

## COMM 324: Feature and Opinion Writing

Spring 2019, 2-3:15 p.m., T-Th

Chuck Haga, instructor

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Office hours: 1-2 p.m. T-Th, after class and by appointment

Course description: Examination of the skills, tools and techniques of effective feature storytelling and written persuasion, with an emphasis on print and online journalism, which can be the foundation for all other disciplines.

The course aims to sharpen your ability to find, frame and focus interesting feature stories and learn different methods for writing effective opinion pieces. We will look at the importance of sound reporting, including sourcing, research and interviewing, and the providing of context. We will review basic grammar and style, literary techniques and the discipline of verification, which separates professional media from “fake news.”

Even if you never write for publication or work in journalism, the intent of this course is to help you to become a better writer, able to communicate clearly and in an engaging and substantive way. Whether you see yourself in business, corporate communications, government, education, the law or many other fields, the ability to put a sentence together with clarity, depth and a little style will be a useful (and marketable) skill. You may also gain a better understanding of how the news media work and thus become a better, more discerning user of the media.

Textbook: None required, but you are strongly encouraged to find a copy of Brooks, Pinson & Wilson, “Working With Words,” any recent edition, as well as Strunk & White, “The Elements of Style,” and The Associated Press Stylebook. They can help with word usage, sentence structure, spelling and other challenges. Several published feature stories, viewpoints, columns and editorials will be posted on Blackboard and you will be expected to read those and take part in discussions. You also will be encouraged to find and suggest additional readings for posting. Finally, as this is largely a newswriting course, you are expected to read or at least peruse a newspaper or two on a regular basis and frequently check in on regional and national issues-oriented web sites, such as [www.vice.com](http://www.vice.com), [www.thedailybeaste.com](http://www.thedailybeaste.com), [www.sayanythingblog.com](http://www.sayanythingblog.com) and [www.theprairieblog.com](http://www.theprairieblog.com).

Grades will be based largely on five writing assignments, which will be explained in class and on Blackboard. Deadlines are critical in the news business and most other professions and must be observed. Late copy will be accepted but, unless arrangements have been made beforehand, lateness will factor in grading.

Plagiarism, the use of someone else’s work without attribution, is not tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course. Please see the entry titled Scholastic Dishonesty under Resources in Blackboard and complete the training and

certification as directed, if you have not already done this for another class. Note that your certificate is due by Jan. 31. If you need help with this, please see the teaching assistant for this class.

Each writing assignment may be rewritten once and turned in, with the edited original, for consideration of a higher grade. Please print your typed, double-spaced stories and hand them in at the appropriate times. (I'll accept rewrites up through finals week, but urge you to do them earlier.) I will accept emailed stories if you are unable to hand them in, but the same deadlines apply.

There may be two or three opportunities for extra credit.

There will be no quizzes, tests or final exam. You may see this as reason to skip most classes. Please don't. Issues, ideas and other material covered in class will help you with the writing assignments, and class participation, including discussion of assigned readings and presentations by guest speakers, may factor in final grades.

#### Guidelines for the UND Communication Department

1. The Communication Department is committed to bringing the richness of cultural diversity to all students. Through active engagement, the department endeavors to provide multicultural opportunities, to reduce cultural stereotypes, to embrace cultural differences, and to promote respect for cultural diversity.

2. All Students are subject to the University of North Dakota Code of Student Life, including, but not limited to, issues of Scholastic Dishonesty.

3. To request disability accommodations, call Disability Services at 777-3425.

4. All Comm majors and pre-majors will be added to the Comm Listserv. The purpose of the listserv is to keep students informed of opportunities to enhance their educational experience at UND. It is the avenue that allows the program to communicate scholarship opportunities and deadlines, networking opportunities, and announce pertinent meeting dates. Contact [und.comm@email.und.edu](mailto:und.comm@email.und.edu) if you would like to be removed from the listserv or if you are not receiving messages and would like to be added. To keep informed, also refer to the Communication web page (<http://www.und.edu/dept/comm/>).

5. Mission: The mission of the Communication Department is to provide students with a broad understanding of human communication in various contexts, across diverse cultures, and through multiple systems. The department engages students in lifelong learning that addresses socially and

globally pressing communication challenges through scholarly, creative, critical, and practical curriculum and instruction.

6. Department Goals: We seek to achieve this mission by designing an interdisciplinary curriculum that respects the liberal arts tradition and exposes students to a variety of theoretical and practical experiences to become informed, engaged, and ethical global citizens. Comm. 200 seeks to further the goal stating: Students will become proficient in communicating critically, creatively, and ethically in diverse contexts and through multiple forms of media, including (though not limited to), written, oral, digital, and print-based communication.

7. The Communication Department follows the Academic Grievance Procedures of the College of Arts and Sciences. The procedures are posted online on the UND College of Arts and Sciences Forms web page at [http://arts-sciences.und.edu/faculty\\_staff/proceduresandforms.cfm](http://arts-sciences.und.edu/faculty_staff/proceduresandforms.cfm)

#### Class schedule

Note: This schedule is tentative and likely to be adjusted. Changes will be announced in class and on Blackboard.

Jan. 8 – Course introduction.

Jan. 10 – What makes a good feature story? Where do the ideas come from?

Jan. 15 – Basic training: a relatively painless grammar review.

Jan. 17 – Words, sentences, paragraphs, stories.

Jan. 22 – Story structure: beginnings, middles, endings.

Jan. 24 – Who and Where: writing characters, settings.

Jan. 29 – The discipline of verification.

Jan. 31 – **Feature story proposal due.** Discussion.

Feb. 5 – Writing a column or blog post.

Feb. 7 – Columns continued. Voice, point of view, support.

Feb. 12 – Interviewing for story.

Feb. 14 – Interviewing continued.

Feb. 19 – Show, don't tell. Literary journalism.

**Column due.**

Feb. 21 – Literary journalism continued. (Bring lyrics, poems, etc.)

Feb. 26 – Conducting research for story.

Feb. 28 – Writing profiles.

March 5 – Profiles continued.

March 7 – Narratives, long features, investigative features.

March 11-15 – Spring Break.

March 19 – Writing essays, viewpoints.

March 21 – Writing editorials.

**Profile due.**

March 26 – Writing feature stories for TV

March 28 – Writing scripts for podcasts, radio.

April 2 -- Writing for the internet.

April 4 – Open.

April 9 – Rewriting.

April 11 – Rewriting continued.

**Editorial due.**

April 16 – Advocacy and solutions journalism.

April 18 – Specialty feature writing (business, science, etc.) and criticism.

April 23 – Finding, developing and writing sports features.

April 25 – Sports writing continued.

April 30 – Writing the feature obituary.

May 2 – A primer on media law and ethics, freelancing and marketing your writing.

Finals week – **Feature story due** (but earlier is better if you want a chance to rewrite).

**All rewrites due** (but earlier would be appreciated).

Writing assignment due dates and grade weight

Jan. 31 – Feature story proposal, 10 percent.

Feb. 19 – Column, 15 percent.

March 21 – Profile, 15 percent.

April 11 – Editorial or viewpoint article, 30 percent.

May 9 – Feature story, 30 percent