics and human rights. She is the author of a political and historical guide on Guatemala.

REQUIRED TEXT: *The New York Times*. Either subscribe or read the free online version every day. The Sunday Times edition has longer features and is particularly important. Make nytimes.com your homepage for the semester and you'll always be prepared for news quizzes. News quizzes will be given every Tuesday on the NYT front-page stories and special features. Knowledge of world news is paramount in this course.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED READING: "Bird by Bird" by Anne Lamott, "Somebody Told Me: The Newspaper Stories of Rick Bragg" by Rick Bragg and "Savage Inequalities" by Jonathan Kozol.

I. Lectures and Reading Topics

- The art of the interview
- Basics of feature writing and personal columns
- Story structure and development
- Research techniques
- Leads: how to hook a prize-winning bass

II. Class Structure

A. First half of semester:

Intensive work on basics, particularly interview techniques. Individual coaching. Write two profiles.

B. Second half of semester: Cub Reporter Program

Students will work in Loachapoka, Alabama on two community features. Each student will pair up with a Loachapoka high school student as a reporting team (you are the veteran and your high school student is the cub reporter). This assignment is based on the principle that the best way to really learn something is to teach it to someone else. You are required to meet with your cub at least two hours a week for 10 weeks, plus attend an all-day field trip. If you are not prepared to make a commitment to work with a teenager, please drop the class. Your cub will act as your story scout and local guide.

You are required to keep a journal throughout the second half of the semester of your observations and reflections. The journal will be used for the class final. Please remember that you are setting an example for a young person and that you represent Auburn University and the Department of Communication and Journalism. Your efforts may change a young life. You will also get real-life reporting experience in a rural community. Participation in this program will look great on a resume and impress future employers.

III. Grades

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| Interview skills: three assignments | 20% |
| News literacy: NYTimes daily reading, quizzes and press conferences | 10% |
| Loachapoka Feature I | 10% |
| One in-depth rural community feature | 20% |
| Mentoring (Cub Reporter program) | 30% |
| Final exam (column) | 10% |

IV. Policies

- A. **Attendance:** Class attendance is extremely important in this course. There is no set text and if you miss lectures and speakers you will have a very hard time with the midterm and with the community feature project. More than five absences means your final grade will be lowered one full letter grade (i.e. from an “A” to a “B”, etc.) See Tiger Cub for policy on excused absences. Students must submit documentation of any excused absence within one week of the absence. Excuses submitted at the end of term for earlier in the semester will not be accepted. Students absent from class 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 (buddy system).
- B. **Assignments:** During the semester you will write at least four feature stories, one column and will also keep a journal. Detailed assignment sheets will be provided for each story with specific instructions. Please follow to the letter. Deadlines are sacrosanct in journalism. No late papers accepted. Learning how to do an in-depth interview is a major component of this course. **An interview means a face-to-face conversation with a live person. Emailing is not an interview. No phone interviews for the first half of the semester.** All interviews must be live and in full color. Feature stories must be at least 800 words long, and at least one must be submitted to the school paper or a local paper for publication. All story ideas must be previously approved by instructor. No features on friends or family. Appropriate dress and professional behavior is required when doing interviews.
- C. **Style:** Use the Associated Press Style Book. All stories are to be typed, double-spaced and on white paper. When turning in a story please do the following: cover sheet with name, feature title, slug, instructor’s name, date. Feature with slug and your last name in the upper left-hand corner of each page, byline centered on first page, consecutive numbered pages and write END at end of feature. List of all sources, their addresses and phone numbers must be turned in with stories. **Papers will not be accepted without a list of sources.**
- D. **Plagiarism:** In the real world, if you plagiarize or invent quotes and parts

articles, you are fired and you have disgraced the media you work for as well as the university you attended. In the real classroom, if you plagiarize or invent work, I will prosecute you before university authorities and do my best to insure that you are expelled from my class and the department. You must properly attribute all quotes and information. Academic dishonesty is an offense that will be reported to the Academic Dishonesty Committee. According to the Auburn University Student Academic Honesty Code “Violations...[include] the submissions of themes, essays, term papers, design projects, these and dissertations, similar requirements or parts thereof that are not the work of the student submitting them...When direct quotations are used, they must be indicated, and when the ideas of another are incorporated into a paper, they must be appropriately acknowledged. Plagiarism is a violation. In starkest terms, plagiarism is stealing—using the words or ideas of another as if they were one’s own.

- E. **Courtesy:** Please be on time and be professional. We will have special speakers and press conferences and it is extremely rude to walk in late and interrupt either the instructor or speaker. Turn off all cellphones before coming to class. No food in the classroom.
- F. **Extra Credit:** You may substitute two news quizzes with one single extra credit assignment. The extra credit assignment must be approved by the instructor beforehand. Maximum of two extra credit assignments.

V. **Calendar**

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| Week 1 | Jan. 11 | Start Art of Interview segment | |
| Week 2 | Jan. 18 | Special MLK story idea assignment. | No class. Research time to do three interviews. |
| Week 3 | Jan. 25 | Interview analysis-Start Profile | |

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| | | segment | |
| Week 4 | Feb. 1 | | Profile 1 due |
| Week 5 | Feb. 8 | Start Cub Reporter Program | |
| Week 6 | Feb. 15 | | Profile 2 due |
| Week 7 | Feb. 22 | | |
| Week 8 | Mar. 1 | | |
| Week 9 | Mar. 8 | | |
| Week 10 | Mar. 15 | Story I due (or Loach yearbook) | |
| Week 11 | Mar. 22 | Story II-present proposal | |
| Week 12 | BREAK | | |
| Week 13 | Apr. 5 | | |
| Week 14 | Apr. 12 | Story II-turn in interviews | |
| Week 15 | Apr. 19 | | |
| Week 16 | Apr. 26 | Story II-rough draft due | |
| FINALS | | Turn in final on Story II | |
| | | Final is take-home column. | |
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