

Long-Form Feature Writing (Spring 2014)
J337F (08030)/J395 (08250)
MWF: 10-11
CMA 6.146

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Office Hours: MW, 1:30-3, or by appointment

Description:

A class exploring long-form journalism for print, online and books. A class exploring the use of narrative, immersion, profile/biography, plots, back stories and voice. Attention will be paid to studying successful long-form writers.

- ***This course carries the **Independent Inquiry flag**.
- ***This course carries the **Writing Flag**.

Objectives/Goals:

To work on finding and developing long-form stories for magazines and nonfiction books. To study the basics of long-form journalism.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will learn to identify, report and write accurate long-form stories, as required to practice effectively as a professional in print or digital mediums.
2. Students will be open to diversity in subjects, sources.
3. Students will understand ethical principles regarding the practice of long-form journalism.

Work:

You will work on one story. You will work on drafts of it over the semester. You will turn in these four things:

- A 300-word “story pitch” for your story
- A 1,000-word draft or “work in progress”
- A 2,000-word draft or “work in progress”
- A finished work of 3,000 words, due the last week of class.

Class Participation: This is a writing workshop. You will be expected to read and comment on work done by your colleagues in the world of long-form writing – the ones sitting next to you in the classroom and the outside writers whose work we will be reading.

****Please do not use your laptops and cell phones**

Grades:

Are determined by these things:

1. Class participation, including presenting story ideas, constructive criticism of work done by your colleagues and outside writers, visits to office hours, etc.
2. Instructor evaluation of your written work, with use of Assessment Grid (attached):
 - Needs very minor editing & shows proof of some combination of solid reporting, revising, storytelling: A
 - Needs major editing or major additional reporting (**but not both**): B
 - Needs major revision **and** major additional reporting: C
 - Some minimal effort at writing or reporting: D
 - No serious effort at writing or reporting: F
 - University policy allows use of “plus” and “minus” grades.
 - Please Note: You will be allowed to revise your first three written assignments, within one week of getting them returned to you.
3. Deadlines: Late work will not be accepted and an F will be issued if you miss a deadline. (See the instructor if there are special circumstances).
4. Attendance: If you miss three classes without advance notice, your course grade can be dropped one level. Visits to office are encouraged.

Grade Grid:

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| ▪ Story pitch | 10 percent |
| ▪ First Draft | 20 percent |
| ▪ Second Draft | 20 percent |
| ▪ Final Draft | 30 percent |
| ▪ Class participation | 20 percent |

How Pitches/Drafts Must Look:

All Stories must be **Double-Spaced** and submitted as a **Word Document** (not PDF) to instructor via email. Put these 4 things at top of your story:

- Your name
- Instructor Name/Course Name
- The Date
- One of these: Story Pitch, Draft #1, Draft #2 or Final Story.

Example:

Rocky A\$AP
Minutaglio/Long-form
9/15/14
Story Pitch

Religious Holy Days Observance Policy:

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

Students with Disabilities:

Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities. Students may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities.

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:

Long-form writing has many temptations. Especially in the realm of literary license. Do not plagiarize, make up quotes or make up facts. Do not embellish your stories with mistruths, untruths. Write creatively but do not write fiction.

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University.

THE UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE:

“The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.”

SCHEDULE (subject to changes):

Aug. 27:

- Introductions
- Syllabus Review
- **Assignment: *Story Pitch*** – a 300-word, heavily researched, thought out, smartly written proposal to an editor of a publication that routinely runs long-form journalism. Choose your publication, study it, see stories they run – and write a pitch that will appeal to them. ***You Cannot Phone This In*** – you have to do some research, some heavy thinking and concise writing. **DUE SEPT. 15**

Aug. 29:

- What do YOU mean by “long-form journalism?”
- Relevancy of long-form in a short-form age

Sept. 1: Holiday

Sept. 3:

- What key elements would *you* consider putting in your long-form journalism: Intimate details, unfolding action, back stories, recreation, voice, and sense of place?
- A primogenitor: W.C. Heinz, “Death of a Racehorse,” 1949

Sept. 5:

- Before you begin to write: The long-form gut check & your ethical compass
- Stephen Glass at the long-form crossroads: “Hack Heaven,” New Republic, 1998

Sept. 8:

- *A sine qua non*: John Hersey, “Hiroshima,” The New Yorker, 1946.

Sept. 10:

- Sketching Your Characters/Protagonists
- Jimmy Breslin, “The Man Who Dug JFK’s Grave,” 1963

Sept. 12:

- Sketching Characters/Protagonists in Milieus: Erik Larson, "Isaac's Storm," 1999

Sept. 15:

- **DUE:** Story Pitches
- Screened, critiqued. Everyone is expected to weigh in.
- **ASSIGNED: First story draft, due Oct. 13. 1,000 words.**

Sept. 17:

- More story pitches screened, critiqued

Sept. 19:

- More story pitches screened, critiqued

Sept. 22:

- Sketching Characters/Protagonists in modern/local milieus: Gary Smith, "The Power of One," Sports Illustrated, 2009.

