

19:128:001 • writing across cultures
spring 2008 syllabus

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class meets: 1:30-3:20 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays
W236 AJB

office hours: 3:30-4:30 p.m. Mondays, and 9:30-11:30 a.m. Tuesdays

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication office is located in E305 AJB. The Director of the School is Prof. Marc Armstrong, who may be contacted at (319) 335-3482.

course overview and goals

Journalists are often called on to cross borders—not just national ones, but borders of culture, identity, race, religion, and other markers of identity. As part of thinking about reporting and writing in a diverse global context, this class will focus on the complex issues involved in reporting on different spaces, places, and people. We will read the best cross-cultural and travel journalism, discuss concepts drawn from ethnography and social geography, and research and write feature stories for newspapers and magazines, based on students' experiences of traversing cultural boundaries. The course will be conducted as a writing workshop. Designed for the novice writer who aspires to a career in feature journalism, this class will set you on the road to publication through its exploration of excellence in reporting and writing—from the first steps in research and interviewing to the strategies involved in establishing a rapport with your sources, developing cultural sensitivity, and understanding the ethics of in-depth reporting. We will also discuss appropriate markets for your articles and the basics of pitching free-lance stories to editors.

By the end of the semester, you will

- understand the specialized knowledge and skills involved in cross-cultural reporting
- strengthen your writing skills as you learn to write correctly, clearly, and well
- become adept at editing and revising your writing (and others')
- be able to develop strong story ideas
- understand some of the ethical and legal issues related to writing across cultures
- acquire basic reporting, interviewing and research skills
- understand concepts of diversity relating to audiences, sources, and issues
- understand the role of the media in translating and shaping cultures
- be able to write query letters
- recognize excellence in journalism

The techniques you develop and practice in this course will orient you to the practice of in-depth feature journalism and contribute to your overall preparation for work in the field.

This course supports all the standards of the Iowa Dozen, the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication's 12 principles for excellence in journalism education, which include: learning to write correctly and clearly; to conduct research and gather information responsibly; to edit and evaluate carefully; to use media technologies thoughtfully; and to apply statistical concepts appropriately; valuing First Amendment principles; a diverse global community; creativity and independence; truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity; and exploring mass communication theories and concepts, media institutions and practices, and the role of media in shaping cultures.

texts

The following books are available at Prairie Lights Books, 15 S. Dubuque Street
required

Fadiman, Anne. (1997). *The spirit catches you and you fall down: A Hmong child, her American doctors, and the collision of two cultures*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux.

In addition, a readings packet is available at Zephyr Copies, 124 E. Washington Street.
strongly recommended

Cropp, F., Frisby, C.M., & Mills, D. (2003). *Journalism across cultures*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press. (This book is on reserve in the Journalism Resource Center, 350 AJB).

Griest, Stephanie. (2004). *Around the bloc: My life in Moscow, Beijing, and Havana*. New York: Villiard. ISBN 0812967607

Everyone in the class is expected to own and use the latest edition of the Associated Press Stylebook. This can be purchased at Prairie Lights or just about any book store.

accommodations

If you have a disability that needs accommodation, please come to my office hours to discuss it as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements in advance. A student seeking academic accommodations first must register with Student Disability Services and then meet with a SDS counselor who determines eligibility for services. A student approved for accommodations should meet privately with the course instructor to arrange particular accommodations. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/

I can only make accommodations for students who have been evaluated by SDD, following that office's specific recommendations.

course web site

The class has an ICON site that students can access using their Hawk IDs. **First and second drafts of all stories must be uploaded to this site on or before the deadlines in the syllabus.**

The site is password protected. Each student has access to his/her grades on this site, as well as all the course information that is online (syllabus, course calendar, etc.)

To access the ICON site, go to:

icon.uiowa.edu (please note that there is no "www" at the beginning of this URL)

log on to ICON using your Hawk ID and password

[Note: The login ID for each new account will be your HawkID. If you don't know your HawkID, you can find out what it is by calling the Customer Information Desk (384-0800), looking it up in WebISIS (<http://isis.uiowa.edu/>) or calling the ITS Help Desk (384-4357)].

Select the appropriate semester, and click on the plus sign next to "Fall 2007" if you don't see this class listed right away.

Click on "019:128:001 Specialized Reporting and Writing"

To upload your files once you are in the course web site:

Click on "Discussions" in the navigation bar at the top.

