

**Spring 2014**

**J332G/J395: Explanatory Journalism: Storytelling in a Digital Age**

**Classes**      T/Th 2-3:30 CMA 4.146  
**Lab**            F      9-11      CMA 4.146

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**Description & Objectives**

“One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way.”

– Poet and storyteller Ben Okri

“Tell me something I don’t know.” Almost forever, good editors have asked reporters for stories that leap off the page and lodge themselves indelibly in readers’ minds. Stories that illuminate corners of the world and human experience people would not otherwise see. Stories that, in the words of an old editor of mine, “levitate.”

Where do we find such tales? In my experience, we find them wherever our deep curiosity leads us. They can be about war, politics, crime or any other issue of importance to the immediate public interest. Or they can delve into areas that simply tell us something interesting about our world – like the NPR music story a while back that, of all things, shed light on the secret history of the tuba.

To tell such stories effectively, yes, we need to get our facts straight. But to make stories memorable, we also need to access what Tom Wolfe calls the “emotional core” of a story – exactly how and to what extent human beings and their experiences are bound up with the issue under your storyteller’s microscope.

Together we will learn how to find such stories, explore time-honored techniques for telling them, and examine new ways of interactive storytelling by which consumers of journalism take on greater responsibility to explain things to themselves.

In sum, the goal of this course is to come up with nonfiction stories we *really* want to tell, to tell them well, and to think hard about the processes and techniques that help us to do

so. The course will help you establish habits for thinking deeply about the storytelling process, from the spark of an idea through to the finished tale – stories that levitate.

There's a concrete goal as well: To publish as many of our stories as possible on Reporting Texas.

Along the way, we will learn to:

- Define what constitutes *really good stories* that you want to tell and people want to hear, see and read.
- Think critically about your choice of topics.
- Identify the best tools for telling the story you want to tell.
- Hone thinking, writing and production skills.
- Study and practice techniques for adding quality to your stories.
- Consider the role of ethics in explanatory storytelling as it relates to fairness, accuracy and truth seeking in a digital age.

### **Course Mechanics**

**Focus:** Consider this course a thinking person's professional workshop. We will think as hard as we can about why as journalists we do what we do and how we can do it best. We'll look for stories that *you* want to tell on the assumption that if you're truly interested in something you can, by employing good technique, make other people interested too. You will produce one long-form story (print or multimedia) at the end of the semester after working methodically through the steps necessary to get there – from inspiration and reporting to organizing, drafting and editing.

**Organization:** In hunting for good stories to tell, we will decide as individuals and a group what we want to work on, how and with whom. The starting assumption is that most people will want to work on projects as individuals. If you want to work on a team to produce an editorial package, that's fine too—but we will want to make clear what constitutes a fair, equitable and substantive division of labor among team members. We will devote a portion of class time to editorial meetings in which we decide how to proceed and help one another sort out any challenges that arise.

**What it's not:** This is *not* a course that will teach you new multimedia software skills you will then use to tell stories. In fact, the purpose is exactly the opposite. We will think about how to exploit our collective toolkit by choosing the right tools to best tell your particular story. In so doing, we hope to exploit the variety of storytelling talents of the individuals on our team and learn something from one another as we go. In short, the tools will not dictate the work; the work will dictate the choice of tools.

## Classes

Our regular class meets for 1½ hours twice a week. As I say, think of it as a multifaceted editorial meeting in which we will:

- Start every Tuesday with a discussion of world, national and local news, and how it relates to our work. We call this “News of the Week.” **News outlets to follow (minimum): The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, Al Jazeera English, BBC World News and Reuters.**
- Start every Thursday with a discussion of nonfiction stories you will pull from any source anywhere (e.g., magazines, newspapers, books) *because they appeal to you*. We call this “Stories We Like” and you will be responsible for presenting your story to the class and saying why you chose it and what we have to learn from it.
- Build up our intellectual capital for acquiring a better command of what story possibilities the world holds and how to discover and act on them.
- Workshop our reporting, writing and production techniques, according to the Course Schedule below.
- Vet any professional or technical challenges that arise in the course of your story development or review material covered in earlier sessions.
- Entertain guest speakers when the opportunity arises.

