MCOM 3309.001

Feature Writing
Stephen F. Austin State University | Fall 2023
TR 12:30pm-1:45pm | Boynton Building 202

Instructor: Cassandra Hayes, Ph.D., M.F.A. (Dr. Hayes)
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Available for office hours Mondays 1pm-4pm, Wednesdays 1pm-3pm (Last hr each day in BO 202) or by appointment: https://cassandra-12.youcanbook.me/

Catalog Description
Types of special articles and writing techniques best adapted to marketing material in newspapers and magazines.

Course Description
As with any form of journalism, feature writing relies on facts. However, with features, you need to craft those facts into a compelling narrative, full of insight and inspiring reflection. In this course, we will explore the development, impact, and craft of feature writing for newspapers and magazines, as well as learning marketing and pitching techniques for your work. At its core, this course will be centered on storytelling, developing your skills at weaving experience into narrative.

Course Format & Required Materials
Regular attendance and participation are mandatory for this face-to-face course. Attendance will be taken by either in-class prompts or writing exercises. Please come prepared to every class with some paper (ideally, a notebook you use throughout the course) and something to write with.

You are required to subscribe to one print magazine of your choice throughout the semester. You will use this magazine in in-class activities and for your feature presentation. If getting access to a magazine will be a financial burden, please talk to me about an alternative.

Suggested readings include:
- *Feature Writing: The Pursuit of Excellence* by Edward Jay Friedlander

Active communication is key to your success in this course: reach out to me, your peers, on campus resources, or consult additional resources I provide for help completing assignments. Although succeeding in the course remains your responsibility, I want to set you up to succeed—do not hesitate to reach out for help, assignment feedback, clarification, etc.

Program Learning Outcomes
1. Demonstrate the ability to write effectively across a variety of platforms appropriate to the discipline.
2. Gather, analyze, organize and synthesize discipline-appropriate research and communication information about it.
3. Understand the role of media in society.
4. Comprehend the legal and ethical principles relating to media.
5. Demonstrate the application of media technology, terminology, and techniques,

**Student Learning Outcomes**
1. Demonstrate journalistic writing skills across print, broadcast, and online platforms.
2. Understand and utilize research and investigative techniques for news stories across multiple platforms.
3. Demonstrate the ability to utilize contemporary newsgathering and writing technology.
4. Demonstrate how to create and present a story simultaneously in print, broadcast, and online platforms.

**Assignments and Grading Scale**

**Points Breakdown**
Total points 1000, broken down as follows:
- Attendance (100 points)
- Feature Presentation (100 points)
- Feature-Length Interview (100 points)
- Personal Profile (150 points)
- Collaborative Memoir (100 points total)
- Longform Feature (200 points)
- Query Letter/Pitch Email (50 points)
- Final Portfolio (200 points)

**Grading Scale**
Your final course grade will be comprised of a weighted average, using the following grading scale. Grades are not rounded up.

- **A = 90% - 100% Excellent. (900-1000 points)**
  Mastery of the assignment/concepts at the highest level of attainment.
- **B = 80% - 89.9% Good. (800-899 points)**
  Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment.
- **C = 70% - 79.9% Average. (700-799 points)**
  An acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment.
- **D = 60% - 69.9% Inferior. (600-699 points)**
  A marginal performance; a minimal passing level of attainment.
- **F = 0% - 59.9% Failure. (0-599 points)**
  Unacceptable performance revealing almost no understanding of content.

**Attendance**
Attendance is mandatory, as much of class time will be dedicated to providing the practice and skillset needed to complete your assignments. I will be grading attendance points for engagement via in-class prompts and writing exercises. In addition, for each assignment we will discuss examples from your subscribed magazine in class. Come prepared with the magazine on the days of these discussions, as marked on the syllabus. You will NOT receive attendance points without participating in class activities and discussions.

**Feature Presentation**
You must choose one feature article from your subscribed magazine and give a brief presentation (10-15 minutes) on the article—its writing style, structure, content, and context. More information will be given on this in the first few weeks of the course.

**Feature-Length Interview**
In many popular magazines, a reporter’s interview with the monthly cover star is the centerfold story. Interviewing is an important skill for all forms of journalism, but especially so when the interview is the story. For this assignment, you will interview a person of your choosing and write a Q&A article. Pick an interesting person, someone who you feel has an interesting story and take on life. Be realistic about who you approach and have back up plans ready. You must include an 100-200-word introduction to the edited interview transcript.