Go to the appropriate forum (e.g. Personal Experience) and click on it

Go to the appropriate topic (e.g. "First drafts") and click on it

Click on "Add message" (top right)

Copy and paste the text of your story into the "Message" box

or

Click on “Attach file” at the bottom left and browse for your story
[It is generally easier for me if you copy and paste, as sometimes attached files don’t open.]

Final stories should be uploaded to the “Dropbox” in the appropriate folder.

FYI--The topic will be locked after the deadline on the syllabus! Also, all uploaded stories are time and date-stamped by the computer, which is another way I can keep track of deadlines.

If you have any difficulties with ICON, please call ICON help at 335-5194. But technical problems are not an acceptable reason for late work! Please plan on uploading your final paper at least an hour before the deadline so that there are no hiccups!

general expectations

General expectations for all students include consistent class attendance, adequate preparation for in-class and out-of-class assignments, constructive participation (especially during article workshops), and completion of all reading and writing assignments on deadline. For purposes of class communication and fulfillment of assignments, you’ll need an email account and regular access to a computer and printer.

Important note: Deadlines are absolutely sacred in this class (as they are in the “real world” of journalism)! Late work will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per hour. No make-up work will be allowed, except in the case of an excused absence (see the policy on absences, below). In addition, final grades of “Incomplete” will not be given unless in exceptional and dire circumstances.

Other important notes: There will be **no** printing out of assignments at the start of class. W240 AJB is an ITC computer lab that students may use. There is also a printer in the Journalism Resource Center (350 AJB). *Please make sure you have all your work printed out prior to the start of each class.* There will be strict grade penalties for any attempts to print while class is in session. If you are late to class because you were printing elsewhere, this counts as a missed deadline and will be penalized according to the regular syllabus policy. Remember that printers break, computers crash, and dogs eat homework, so plan ahead. This is both professional and courteous, and it will also save you a lot of trouble.

Be sure to back up your work, for the same reasons. Many students have lost their only copies of final projects at the very last minute, so be smart and back up.

And, finally, cell phones and other communication devices must be turned off during class.

ethics

Follow basic academic and journalistic ethics. Be original, be creative, and be true to your values: show me that you are a person of integrity and principle. Your writing will reflect who you are as a person. Remember that we will form lasting impressions of each other this semester.

The only real crime in this class would be cheating. It is expected that all work submitted for a grade in this course reflects the original work of the student submitting it. Students are encouraged to discuss their work with others (inside and outside of class), and to exchange drafts of papers with one another for comments and criticisms. But keep in mind that if you borrow an idea from someone else, you must cite the source, even if it is based on a conversation or correspondence. Also, inventing sources/quotes constitutes plagiarism in journalism; sources used in stories will be verified by the instructor.

Plagiarism and any other activities that result in a student presenting work that is not his or her own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is reported to the departmental DEO and then to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Services in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences who deals with academic fraud according to these guidelines:
www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml

This course is given by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. This means that class policies on matters such as requirements, grading, and sanctions for academic dishonesty are governed by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Students wishing to add or drop this course after the official deadline must receive the approval of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Details of the University policy of cross enrollments may be found at: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~provost/deos/crossenroll.doc>

Any student who does not fully understand the standards of academic honesty should speak to me in advance of submitting coursework.

understanding sexual harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Visit www.sexualharassment.uiowa.edu/ for definitions, assistance, and the full policy.

student rights

Students have the right to make suggestions or complaints and should first visit with the instructor, then with the course supervisor if appropriate, and next with the departmental DEO. All complaints must be made within six months of the incident.
www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml#5

course requirements

class participation (5% of final grade):

Class participation is an important part of this class. You will be encouraged to voice your ideas and thoughts and to contribute to the discussion of every topic. Even the shy ones will be given an opportunity to speak and interact with their classmates and the professor. Respect for others' feelings, beliefs and values are essential to the success of the class, so please be considerate of your classmates' different backgrounds and experiences as you discuss various points of view.

Those who are usually silent in class, or whose participation is unrelated to the readings or conceptual terms discussed in the class, will not earn the portion of the grade that is based on class participation.

attendance and compliance with deadlines (5% of final grade):

Attendance will be taken in every class and will count toward your class participation grade. Excused absences are granted *only* for the following reasons: serious illness (which must be documented with a doctor's certificate), a death in the family (again, documentation is required), or, in very rare cases, a school-related event that requires your presence and that you have arranged with the professor well in advance (e.g. an out-of-town university competitive event in which you are required to participate, a religious holiday, or a job interview). In order for an absence to be excused, documentation must be provided (a note from a coach, letter scheduling the interview, etc.).