## Labs

Our Friday lab is our “newsroom” –the key place for you to interact with your editors, Tracy and Gabino, and get guidance on your reporting and production work. Interaction with editors and other journalists is an important part of the human “software” that makes the editorial enterprise go – so be sure to take advantage of the opportunity.

**Important:** You are required to attend at least eight Friday lab sessions during the semester, including the three required sessions listed immediately below and underlined in the course schedule. Attendance will be taken. **You are strongly encouraged to attend all sessions, as the labs are critical to your success in refining your storytelling skills.** One-on-one meetings with your instructor or TA should not be viewed as a substitute for attending lab sessions. If you have a time conflict that limits your participation in lab sessions, you should consider dropping the course.

**Mandatory labs: Jan. 24, Feb. 7 and Feb. 14.**

## Assignments

**Part One:** Individual assignments will focus on the natural stages of bringing to life a good story: coming up with winning ideas; introducing your ideas in proposal form; developing *the* idea through researching and reporting; organizing your information;

drafting your story; editing it; and producing a final story that we (and others) like. To that end, we will produce the following:

- **Assign 1: Initial list of story ideas (due: Jan. 23, 6 p.m.)** 50 pts.
- **Assign 2: Story proposals, the first two (due: Feb. 6, 6 p.m.)** 100 pts.
- **Assign 3: Story proposals, the final one (due: Feb. 17, 6 p.m.)** 100 pts.
- **Assign 4: Reporter’s blueprint (due: March 6, 6 p.m.)** 50 pts.
- **Assign 5: Outline + evolved blueprint (due: March 20, 6 p.m.)** 100 pts.
- **Assign 6: Story rough cut (due: April 3, 6 p.m.)** 100 pts.
- **Assign 7: Story fine cut (due: April 17, 6 p.m.)** 100 pts.
- **Assign 8: Story final (due: May 5, 12 noon)** 100 pts.
- **Class participation** 300 pts.

**Part Two: Graduate students:** In consultation with your instructor, grad students will read a book, view a documentary video or otherwise consider a significant piece of work that uses the techniques of explanatory journalism to examine its topic. They will then write a critique assessing the work, citing at least three outside sources to help develop the argument. Length: 800 words. **Deadline: On or before March 25, 6 p.m.**

**Part Three:** To help ensure productive in-class discussions, you will want to keep notes on your reading-listening-viewing assignments. The instructor reserves the right to require occasional “reflection papers” on the course material.

**Project Formats:** If your project of choice is print only, plan on producing a story of not less than 2,500 words (3,000 for graduate students) and not more than 3,500 words (4,000 for graduate students); if a photo essay, look to include 30 to 60 images in a storytelling format with captions and/or audio, and a print overview; if a video, plan to produce 8 to 10 minutes of edited AV, and a print overview; if a podcast, produce 6 to 12 minutes of edited audio, and a print overview. **Important: If you will be working in two or more formats, please consult your instructor on the appropriate parameters for you. And remember, quality, not necessarily quantity, is our ultimate goal.**

## Grades

1. **Timing:** Deadlines are sacrosanct in journalism and critical in any area of media production. Meet them and qualify your assignments for full credit; miss them and your highest potential grade will drop sharply – one grade level at each of the following benchmarks: 30 minutes, 12 hours, 24 hours late. Be aware that you can always file your assignments *before* deadline for extra credit.

2. **Assessment:** Assignments will be graded on the skill with which you use words and, where appropriate, images and sound; good organization; solidly reported content; and production skills to illustrate and satisfy your topic – and the degree to which you improve your skills over the course of the semester. **See Appendix I below for a detailed assessment grid.**

3. **The Matrix:** Final course grades will be calculated on the plus/minus grading system for both undergraduate and graduate students. They will be tallied according to the following percentage guidelines:

- **Developmental assignments** **40 %**
- **Semester project (total of all three drafts)** **30 %**
- **Class participation** **30 %**

### **Filing Your Work**

All written communication between you and your editors (instructor and TA) will be electronic. For routine memos (messages), use standard email. We will post all assignments (proposals, outlines, drafts) as “files” to Discussion Board on our Blackboard site. Also please file a copy of your assignment by email to Tracy and Gabino with the assignment sent as a Word attachment.