**Personal Profile**
For this assignment, craft a profile of an interesting or otherwise noteworthy individual. This can be someone you know well or not at all—but make sure you know about the person well enough to craft an insightful and compelling narrative about them. You must interview the profiled person for this assignment. Your profile should be 1,000-3,000 words.

**Collaborative Memoir**
Personal writing can be a great way to express your experiences and get in the groove of narrative journalistic writing, appropriate for features. For this assignment, I want you to creatively use Chat-GPT or a similar tool to collaboratively write a flash memoir story, no more than 750 words.

**Longform Feature**
Write a feature article on the topic of your choosing. You must pitch this story midway through the course. The article will be 2,000 words minimum, 5,000 words maximum. You will have a minimum of three non-human sources and two human sources. The topic can be anything—an event, a person, a trend, a historical piece, etc., though I suggest choosing something very specific and narrow, even if it at first seems too mundane. Choose something you are passionate about and that has depth enough to keep you interested through several weeks.

**Query Letter/Pitch Email**
Craft a query letter/ pitch email for your longform feature. Be sure to be specific regarding the publication you are submitting to, and use concepts and structure discussed in class.

**Final Portfolio**
The final portfolio for this course involves compiling revised versions of all your assignments into one Word document or PDF. Also include a 300–500-word explanation of your revisions and development as a feature writer over the semester as well as a 1-2 sentence mission statement for yourself as a writer. You must present your final portfolio in the last week of class, reading for 2-5 minutes from your favorite passage written for the course and explaining your development and mission as a writer.

**A note on formatting & style:** All writing assignments should be in Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, single-spaced with one line of extra space in between paragraphs, turned in online as a Word document, and adhering to the latest AP style. Your name must appear on the document. Failure to implement this style or going over the maximum word count (if specified) will result in a letter grade off your assignment.
Course and Campus Policies

Late Work
A one-week grace period will be given for all assignments except the final portfolio, to allow for technical glitches or other issues that may delay you turning in your work. Beyond the grace period, no late work will be accepted.

Extra Credit
Pitch your work to a magazine, submit your work to a literary journal, or post one of your pieces on Medium (https://medium.com/). You can pitch/submit/publish one of your pieces from this class or develop a new story idea. Please forward me proof of pitching, submittal, or publication via my email. This option is worth up to 50 points and must be completed by the last class day of the course. (If you pitch or submit, you do not need to be accepted to get the points, but the submission must be professional and serious. I highly recommend working with me to edit your work before pitching/submitting/publishing.)

Generative-AI Tools (such as Chat-GPT)
I do not mind if you use AI tools such as Chat GPT to provide structure or basic editing/proofreading for your writing. However, you must NOT use these tools to generate ideas with no reflection or direction from your own mind and you may NOT use these tools to draft a document. I want YOUR ideas and YOUR voice in your work in this class. Producing unoriginal work will result in a 0 on the assignment. A good rule of thumb is to be transparent about your use of AI tools. We will learn how to incorporate Chat-GPT and similar tools ethically in this course.

Questions about Grades
I welcome questions about grades, so please reach out if you would like clarification. However, I ask that you wait for 24 hours after receiving your grade before talking with me about it. This “cool off” period is required before I will meet with you. Afterwards, you have a week to talk with me about the grade; after a week, I will consider the issue closed. All discussions of grades must take place via videoconference or, depending on our situation, in person.

Students with Disabilities
To obtain disability-related accommodations, alternate formats, and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services promptly may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/.

Grade Withheld Policy (Semester Grades, Policy 5.5)
Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the coursework because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and
will be counted as a repeated course to compute the grade point average. For additional information, go to https://www.sfasu.edu/policies/course-grades-5.5.pdf.

Academic Integrity
The Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity outlines the prohibited conduct by any student enrolled in a course at SFA. It is the responsibility of all members of all faculty, staff, and students to adhere to and uphold this policy.