The following types of situations are NOT considered excused absences: social events, meetings of Greek or service organizations, entertaining out-of-town visitors, holiday plans, going to weddings or to visit relatives, or any other circumstance that is extracurricular and at which your attendance is optional and secondary to your schoolwork.

A note on Thanksgiving and Spring Break: The University generously offers a full week for each of these scheduled breaks. Class is officially in session before and after this designated week. If you choose to extend your break, you cannot have extensions on deadlines, nor can you make up the missed work. The choice to extend a break is a choice to accept the grade penalty.

Regarding deadlines, see the note above.

responses to the readings/other in-class assignments (25% of final grade)

Reading responses

Good writers are, inevitably, avid readers. If you wish to become an accomplished writer, you must read a lot of good writing. (You can read the junk, too, but you should know it when you see it!) As a would-be published writer, you should always be reading, widely and eclectically, from books, newspapers, poetry, the Web, and especially magazines, both fiction and nonfiction.

You will have assigned readings in this class throughout the semester, and you will be asked to provide written and oral responses to the readings. Your responses will be graded on the basis of their depth, thoughtfulness, and originality. Responses should make it clear that you have read and reflected on the whole article. Reading assignments will be heavier at the beginning of the semester and ease up as you work on your longer projects. Most readings will be in the packet, but others will be distributed in class or made available through the Journalism Resource Center in 350 AJB.

Only half credit will be given for assignments turned in *in absentia* (unless it is an excused absence; see above).

Format for responses: You will receive handouts with details on how to respond to each reading. Responses are generally expected to be between 300 and 500 words in length. For each response, put the response # in the upper right-hand corner.

You will also be asked to write some short essays on various topics discussed in class; these will be similarly graded. Be prepared to read your responses and essays aloud in class.

All essays and responses must be printed out from a computer. No handwritten responses will be accepted. All responses should be legible (i.e., the print should be dark enough to be easily read). As in all journalism classes, deadlines are sacred! Late work is not graded.

paired presentations (5% of the final grade)

There will be a series of oral presentations by students during the semester. Pairs of students will read an assigned chapter and report on it to the class, discussing its main points and its relevance to the course. The use of audiovisual materials and illustrations of the points made in the chapter are encouraged. Presentations will be roughly 30 minutes long. Each presentation will cover:

A quick summary of the main points of the assigned reading

Key information about the culture or topic being discussed (based on outside research)

Important issues for journalists regarding this culture or topic (chapter + outside research)

Relevant examples drawn from various media (the Web, but also TV clips, print media, etc.)

Resources for journalists (chapter + outside research)

Presentations will be graded on the depth and thoughtfulness, the extent and quality of original research conducted for the presentation, the relevance of the examples, and the presentation itself—organization, clarity, and so on.

articles (60% of final grade)

This is a writing class, so the majority of the grade is based on your written assignments. You will be asked to write three long stories and several short ones during the course of the semester. The length and complexity of the long stories will increase as the semester progresses. The last article is weighted most heavily, and is expected to “showcase” what you have learned in the course of the semester. The categories of long articles you will write include:

- A first-person experience article (10 points)
- A personality profile (20 points)
- An in-depth feature that is either (a) a human interest story, (b) an investigative story, or (c) a remarkable story that defies categorization. (30 points)

All stories must be approved by the instructor in advance. No last-minute topic changes will be accepted. A key aspect of magazine journalism is developing the manuscript, revising, editing, and reworking, so once a story idea is approved, the writer must stick with it until its completion. Again, deadlines are set in stone! Late stories lose a letter grade for every hour they are late.

grading

Set high standards for yourself, as grading will be rigorous in this course. You will receive letter grades for each element of your work, with A for exceptional/outstanding work, B for very good/above average work, C for acceptable work, D for unacceptable but passing, and F for failing. Plus and minus grades will be used.

Stories will be graded partly on mechanics (grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence fluency, transitions, language use, organization of the article, etc.) and partly on content (background research, use of sources, depth of reporting, etc.).

Extra credit: If you have one or more articles actually published or accepted for publication in a magazine by the end of the semester, you will receive extra credit (actual extra credit will vary depending on where your piece is published). Other extra credit opportunities may also come up, but all extra credit must be completed and handed in *prior to the last day of class*.

course calendar

- Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are in the textbook on reserve; all others are from the course-pack or online. Many of the readings with web addresses are under either “Content” or “Links” on the course web site (check both before you panic!).
- Please note that this schedule is subject to change depending on circumstances. It is the student’s responsibility to attend class and check email regularly to be sure to keep up with any changes.

week one

Wednesday, 1/23—Introductions, syllabus, anthology, etc.