**Important: When filing an attachment always put the same slug on both your email and the Word attachment.**

Here’s how to create a proper slug:

Start by using the correct tag for the item you’re sending: For all assignments, it’s “file.” For all other messages, it’s “memo.” Add a space, then your last name, and then another space, and finally the assignment number (or for memos only, a brief topic identifier). If your last name is Smith, for example, and you’re filing your first assignment, the slug reads:

**file smith assign1**

If you’re sending a routine memo, it reads:

**memo smith missed deadline**

Please send all backup assignment files to both of your editors – one copy to Tracy, one to Gabino. Memos can of course be sent to either one or both, depending on to whom you want to talk about what.

**Important: Excepting memos, anything you write for this class (story proposals, blueprints or story drafts) must carry a working headline. Artfully summing up our storytelling efforts in a handful of words helps us focus – and focusing on what it is we want to say is half the battle in the effort to tell good stories.**

## Editorial Consultations

You will meet with your instructor at least once during the semester to discuss individual progress, reporting methods, research ideas and career goals. You are also encouraged to make use of office hours to discuss any of the foregoing.

## Readings

Reading, both panoramic and sharply focused, is essential to your success as a journalist. Formal reading assignments come from main two sources – required texts or materials provided for you on Blackboard.

**Important: Please do all the reading (or viewing or listening) assigned by the deadline for discussion so that we can make the best use of our class time.**

## Required Texts

*Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide From the Nieman Foundations at Harvard University*, edited by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call  
*The Art and Craft of Feature Writing*, by William E. Blundell

## Course Flags

This course carries two course flags in the undergraduate curriculum: Independent Inquiry and Writing. Independent Inquiry courses are designed to engage you in the process of inquiry over the course of a semester, providing you with the opportunity for independent investigation of a question, problem, or project related to your major. You should expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from such activities. Writing courses are, as the term implies, writing intensive, in which case a substantial part of your grade comes from your written work.

## Attendance & Rules of the Road

Showing up when you need to be there is a first requirement of the journalism professional. Come to class on time. Do your work. If you can't be on time, tell your instructor why – in advance.

**Important:** Please attend all classes. **If you accumulate three unexcused absences from regular classes, you should consider dropping the course.** (Please don't interpret this to mean you have three "free passes" – you don't. Each class period carries specific weight in your grade for class participation.) Being five minutes late equals half an absence. Fifteen minutes late is a full absence. Leaving class early will be treated the

same way. **Unexcused absences can be converted to excused absences when you present acceptable documentation – e.g., a note from a healthcare provider.**

**You are required to attend a minimum of eight lab sessions during the semester, including the mandatory sessions on Jan. 24, Feb. 7 and Feb. 14. Attending a lab means being there on time at 9 a.m. and staying for the entire session. The same rules of attendance for regular classes also apply to labs.**

**Professional courtesy:** Attention is the key to good intellectual and creative work. To help us maintain our focus, sharp and clear, use of electronic devices (cell phones, tablets, e-readers or laptops) is not permitted during class unless required for in-class assignments specifically approved by the instructor.

**If you require personal digital connectivity during class time, this is not the class for you.**

**Likewise, please don't consume food in class. Beverages are okay provided they don't prove a distraction.**

## **Our Roadmap**

The following class schedule is intended to provide a roadmap of the territory we will cover. At the same time, a map is a map, and we will speed up or slow down or change our direction depending on the “reality on the ground” – i.e., our progress as a class in mastering the requisite materials and techniques.

## COURSE INTRODUCTION: EXPLAINING WHAT TO WHOM AND WHY?

### Jan. 14      **Introduction I: Basic Questions**

What will this course cover? How will it be structured and how will it work? We will review the syllabus and talk about how you will source “News of the Week” and “Stories We Like.”