Sept. 24:

- An Austin-based long-form writer talks about A Sense of Place. Shermakaye Bass: Veteran freelancer for The New York Times, National Geographic, Daily Beast, People, etc. (Tentative)

Sept. 26:

- Baking in The Context/Big History: Lauren Hillenbrand, "Seabiscuit," 2001.

Sept. 29:

- Action Observed & Recreated: Bill Minutaglio, "First Son: George W. Bush & The Bush Family Dynasty," Times Books/Random House, 2001.

Oct. 1:

- Outlines & Plot Maps

Oct. 3:

- The North Star: Does your story sustain? Does it run out of gas?
- Real and Symbolic “thunderclap” sentences, paragraphs, chapter endings – the effectiveness of economy in language (from Hemingway to Hunter S. Thompson)

Oct. 6:

- Long-form possibilities in the hard news: David Kushner, “Dead End on Silk Road: Internet Crime Kingpin Ross Ulbricht’s Big Fall,” Rolling Stone, 2014

Oct. 8:

- Problem Solving: Your first draft is due soon and we’ll have an Editorial Budget Meeting, in which every writer gives a status report, reads their ‘working lead’ and names the ‘biggest problem’ they are facing with their story.

Oct. 10:

- Immersion Long-Form: Kira Salak, “Hell and Back,” National Geographic Adventure, 2006

Oct. 13:

- **DUE**: First Story draft.
- Screened, critiqued
- **Assigned**: Second Story draft, due Nov. 10.

Oct. 15:

- More drafts screened, critiqued

Oct. 17:

- More drafts screened, critiqued

Oct. 20:

- In Class Writing Exercise: Narrative Recreation

Oct. 22:

- In Class Writing Exercise: Narrative Recreation

Oct. 24:

- The Art of Using Your Voice: Joan Didion, "Salvador," 1982

Oct. 27:

- Pacing and Plot Twists: Robert Kurson, "Into The Light," Esquire, 2005

Oct. 29:

- Mixing & marrying immersion journalism: Bill Minutaglio, "In Search Of The Blues," an anthology of long-form journalism by Minutaglio previously published in magazines and newspapers, University of Texas Press, 2010

Oct. 31:

- Writing about the forces of nature, as done by John Graves, "Goodbye To A River," 1960
- Rick Bass, "Caribou Rising," 2004.

Nov. 3:

- The elusive personality: Scott Raab, "Be My Baby: The Phil Spector Story," Esquire, 2003; Lisa Taddeo, "Jay-Z: It Takes a Harmless, Hand-Built Gangster to Run this Town," Esquire, 2010

Nov. 5:

- Clay Smith, chief reviewer for Kirkus, former literary director of the Texas Book Festival (tentative)

Nov. 7:

- Deciphering inscrutable protagonists: Susan Orlean, "The American Man Age of Ten," Esquire, 1992

Nov. 10:

- **DUE:** Story Draft #2; screened, critiqued

Nov. 12:

- More drafts screened, critiqued
- **Assigned:** Final Draft due Dec. 5

Nov. 14:

- More drafts screened, critiqued

Nov. 17:

- Classic Tick-Tock Observed: Jon Franklin's "Mrs. Kelly's Monster," 1979

Nov. 19:

- Recreated Tick-Tock: Bill Minutaglio's "City on Fire," 2003

Nov. 21:

- Modern Masters: Buzz Bissinger, "Friday Night Lights"; Jon Krakauer, "Into Thin Air" & "Into The Wild"; Sebastian Junger, "The Perfect Storm"

Nov. 24:

- Long-form investigations, hard news: Rolling Stone's Mark Binelli and Matt Taibbi, 2010-2014

Nov. 26:

- Do not report to Room 6.146 today. Use this day for last-minute, off-campus reporting on your final story

Nov. 28: Holiday, no class

Dec. 1:

- Screening & Discussion: Video about former J School student Jacob Payne, who wanted to be a new long-form voice

Dec. 3:

- More Resources: Longform.org, Nieman
- New Outlets: Byliner.com, Grantland, Longreads.com, etc.

Dec. 5:

- **DUE**: Final Story
- Goodbyes, parting gifts

APPENDIX

Assessment Grid for Long-Form Journalism

In evaluating your written work, the instructor will use the following framework:

1. The work shows vivid writing and is not clichéd

0 1 2 3 4

2. The work is accurate, not invented

0 1 2 3 4

3. The work demonstrates a clear and consistent theme

0 1 2 3 4

4. The work is easy to follow and requires minimal editing

0 1 2 3 4

5. Grammar, spelling and punctuation are correct

0 1 2 3 4

6. The work has, when needed, a sense of time elapsing – a plot

0 1 2 3 4

7. The work has **BOTH** intimate details and a larger “sweep” or perspective

0 1 2 3 4

8. The work has, when appropriate, recreated but sourced history

0 1 2 3 4

9. The work has a clear and vivid depiction of a place or milieu

0 1 2 3 4