

Literary Journalism

ENW 330 I Fall 2018

Professor

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Office Hours: 2-3 p.m. M/TH, 1-2 p.m. Wednesday, and by appointment

Class Meeting

Wednesday, 2-4:30 p.m.

Canasius 303

About this course

Literary journalism has long been an important genre in creative nonfiction writing. It takes a form of writing – journalism – that has long been considered boring and formulaic and turned it into something that readers crave. In short, literary journalism is strongly reported work that reads like fiction, but is entirely factually true. In this class, we will read a great deal of the best literary journalism from the last 25 years. We will also strive to write great literary journalism of our own. Much of this course will be focused on reporting, as that is the foundation of any great literary journalism. We will also spend time discussing writing techniques, primarily focusing on how we will bring all of this reporting that we have done alive in the eyes and the minds of readers.

Course objectives

- Develop the reporting skills necessary for telling long, journalistically-sound stories
- Develop an understanding of the writing techniques that narrative writers use to tell true, reported stories
- Study and understand the ethical questions that reporters who do literary journalism face
- Produce quality literary journalism
- Understand how to sell quality literary journalism

Readings/Listenings

Over the course of the semester, we will read close to 50 pieces of literary journalism. All readings will be placed on Blackboard.

Before and after class

You are required to read the assigned reading before class to understand the course content better. Failure to read the assigned readings will invariably show in the work you turn in for class. Students experience difficulties with computers quite often during the course of a semester. You are responsible to save your work properly to avoid starting over again. Save your work regularly and make sure you back it up as well.

Grading

Assignments in this course are graded based upon all or some of the following considerations:

- Accuracy and completeness stories
- Quality of reporting & writing
- Creativity
- Originality

Assignments

- *Story idea generation*: You will have to turn in five potential longform narrative story ideas. At least one of these ideas will have to come from a friend or family member that you have talked with specifically about possible story ideas. At least one of these ideas must come from some Fairfield archival research (i.e. something that happened in Fairfield's past that would make a great story). The other three can come from wherever you like. (5 percent of final grade)

- *Vignette*: Over the course of Alumni & Family Weekend (Oct. 19-21), everyone in the class will be required to report and write a micro-narrative (otherwise known as a vignette). You will have a maximum of 200 words to tell a reported story. The day these are all turned in, we will produce one piece that includes all the vignettes. (10 percent of final grade)

- *Short Narrative*: You will have to propose and then produce a 500-word narrative story about someone or something on campus. (15 percent of final grade)

- *Profile*: You will produce a 1,000-word profile of a person on campus. This will require spending a great deal of time with that person, but also talking to people around that person. (20 percent of final grade)
- *Longform Narrative*: This will be the final piece of literary journalism you will do in the course. The story will be a minimum of 2,000 words. You will also be required throughout the semester to pitch the story idea and give regular updates on how the reporting and writing is going. A rough draft will also be due. (30 percent of final grade)
- *Class Participation*: A great learning experience in this class is largely contingent upon your active involvement. You will not learn anything if you don't put forth an effort. There will be many times when the success of the class will be wholly dependent on you, the students, being active participants and guiding the discussion. That means that you have to read and critically engage with all of the assigned readings. That means you have to spend time thinking about what it is we are working on at any given time. And that means that you must be in class.

Included in this will be a required, short response to each week's required reading, which you will hand in via hard copy. (20 percent of final grade)

Turning work in

Everything, aside from the weekly reading responses, will be turned in via Blackboard. We will also make use of Adobe Spark and Atavist to produce solid web presentations of the stories you write

Absence

I will take attendance at the beginning of class every day. If you are not here when I take attendance, you will be counted as absent. I will not provide missed notes or information. You will need to get that from your classmates and/or Blackboard. Late arrivals are disruptive to me and the class. If you are more than 10 minutes late, that will be counted as an absence. We will only be meeting 13 times this semester. You are allowed to miss ONE class session for any reason without penalty. Once you use the one penalty-free absences, you will lose four

points off your final grade per absence Nos. 2-4. For every class you miss after four absences, you will lose 10 points off your final grade.