### 16              **Modalities I: Where the Old Meets the New**

What is explanatory journalism? How is evolving? What is the “explanatory continuum”? What are “storytelling essentials”? How do we pick the best tools best for telling our stories?

**Assigned**      Rachel McAthy: “How Long-Form Journalism is Getting ‘A New Lease of Life’ in the Digital World”

*Telling True Stories*, p. xv-xvii, 3-16

**In-class**      A brief tour of story modes and techniques

### 17              **NO LAB THIS WEEK**

### 21              **Dilemma I: Are We Really Headed for a Golden Age of Explanatory Storytelling – or Something Else?**

What is our “personal relationship with story”? What is the impact of the digital revolution on our storytelling traditions? What’s at stake?

**Assigned**      Colin Robinson: “The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Reader”

Sherry Turkle Interview: “Digital Disconnect: The Challenges of Constant Connectivity”

Suggested: Zadie Smith: “Generation Why”

### 23              **Dilemma II: Form Fights Substance – or Does It?**

Okay, conventional wisdom says Google is making us stupid and digital life leaves us with the attention span of fruit flies. To what extent *are* new modes of information delivery eclipsing or expanding our understanding?

Is it time to liberate ourselves from the forms and modes of the past?

**Assigned** New York Times team: “The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek”

Michael Kinsley: “Cut This Story!”

**24**      **LAB: HOW TO WRITE A GOOD PROPOSAL (REQUIRED)**

**TD Memo**      “Writing Proposals That Levitate”

**28**      **Dilemma III: Inform First, Then Explain – or Vice-Versa?**

What accounts for the difference between journalists explaining or obscuring the world for us? Is it possible the traditional order of news-thinking (news first, then explanation) is wrong? Let’s look at an argument for the role of the explanatory journalism going forward.

**Assigned**      PRESSthink: “A Job for Journalists...”

**30**      **Long-form Forms I: The Public Interest Explainer**

Where does this type of story fit on our “explanatory continuum”? What are some hallmarks of great explaining? Let’s first look at “enlightened public narrative.”

**Assigned**      NPR team: “The Giant Pool of Money”

**31**      **LAB: TAKING PROPOSALS TO THE NEXT STAGE**

**Feb. 4-6**      **Forms II: The Social Dynamic Narrative**

Combine a strong, sustained narrative, an evolving sociocultural event or trend, and the nonfiction techniques of a novel, and you arrive at a story form that sets out to tap the human core in the services of larger issues.

**Assigned**      Jacqui Banaszynski: “AIDS in the Heartland”

Andrea Elliott, photographs by Ruth Fremson: “Invisible Child,” Part I: “Girl in the Shadows: Dasani’s Homeless Life”

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**LAB: ARCHITECTURE I: STARTING YOUR REPORTER'S BLUEPRINT (REQUIRED)**

**Assigned** John McPhee: "Structure"

Optional: *The Art & Craft of Feature Writing*, p. 69-126

**TD memo:** "The Reporter's Blueprint"

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**Forms III: The Survival Narrative**

Just as there are different kinds of survival, there are different forms of writing about overcoming a physical challenge or living through a transitional time. We'll look at two examples.

**Assigned** Paul Tough: "Man Overboard"

Joan Didion: "Goodbye to All That"

13

**Forms IV: Pointillism and Literary Nonfiction**

Next come the "offbeat explainer" and the artfully angled profile. Do we need to make a case today for literary journalism?

**Assigned** Gay Talese: "New York Is a City of Things Unnoticed"

Gay Talese: "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold"

*Telling True Stories*, p. 65-78, 89-94

14

**LAB: REPORTING I: THE ART, CRAFT AND PSYCHOLOGY OF HANDLING OF SOURCES (REQUIRED)**

**Assigned** *Telling True Stories*, p. 24-45

Janet Malcolm: *The Journalist and the Murderer* (excerpt)

18

**Forms IV: Pointillism and Literary Nonfiction (Cont.)**

Let's continue our discussion of nonfiction with a literary flair.