Reading for Monday:

Wilson, Jason. (2000). “Foreword: Why travel stories matter.” From *The Best American Travel Writing 2000*, pp. xi-xvii. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Garrison, B. (1999). “Finding a good feature article idea.” In *Professional Feature Writing* (3rd ed.), pp. 33-59. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Extra credit assignment: Who is Daniel Ellsberg and what is his significance to journalism? (No Wikipedia answers, please! In your one-page response, please cite the sources of your information, making sure they are authoritative and credible!)

Response #1: “What is culture?” (due 1/28)

week two

Monday, 1/28—Responses due. Discussion of excellence in travel writing, definitions of culture and cultural crossing.

Daniel Ellsberg classroom visit (major participation points for good questions!)

Readings for Wednesday:

Jones, Alden. (2000). "Lard is good for you." From *Coffee Journal*, published in *The Best American Travel Writing 2000*, pp. 107-119. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

O'Rourke, P. J. (2000). "Weird karma." From *Men's Journal*, published in *The Best American Travel Writing 2000*, pp. 145-157. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Elliott, Andrea. (2006). "A Muslim leader in Brooklyn, reconciling two worlds." *The New York Times*. Under "Content" on course web site. If you have an online subscription to the *Times*, you can access this story at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/nyregion/05imam.html?ex=1187150400&en=acaaf638bc60cf92&ei=5070>

Wednesday, 1/30— Reading responses due; discussion of how to create a sense of place; discussion of theses and angles.

Begin working on story ideas for first two stories: personal experience and profile.

Reading for Monday:

Molnar, J. (1991). "The art of travel writing." In L. Witt (Ed.), *The complete book of feature writing*, pp. 157-165. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

Zinsser, W. (1985). "Writing about a place." In *On writing well*, 3rd ed., pp. 96-109. New York: Harper & Row.

Dillard, Annie. (1993). "The deer at Providencia." In *Maiden voyages*, pp. 417-422. New York: Vintage.

week three

Monday, 2/4— Reading responses due.

Short writing assignment #1—A sense of place (begin in class)

Reading for Wednesday:

Osborne, Lawrence. (2005, April 18). "Strangers in the forest." In *The New Yorker*, Vol. 81, No. 9, pp. 124-141.

Wednesday, 2/6— Reading responses due; writing assignment #1 due in class; workshopping of stories.

Cannibal Tours (67 min)

Readings for Monday:

Lavenda, Robert H., & Schultz, Emily A. (2003). Chapter 2: "Culture" and Chapter 4: "Culture and the Individual." In *Core concepts in cultural anthropology*, pp. 13-29 and 51-66.

Boston: McGraw-Hill.

week four

Monday, 2/11—Reading responses due in class. Student presentation #1:

*De Uriarte, M. L. (2003). "A problematic press: Latinos and the news." In *Journalism across cultures* (Eds. F. Cropp, C. M. Frisby, and D. Mills), pp. 39-64. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Reading for Wednesday:

Bacher, Sterling. (2004). "Trespassing for beauty." Story written for 19:120; reprinted with the permission of the author.

Wednesday, 2/13—Responses to readings due; UI librarians Jennifer Raghavan and Von Yeager will discuss how to do cross-cultural research for journalism. **This is a crucially important presentation**—be sure to attend!

Readings for Monday:

Garrison, B. (1999). "Personal experience articles." In *Professional feature writing*, 3rd ed., pp. 355-376. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wilson, John M. (1993). "Those first crucial words." In *The complete guide to magazine article writing*, pp. 94-113. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

week five

Monday, 2/18—Response to reading; discussion of writing personal experience pieces; Story #1 guidelines handed out. Brainstorming of story ideas.

For Wednesday:

Work on story #1. Outline and source list due 2/20.

Wednesday, 2/20— Brainstorming of story ideas, continued, if necessary.

Discussion of story #1 progress; bring an outline and list of sources to class to turn in. We'll go over questions and concerns, and we may spend some time in class compiling additional sources based on Monday's presentation from the librarians.

Basil Talbott visits class.

Readings for Monday:

Parts 1 and 2 ("The decision" and "The separation") of "The Boy Monk" by Anh Do and Teri Sforza, from *The Orange County Register*, January 19-22, 2003. Access the article under "Links" on the class web site, or at <http://www.ocregister.com/features/monk>.

week six

Monday, 2/25—Reading responses due in class. Story workshoping guidelines handed out.