Deadlines

Late work of any kind will not be accepted unless arrangements have been made with me at least 48 hours prior to the due date. If you are absent the day an assignment is due, you must put it in the appropriate Blackboard dropbox. Turning in late work without prior approval will result in a failing grade on that assignment.

Electronic Devices

This is a media class, and one way many of us create, share, and receive media is with mobile devices. As such, your phones, laptops, and other technological devices can be out during class. The goal, though, is for you to not be using this technology for anything that is NOT DIRECTLY RELATED to what we are discussing in class.

Academic Dishonesty

You must abide by the rules for academic conduct as described in the Student Handbook. If you have any questions about when and how to avoid academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, please review the Student Handbook and talk with your instructor. In a journalism course, fabrication is also a major form of dishonesty. Fabrication includes:

- Making up quotes from sources
- Making up sources from whole cloth
- Including any information in a story that is made up and not based on reporting.
- Staging photos and videos

As journalists, you must abide to the highest standards of integrity and honesty. Plagiarism and fabrication undermine both.

Learning Disabilities

This course will provide reasonable accommodations to students who have diagnosed learning disabilities. If you have diagnosed learning disabilities and wish to take advantages of special accommodations, you first must visit the Office of Academic and Disability Support Services at extension 2615.

Calendar (always subject to change)

- Week 1 (Sept. 5)** *Introduction, Finding the Stories, Dorm Dedication*
- Week 2 (Sept. 12) *The Best Literary Journalism & Finding Stories to Tell*
Read "Falling Man"
Read "Lost in the Waves"*
Read "Into the Lonely Quiet"
- * Read Annotation Tuesday: Justin Heckert and "Lost in the Waves" at Nieman Storyboard for an in-depth description of how he reported this story
- Week 3 (Sept. 19) **Story Idea Generation due**
More Great Literary Journalism
Read "The Things That Carried Him"
- Week 4 (Sept. 26) *Reporting and Writing Short Pieces*
Read "Cast off, she finds peace"
Read "Lookin' for love... In Sun City Center"
Read "In Chicago, the final wait for a Cubs win mixes joy and sorrow"
- * Listen to John Woodrow Cox talk about how he reported his short pieces on Gangrey: The Podcast
- Week 5 (Oct. 3) **Longform story pitch due**
True Crime Narratives
Read "Blood Will Tell, Parts I & II"*
- * You can listen to Pamela Colloff talk about how she reported and wrote "Blood Will Tell" on Gangrey: The Podcast, episode 63
- Week 6 (Oct. 10) **Short Narrative due**
Writing Profiles
Read "Can You Say... Hero?"
Read "Can you say thanks... And we miss you?"
Read "Eugene Monroe Has A Football Problem"

* Listen to Tom Junod talk about his Eugene Monroe story on Gangrey: The Podcast, Episode 49

Week 7 (Oct. 17)

Celebrity Profiles

Read "The Tragedy of Britney Spears"

Read "The Ghost"

Read "Tonya Harding Would Like Her Apology Now"

Week 8 (Oct. 24)

Vignette due

Longform story update due

Writing Profiles

Read "The Final Comeback of Axl Rose"

Read "The Essential Man"

Week 9 (Oct. 31)

Profile due

Yourself as a Character

Read "The Root of All Things"*

Read "Susan Cox is No Longer Here"

Read "Upon This Rock"

* Listen to Nathan Thornburgh talk about reporting and writing "The Root of All Things" on Gangrey: The Podcast, episode 36

Week 10 (Nov. 7)

Longform Structure

Read "Angels & Demons"

Week 11 (Nov. 14)

Turning History Into Story

Read "Who Was Stella Walsh?"

Read "Spectacle"

Week 12 (Nov. 21)

No class. Thanksgiving Break.

Week 13 (Nov. 28)

Longform story rough draft due

Freelance Marketplace: Selling Your Work

Reading TBD

Week 14 (Dec. 5)

The Art of Revision

Readings TBD

Final Exam Period:

December 17 at 3 p.m.

Longform story final draft due