**Assigned** Gay Talese: "New York Is a City of Things Unnoticed"

Gay Talese: “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold”

*Telling True Stories*, p. 65-78, 89-94

**20 Forms V: Working the Historical Profile**

The pros tell us that doing a good profile is not only a matter of interviewing your main subject but also the people who know him or her best and can deepen the depth of field. Historical and personal background research is important too.

**Assigned:** Errol Morris: “The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara”

*Telling True Stories*, p. 86-89

**21 LAB: MONITORING YOUR PROGRESS**

**25 Modalities II: Old and New Got Married – How’s It Going?**

We live in a moment of explanatory experimentation. What are the new forms of the craft? Which work, which don’t? Is it possible to see new directions?

**Assigned** BuzzFeed: “The Incredible Story of How a Reporter Followed an At-Risk Teenager All the Way to Yale”

Boston Globe team: “Brothers Seek a Way Up and Out”

**27 Nurturing Ideas I: Finding Out Where the Good Stories Live**

What are the standard approaches to coming up with winning story ideas? Do past techniques still work today? How do we get the reader “to invest”? How do we induce the “A-ha!” experience?

**Assigned** *Telling True Stories*, p. 19-24, 55-59

*The Art & Craft of Feature Writing*, p. ix-xii, 1-22

Bianca Giaver: “Holy Cow Lisa”

**28 LAB: DEVELOPING THE BLUEPRINT II**

**Mar. 4 Ideas II: Treasure Buried in the Mountain: Searching the Writerly Core**

If curiosity be the key, how do we exploit our own deep curiosity? What roles do myth and the psyche play in finding stories worth telling? How do we identify a story that rises internally?

**Reading** Christopher Booker: *The Seven Basic Plots*

**6 Reporting II: Thinking Your Story Through (And What Happens When You Don't)**

Stage your reporting properly and save yourself tons of wasted effort when you're in the field. How do we find the "right" direction? How do we identify sources and cultivate them?

**Assigned** *The Art & Craft of Feature Writing*, p. 23-68

**7 NO LAB THIS WEEK**

**SPRING BREAK**

**18 Architecture II: Methods and Chronology Revisited**

Explanatory work can be fun but is also fraught and fluid. You need a system. How do you find the one that works for you? Let's look again at how to handle source material, space and time.

**Assigned** *The John McPhee Reader*, "Introduction"

John McPhee: "Encounters with the Archdruid"

**20 Reporting III: Three Reasons Stories Fail – No Characters, No Conflict, Too Much "About"**

Put people first. Okay, but how do we know when we've found the right ones? Why is "viewpoint switching" so important and why do we often come up short? What is "About-itis" and why is it a problem?

**Assigned** *The Art & Craft of Feature Writing*, p. 13-22 (review)

**21 LAB: REVISTING YOUR REPORTER'S BLUEPRINT**

**25 Reporting IV: Striking a Balance "About" Something**

Stories aren't only about people and events; they also involve historical background and other elements that exist outside the narrative flow. How do we achieve proper balance between narrative and context?

**Assigned** *The Art & Craft of Feature Writing*, p. 127-157

**27 Architecture III: Crystallizing a Structure**

How do we translate our blueprint into a workable writing and production outline? Together, let's figure it out.

**Assigned** *Telling True Stories*, p. 97-121

**28 LAB: DRAFTING THE DRAFT OR TREATMENT**

**Apr. 1 Production I: Let's Talk About Our Writing**

So we've reported our story, organized our materials and our thoughts. Now comes the writing and production. Let's talk about how to make the writing part as painless as possible.

**Assigned** George Orwell: "Politics and the English Language"

**3 Production II: Contemplating "The Weave"**

One of the biggest challenges of telling narrative stories is to arrive at the right combination of ideas, examples and background. We'll talk about how to blend the necessary elements.

**Assigned** *Telling True Stories*, p. 125-159

**4 NO LAB THIS WEEK**

**8**                    **Forms VI: The In-Depth Essay and the Memoir**

Mastering the in-depth essay is a challenge – but can be fulfilling and help get you published, too. Writing in the first person is hard to pull off but glorious when done well. Let’s look at a couple of examples and talk.