Articles IV, VI, and VII of the new Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity outline the violations and procedures concerning academic conduct, including cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and misrepresentation. Cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1) Copying from the test paper (or other assignment) of another student, (2) Possession and/or use during a test of materials that are not authorized by the person giving the test, (3) Using, obtaining, or attempting to obtain by any means the whole or any part of a non-administered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program, or using a test that has been administered in prior classes or semesters without permission of the Faculty member, (4) Substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for one's self, to take a test, (5) Falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other records or academic work offered for credit, (6) Using any sort of unauthorized resources or technology in completion of educational activities.

Plagiarism is the appropriation of material that is attributable in whole or in part to another source or the use of one's own previous work in another context without citing that it was used previously, without any indication of the original source, including words, ideas, illustrations, structure, computer code, and other expression or media, and presenting that material as one's own academic work being offered for credit or in conjunction with a program course or degree requirements.

Collusion is the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any provision of the rules on academic dishonesty, including disclosing and/or distributing the contents of an exam.

Misrepresentation is providing false grades or résumés; providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit for oneself or another individual or to injure another student academically or financially.

Student Wellness and Well-Being
SFA values students’ overall well-being, mental health and the role it plays in academic and overall student success. Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, emotional well-being, alcohol and other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help, SFA provides a variety of resources to support students’ mental health and wellness. Many of these resources are free, and all of them are confidential.

On-campus Resources:
The Dean of Students Office (Rusk Building, 3rd floor lobby)
The Health and Wellness Hub “The Hub”
Location: corner of E. College and Raguet St.

To support the health and well-being of every Lumberjack, the Health and Wellness Hub offers comprehensive services that treat the whole person – mind, body and spirit. Services include:

- Health Services
- Counseling Services
- Student Outreach and Support
- Food Pantry
- Wellness Coaching
- Alcohol and Other Drug Education

Crisis Resources:
- Burke 24-hour crisis line: 1.800.392.8343
- National Suicide Crisis Prevention: 9-8-8
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
- johCrisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741-741
### Course Schedule
(subject to change)

**Due dates bolded and in red.**

*Required discussions of magazine articles bolded, italicized, and in blue.*

**Note on readings:** Many of the articles we discuss in class and you encounter in magazines may deal with very serious subject matter. If you are uncomfortable listening to any of the content or if you sign up for an article to present and do not feel comfortable with the subject matter, feel free to step outside and/or let me know.

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<th>Week/Date &amp; Topics</th>
<th>To Do</th>
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<td><strong>Module 1—Introduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Read Course Syllabus</strong></td>
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| Week 1  
  - Tues., Aug. 29—Syllabus & Intro  
  - Thurs., Aug. 31—What is Feature Writing? | |
| **Module 2—The Art of Interviewing** | **Example of feature-length interview due in class Sept. 7.** |
| Week 2  
  - Tues., Sept. 5—Preparing an Interview  
  - Thurs., Sept. 7—Conducting an Interview | |
| Week 3  
  - Tues., Sept. 12—Interview Examples  
  - Thurs., Sept. 14—Editing an Interview | **Feature-Length Interview Due by 11:59pm Fri., Sept. 15** |
| **Module 3—Capturing Human Interest** | **Example of profile due in class Sept. 21.** |
| Week 4  
  - Tues., Sept. 19—Who to Profile  
  - Thurs., Sept. 21—Profile Anatomy | |
| Week 5  
  - Tues., Sept. 26—Storytelling Elements  
  - Thurs., Sept. 28—Developing a Theme/Why | |
| Week 6  
  - Tues., Oct. 3—Profile Work  
  - Thurs., Oct. 5—Profile Peer Review | **Personal Profile Due by 11:59pm Fri., Oct. 6** |
| **Module 4—Tour of Feature Writing** | [FEATURE PRESENTATIONS TBA] |
| Week 7  
  - Tues., Oct. 10—Narrative Journalism | |
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| Module 5—Feature Reporting | Week 10  
- Tues., Oct. 31—Longform Feature Idea Workshop  
- Thurs., Nov. 2—Using Observations  

Module 6—Marketing Feature Writing | Week 14  
- Tues., Nov. 28—Freelancing/Marketing Skills  
- Thurs., Nov. 30—Query/Pitch Bootcamp  

Week 15  
- Tues., Dec. 5—Final Portfolio Presentations  
- Thurs., Dec. 7—Final Portfolio Presentations  

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**Final Portfolio Due Thursday, Dec. 14 at 11:59pm**