

## **Opinion Writing and Reporting**

JOUR 3140-001

Spring 2017

Tuesday-Thursday 11:20 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.

206 MJ

Instructor: Prof. Otis Sanford

Office: 318B Meeman Journalism Building

Office Hours: Tuesday, 3-5 p.m.; Thursday, 2-4 p.m. or by appointment

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### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **CATALOG DESCRIPTION:**

Principles and practices for well-researched and well-written editorials, columns, op-ed submissions, reviews, broadcast commentaries and long form analysis/perspective pieces. Thorough examination of the purpose and impact of opinion journalism on readers, political leaders, policy makers and society at large.

#### **PREREQUISITE:**

JOUR 3120

#### **TEXTBOOKS:**

None. Must read The Commercial Appeal editorial page daily and the Sunday Viewpoint section, along with various opinion columns as assigned. Also must read The New York Times editorials and content from the Real Clear Politics online site and Politico regularly.

#### **CLASSROOM FORMAT:**

Lecture and discussion will be used in the teaching of the class, and students will regularly write editorials, columns, short-form commentaries suitable for broadcast and at least one long-form perspective piece on a major political or social issue. Graduate students will write at least two long-form perspective/analysis pieces on a major political, public affairs or social issue. Each class session will be set up similar to an editorial board at a professional news organization. Each student is required to come to class prepared to discuss timely topics worthy of an editorial or commentary. Students also will routinely write opinion pieces in class on deadline.

#### **GRADING:**

- In-class writing assignments: 35 percent (includes online portfolio)
- Outside long-form analysis and perspective stories: 20 percent
- Outside editorials, columns, etc.: 35 percent
- Attendance and class participation: 10 percent

## **TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE:**

**Tuesday, January 17** – Introduction and expectations for the semester. Brief in-class writing assignment. Writing assignment advancing the presidential inauguration to be turned in Jan. 19.

**Thursday, January 19** – A detailed discussion of opinion writing, from editorials to columns, to broadcast commentaries to reviews and analytical think pieces. Qualifications for opinion writing. Why does opinion journalism remain relevant?

**Tuesday, January 24** – Review of editorials and columns from presidential inauguration. Editorial discussion. All students must have a topic in which to opine. Writing the editorial.

**Thursday, January 26** – Editorial discussion. Assignment of out of class opinion piece. Writing editorial.

**Tuesday, January 31** – Special guest opinion journalist.

**Thursday, February 2** – Editorial discussion and writing assignment.

**Tuesday, February 7** – Writing commentary for broadcast.

**Thursday, February 9** – Outside opinion writing assignment due. More on broadcast commentary. Broadcast opinion writing assignment in class.

**Tuesday, February 14** – Preparing for editorial board with newsmaker.

**Thursday, February 16** – Special guest of a political newsmaker.

**Tuesday, February 21** – Editorial written in class based on meeting with newsmaker.

**Thursday, February 23** – The do's and don'ts of opinion writing on social media.

**Tuesday, February 28** – Long form opinion writing for television.

**Thursday, March 2** – Major in-class opinion writing assignment. Major outside writing assignment for graduate students due.

**Tuesday, March 7 and Thursday March 9** – Spring Break

**Tuesday, March 14** – Assignment of outside opinion piece. More on writing opinion for social media.

**Thursday, March 16** – Editorial discussion and writing editorial in class.

**Tuesday, March 21** – Editorial discussion and writing editorial in class.

**Thursday, March 23** – Visit the Commercial Appeal editorial board meeting.

**Tuesday, March 28** – Column Writing with flair.

**Thursday, March 30** – More discussion on column writing with guest columnist. Second major outside assignment due.

**Tuesday, April 4** – Editorializing on the anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**Thursday, April 6** – How to write an effective review.