**Assigned**        Joyce Carol Oates: “The Cruellest Sport”

                          Zadie Smith: “Love in the Gardens”

*Telling True Stories*, p. 78-85

**INTERLUDE: CONSIDERING CULTURE & ETHICS**

**10**                    **Separating Fact from Fiction**

Narrative storytelling can impose unique ethical challenges. How do we keep fact separated from fiction and sources protected? To what extent do we have to maintain “distance” from our stories?

**Assigned**        *Telling True Stories*, p. 163-193

**11**                    **LAB: TROUBLESHOOTING DRAFT #2**

**15**                    **Working Across Cultures**

Crossing cultural boundaries requires special considerations too. How do we maintain our identity while exploring the identity of others? How do we gain entry into unfamiliar worlds and present them fairly?

**Assigned**        *Telling True Stories*, p. 46-51

**17**                    **Production III: The Overwhelming Advantages of Self-Editing**

The ability to step back, spot flaws in your work and work out solutions as objectively as possible is a key to successful production – and not as painful as it sounds. We’ll discuss tips for better self-editing.

**Assigned**        *The Art & Craft of Feature Writing*, p. 218-224; optional,  
                          p. 188-217.

**18**                    **LAB: TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR FINAL STORY**

**22-24            Production IV: But Everybody *Does* Need an Editor**

To be successful, you also need “another set of eyes” on your work to help shape the ideas and get a “sense of audience.” We’ll talk about the relationship between content producers and content editors.

**Assigned**        *Telling True Stories*, p. 197-223

**25                LAB: TYING UP LOOSE ENDS**

**29                Course Wrap-Up I: Careers in Storytelling**

**Assigned**        *Telling True Stories*, p. 263-287

**May 1            Course Wrap-Up II: Reviewing the Road Traveled**

**In class**        NewsHour: “In Haiti, Kwame Dawes Tells of Quake Aftermath Through Poetry”

**NO LAB THIS WEEK**

## APPENDIX I

### Assessment Grid for Production Work

In evaluating your work for this course, we will use the following framework:

1. The work shows an effective, well-focused presentation of topic.

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

2. The ideas represented in the work are focused and well developed for the purposes of the assigned format.

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

3. The work demonstrates effective research and/or reporting, factually accurate, and is supported by appropriate sources.

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

4. The writing is straightforward, logical and persuasive of its point of view.

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

5. Grammar, spelling and punctuation are correct.

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

6. The work properly attributes sources.

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

7. The visual and audio materials used in the work (if any) are of a quality and variety conducive to telling the story well.

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

8. The work demonstrates critical thinking about issues relevant to a full treatment of the topic at hand.

0                    1                    2                    3                    4

## APPENDIX II

### Required University Notices and Policies

#### University of Texas 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.

#### Documented Disability Statement

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).

#### Plagiarism and the Consequences of Plagiarizing

Any instances of plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance with University policies referred to in the web link immediately below. If you are in doubt about how to define or prevent plagiarism, ask your instructor and refer to the learning module, also below:

[http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acadint\\_conseq.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acadint_conseq.php)

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/>

#### Resources for Learning & Life at UT Austin

The University of Texas has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning.

The UT Learning Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/>

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling & Mental Health Center: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Career Exploration Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/careercenter/>

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

#### Use of Blackboard in Class

This course will use Blackboard—a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <http://courses.utexas.edu>—to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to submit assignments, and to give you online quizzes and surveys. You can find support in using Blackboard at the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., so plan accordingly.

#### Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your email for university and course-related information and announcements. You are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your e-mail address. You should check your e-mail regularly and frequently to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. You

can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating your e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

### **Religious Holy Days**

By UT Austin policy, you must notify the instructor of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, the instructor will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

### **Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)**

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

### **Emergency Evacuation Policy**

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors.

Do not re-enter a building unless you're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office

### **Q drop Policy**

The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6). As stated in Senate Bill 1231:

“Beginning with the fall 2007 academic term, an institution of higher education may not permit an undergraduate student a total of more than six dropped courses, including any course a transfer student has dropped at another institution of higher education, unless the student shows good cause for dropping more than that number.”