

JCOM 3140 – Opinion Writing

MWF 11:30 - 12:20

Ray B. West 113

Professor Nancy Williams

Office: An Sci 306

Office hours: Monday & Friday 10:30-11:20, Wednesday 12:30-1, others by appointment

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Purpose of this course: JCOM 3140 is an upper-division journalism skills class designed to help you understand the opinion function in the American news media and contribute to it. In this class we will write editorials, columns, reviews and critiques, and other print commentary, with a goal of getting your work published. Everything you submit for a grade will be considered for publication on the JCOM department's student Web site, the *Hard News Café*. You will learn to rewrite and critique your own work as well as that of your classmates. In class we'll use the workshop method to build personal voice and writing fluency, and to develop a sense of writing for an audience.

Materials required for this class:

- * *Best Newspaper Writing 2006*, edited by Aly Colon. The Poynter Institute, 2006.
- * *The 10% Solution*, by Ken Rand. Kent, Wash. Fairwood Press, 1998.
- * *Writing Down the Bones*, by Natalie Goldberg. Shambhala Press, 1991.
- * A notebook for your daily writing practice, and a fast-writing pen. (Always bring these to class.)
- * *The Herald Journal*, Logan's daily paper
- * Associated Press Style Manual, latest edition

Strongly encouraged but not required:

Writing Brave and Free, Ted Kooser & Steve Cox, University of Nebraska Press. \$12.95 paperback.

Assignments and grading:

Your final grade in this class is based on the quality of your written assignments (75%) and your class participation & notebook (25%). I expect you to have the readings done before Monday's class on the week they are assigned.

You have six writing assignments due this semester. These must include at least one of each of these four kinds of opinion writing:

- house editorial on a current local issue (700 words)
- in-depth analysis of a tough or neglected subject (1,000 words)
- review of a local play, local concert, or recently published book (500 words)
- first-person column (700-1,000 words)

The remaining two assignments are your choice from that list. Choose wisely and play to your strengths.

Deadlines for final drafts of your assignments: Fridays: Sept. 15, Sept. 29, Oct. 13, Nov. 3, Nov. 17, Dec. 8.

Assignments should be submitted both on paper (double-spaced, typed) and by e-mail to me at nanwill@cc.usu.edu. The subject line for your e-mailed copy should have the class name and assignment type (*Example* – Subject: JCOM 3140 - local issue editorial).

IMPORTANT: I don't accept e-mail attachments. E-mail your assignments to me as plain text by pasting the text into the e-mail message window. Be sure your byline is at the top of your assignment.

I'll be calling for your notebooks – not to read them but to check your progress – several times during the semester. Bring your notebook to every class. Keeping your daily notebook counts as part of your class participation grade. You should keep your daily writing practice in these as well as the writing exercises we do in class.

Class schedule: (I reserve the right to make changes in order to accommodate guest speakers' availability.)

Aug. 28 -Sept. 1 - Overview of class. Introduction to writing practice and timed writings.

Sept. 6-8 - (No class Labor Day). A little journalism history: The why of the editorial page.
READ before class Wednesday: Best Newspaper Writing, (Forward, Introduction, Column Writing, part 3); Goldberg (Introduction and pp 1-47).

- Sept. 11-15 - Rules for productive critiquing. First assignment (personal column) draft due Monday in class: bring 3 copies for small-group critique.
DUE FRIDAY, Sept. 15: Final draft of 1st assignment.
- Sept. 18-22 - House editorials & local issues. Narrative structure. Voice Notebook check.
READ: Rand, in its entirety; BNW (Editorial writing, part 5), Goldberg (pp. 48-76)
- Sept. 25-29 - Critique second assignment (house editorial on local issue); draft due Monday in class. DUE FRIDAY, Sept. 29: Final draft of 2nd assignment
- Oct. 2-6 - Backgrounding and research. Focus. Tightening up..
READ: BNW (Writing on deadline, part 1); Goldberg, pp. 77-100
- Oct. 9-13 - Critique third assignment (in-depth editorial); draft due Monday in class.
DUE FRIDAY, Oct. 13: Final draft of 3rd assignment
- Oct. 17-19 - Individual mid-term conferences, no class. Notebook check at your conference (Friday, Oct. 20, is Fall Break)
- Oct. 23-27 - The art of reviewing the arts. Election editorials: should the press endorse candidates?
READ: Goldberg (pp. 101-123); BNW (Narrative writing, part 2)
- Oct. 30-Nov. 3 - Critique fourth assignment (review); draft due Monday in class.
DUE FRIDAY, Nov. 3: Final draft of 4th assignment.
- Nov. 6-10 - Ethical & legal issues. Copyright. Notebook check.
READ: Goldberg (pp.124-142); BNW (conversation with Carol Guzy, pp. 367-375)
- Nov. 13-17 - Critique fifth assignment (your choice); draft due Monday in class.
DUE FRIDAY, Nov. 18: Final draft of 5th assignment.
- Nov. 20-24 - **No class Monday. Thanksgiving week.**
- Nov. 27-Dec. 1 - Lighten up! Using tone and humor to tell your story.
READ: Goldberg (pp. 142-end); BNW (“A Husband for Vibhaz” (3 part series, pp. 85-134)
- Dec. 4-8 - Critique sixth assignment (your choice); draft due Monday in class.
DUE FRIDAY, Dec. 9: Final draft of 6th assignment due Friday.

NO FINAL EXAM

• **ACADEMIC HONESTY:** The University expects students and faculty alike to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty (for a complete definition, see University Catalogue or the Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University, Article V, Section 3). **The policy states: “[C]heating, falsification or plagiarism can result in warning, grade reduction, probation, suspension, expulsion, payment of damages, withholding of transcripts, withholding of degrees, removal a class, performance of community service, referral to appropriate counseling” or other penalties as the university judiciary may deem appropriate.** Because public trust and personal credibility are essential to journalists and other professional communicators, the JCOM department observes a zero-tolerance policy regarding academic dishonesty: Any documented form of academic dishonesty--including plagiarism--will result in an automatic F in the course and a report to the department head, the dean of the college and the USU vice president for student services. JCOM students who engage in documented academic dishonesty may be dropped from the major. Students who hand in similar or identical work will receive an F regardless of who copied from whom. If you have any questions about what’s acceptable work under strict codes of academic honesty, see the USU Code of Policies and Procedures for Students, or consult your professor. Any suspicious work may be submitted to a database that compares student papers to other student and published work in a web database.

• **PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIOS:** As part of the Senior Seminar capstone course required of all JCOM majors for graduation,

students must compile and present to the faculty a portfolio of professional-quality work. This portfolio may include work produced in JCOM courses, labs and internships. The final portfolio, created as part of the Senior Seminar (JCOM 400), will be evaluated by JCOM faculty and appropriate media professionals. For this reason, JCOM majors should maintain an ongoing file of course work and other materials produced throughout their university careers that will reflect on the quality of their professional and academic preparation for communication careers. This material may include essays and papers written for classes, the Hard News Café, newspaper stories, video or Powerpoint productions, Internet sites, fliers or brochures, etc., that reflect your professional preparation. Start now to collect these materials so that you will have a comprehensive file from which to select your best work to include in your final professional portfolio. Questions, ask your JCOM instructors.