**Tuesday, April 11** – Discussion of major assignment. Writing a review in class.

**Thursday, April 13** – Writing an editorial in class.

**Tuesday, April 18** – Writing an editorial in class.

**Thursday, April 20** – Writing an editorial in class

**Tuesday, April 25** – Major outside assignment due. Assessing what we've learned this semester about opinion writing?

## **ASSESSMENT**

### **PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR OPINION WRITING:**

- understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;

- demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

### **HOW PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES WILL BE MET:**

#### **Cognitive Objectives To Be Mastered (Ability To Explain, Analyze, Understand, Think Critically):**

- Recognize the role of media in influencing the political and cultural dynamics on the global stage.
- Develop a strong historical sense of how mass communication technologies originated and developed.
- Understand the variety of relationships between media and their audiences, including diverse audiences.
- Understand the critical need for thorough reporting and research in order to write opinion pieces that are persuasive and effective.
- Be sensitive to the needs of diverse and under-represented groups in presenting commentary and creating messages.
- Understand the history of news editorials and the role they played in shaping public opinion and holding policy makers accountable.
- Understand the ongoing government regulation of the U.S. Media as well as the constitutional principles that guide it.
- Recognize the ethical and philosophical issues that arise in media culture and understand the range of viewpoints regarding these issues.
- Understand the behind-the-scenes operations and decision-making processes of major mass communication industries.
- Understand how new technology affects the media and communication.
- Understand what's involved in preparing for and advancing a career in the changing media.
- Understand the allied fields of advertising and public relations and their relationship to media systems.
- Understand mass communication theories and their application to media professions.

#### **Performance Standards To Be Met (Demonstrable Skills, Abilities, Techniques, Applied Competencies):**

- Earn a passing score on all writing assignments.
- Participate in one or more outside activities (e.g., attend FOI lecture, interview media professional, visit the editorial board of The Commercial Appeal and submit one opinion/ op ed article worthy of publication in The CA.

## **HOW ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING WILL BE MET FOR OPINION WRITING:**

### *Awareness:*

- Lecture, discussion on purpose of opinion writing.
- Knowledge of issues generating editorials, columns and broadcast commentaries.
- Diversity will be discussed as it applies to all areas of mass communication
- Ethical decision making is discussed throughout the semester as it applies to opinion writing.
- Discussion questions will be posed in class to stimulate critical thinking. Independent thinking and critical analysis are encouraged.

## **PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:**

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be to

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

## **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:**

The Council seeks to promote student learning and encourages experimentation and innovation.

Assessment is a system of evaluation of student learning at the course or unit level (as opposed to grading at the individual level). Three criteria should guide assessment of student learning:

- *Awareness*: familiarity with specific information, including facts, concepts, theories, laws and regulations, processes and effects.
- *Understanding*: assimilation and comprehension of information, concepts, theories and ideas.
- *Application*: competence in relating and applying skills, information, concepts, theories and ideas to the accomplishment of tasks.

## **DEPARTMENT POLICIES**

### **PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENT:**

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Students are to begin the portfolio in JOUR 2121 and contribute to it from every course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from his/her courses and/or professional experience and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in the capstone course for their majors.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. The department requires students to use WordPress to build their portfolio sites. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail or Yahoo.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files, and Storify pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

**EMAIL:**

You must have your UM email account activated. If you are using another provider such as Google, you are required to have your UM email forwarded to that account. Go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UM email. You are required to check your email daily. You are responsible for complying with any email sent to you by your professor or the University.

**MOBILE PHONES AND LAPTOPS:**

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Your instructor will set the policy for her/her specific class.

**ATTENDANCE:**

Class attendance is mandatory in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance, or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements, which are acceptable to your professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence due to illness or other catastrophic emergency such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). This is a professional program for journalists who are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. If you have some problem making it to class on time make arrangements to fix the problem or consider taking another class. You should consider this class your "job" in the educational process and be on time just as you would elsewhere.

**CHEATING:**

In addition to university-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses, or a student receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on his/her own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. That may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the university.

Further, as this is a journalism/mass communication class, students are expected to comply with copyright law, and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

"Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your written work, or be given other instructions to follow. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all." (Office of Legal Counsel, October 17, 2005)

**ONLINE SETEs:**

You are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once your instructor has posted your grade, you can immediately see that grade, provided you completed a

teacher evaluation for that class. How to access your evaluation forms: Log in using your UUID and email password; click on the gray "Student" tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. It will only take a few minutes of your time. We take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and will be appreciated.

**DEADLINES:**

Remember there's a reason "DEAD" makes up half the word "deadline." All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. If you get into trouble, talk to your instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

**AP STYLE AND GRAMMAR:**

All written work in this class should follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. If you don't know the style for a particular phrase, look it up or ask your classmates or the instructor.

**DISABILITY:**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

**DIVERSITY:**

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Mass communications reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

**WEATHER POLICY:**

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the university is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day's work.