Student presentation #2: *Cropp, F. (2003). "From a troubled past to a confused present: The need for better coverage of Asian Americans." In *Journalism across cultures* (Eds. F. Cropp, C. M. Frisby, and D. Mills), pp. 221-240. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Readings for Wednesday:

Parts 3 and 4 of "The Boy Monk" from *The Orange County Register*

Heider, Don. News coverage. In *White news: Why local news programs don't cover people of color*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000.

Wednesday, 2/27—Reading responses due in class.

Please note: A draft of story #1 (personal experience) needs to be uploaded to the web site by 5 p.m. on Friday, 2/29; you need to read your group members' drafts by Monday.

week seven

Monday, 3/3— Story #1 workshoped in class

Wednesday, 3/5— Student presentation #3: *Pipper, W. G. (2003). Media coverage of Arabs and Arab Americans." In *Journalism across cultures* (Eds. F. Cropp, C. M. Frisby, and D. Mills), pp. 65-78. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Diane Hawkins visits class

Readings for Monday:

Allen, Charlotte. (1997). "Spies like us: When sociologists deceive their subjects." *Lingua Franca*, pp. 31-39.

week eight

Monday, 3/10—Final version of Story #1 (personal experience) due in class and in Dropbox Guidelines for Story #2 handed out in class

Student presentation #4: "Spies like us."

Readings for Wednesday:

Garrison, B. (1999). "Profiles and personality sketches." In *Professional feature writing*, 3rd ed., pp. 175-202. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wednesday, 3/12— Writing personality profiles; come to class with *confirmed* ideas for a personality profile about someone from another culture. These should be submitted in writing—short paragraphs explaining why the person is worth profiling, what the fresh angle on the story is, whether there's a bigger picture or thesis to the story, and how the topic relates to the class.

Readings for Monday:

Gorney, Cynthia. (2004, July 5). A feel for the water. *The New Yorker*, pp. 70-79.

Kramer, Jane. (2003, January 20). Refugee. *The New Yorker*, pp. 64-73.

Miller, K. (1991). "Interviewing techniques: Getting them to talk." In L. Witt (Ed.), *The complete book of feature writing*, pp. 61-76. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

week nine

3/17-3/21: Spring Break! Get some r&r!

week ten

Monday, 3/24—Student presentation #5: *Lamsam, T. T., and McAuliffe, Jr., D. (2003). Taking the mystery out of Native American coverage. In *Journalism across cultures* (Eds. F. Cropp, C. M. Frisby, and D. Mills), pp. 131-158. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Wednesday, 3/26—Draft of Story #2 due in class (hard copy) and online at 1:30 p.m.

week eleven

Monday, 3/31—First draft of Story #2 workshopped in class

Wednesday, 4/2— Mike Hall visits class.

week twelve

Monday, 4/7— Final version of Story #2 must be uploaded by 5 p.m.

Readings for Wednesday:

Harriet McBryde Johnson. (2003, February 16). Unspeakable conversations (Should I have been killed at birth?) *New York Times Magazine*. Under "Content" on the course web site; don't forget to check out her picture, which is also uploaded. Or you can find the story at: <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/843688/posts>

Wednesday, 4/9— Student presentation #6: *Wisner-Gross, E. (2003). "People with disabilities." In *Journalism across cultures* (Eds. F. Cropp, C. M. Frisby, and D. Mills), pp. 203-220. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Discussion of final story

Readings for Monday:

Chapters 1-5 of *The Spirit Catches You*

week thirteen

Monday, 4/14—Outline of final story due in class (with sources); discussion of final story outlines

Responses to readings due in class

Readings for Wednesday: Chapters 6-8 of *Spirit*.

Wednesday, 4/16—Discussion of final story outlines (continued)

Readings for Monday:

Chapters 9-15 of *Spirit*

week fourteen

Monday, 4/21—Reading responses due

Student presentation #7: * Collins, K. S. (2003). "Just don't call 'em 'Old Folks.'" In *Journalism across cultures* (Eds. F. Cropp, C. M. Frisby, and D. Mills), pp. 113-130. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Wednesday, 4/23—First draft of final story must be uploaded by 1:30 p.m.

Reading for Monday: Chapters 16-19 of *Spirit*

week fifteen

Monday, 4/28— Final reading responses due.

Workshop first draft of final story in class

Wednesday, 4/30—Work on final story

week sixteen

Monday, 5/5—Work on final story; optional second draft of final story can be shown to Gigi for comments. Groups are also free to workshop their second drafts.

Wednesday, 5/7—Final stories due in class; wrap-up, evaluations, etc.

**Good luck with your further adventures in writing across cultures!
Send a postcard!**