

## CCJN 3362

### MAGAZINE JOURNALISM

SPRING 2011, UMPHREY LEE CENTER 283

TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS 2:00 PM-3:20 PM

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### An Overview of CCJN 3362

Magazines are not immune to the pressures facing the media industry today. But while some magazines are downsizing—and others are shutting down—magazines are strong candidates for ultimate survival, and even for growth. Some 92% of U.S. adults say they regularly read magazines, compared to 43% who read a daily newspaper. That's because magazines specialize: They focus on a particular audience, build a close relationship with readers, and give them something they can't get anywhere else. As one prominent magazine editor wrote, "Newspapers tell you about *the* world, and magazines, the best ones, tell you about *their* world—and, by association, *your* world."

Successful magazines are also strongly visual: Their use of photography, art and design is as much a part of their identity as is the text they publish. In other words, magazines can accomplish something in print that can't be done in other media, and that is key to their long-range vitality.

A magazine story, then, isn't just a longer or less newsy form of newspaper story. It's fundamentally different, in how it's conceived, how it's reported, how it's written and how it's presented. This course will introduce students to the diverse world of magazines, and, through the reading of great magazine writing and the intensive practice of magazine reporting and writing, help prepare them for professional work in that world. In particular, we will study and practice magazine feature writing, including profiles, narratives, and analytical pieces.

### Class objectives

In CCJN 3362, students will:

- Gain a broad understanding of the magazine industry, how it's changing, and where its opportunities lie.
- Examine the architecture of magazines—how they flow, how they're packaged and presented.

- Learn how to understand particular magazines—how to “get” what they’re about, who they’re for, and how to write for them.
- Read and dissect lots of great magazine writing and use it as a model for your own work. Through close reading, we will deconstruct how stories were reported and analyze the choices the writers made about how to organize and present those stories.
- Learn how magazine stories differ from newspaper stories, and how to shift your reporting and writing accordingly.
- Learn to conceive, plan, report, structure and write magazine stories. More specifically, you will: a) learn to generate, develop and shape good magazine story ideas; learn to report a story from multiple perspectives and to shape your reporting to meet the needs of the story; master the writing of complex and imaginative magazine ledes; and experiment with and learn to work with advanced magazine story structures.
- Put these insights into practice by writing short “front of the book” magazine pieces and progressing to more in-depth, complex, and multi-sourced medium-length features and **one substantial long-form feature**.
- Produce the Journalism Division’s online ezine, *Shift*, to showcase the class’s best work..

## Readings

The text for the class is *Best American Magazine Writing 2006*, compiled by the American Society of Magazine Editors, and *Words’ Worth* by Terri Brooks and Mary Quigley. Because written assignments must adhere to AP style, students will need a copy of *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. There will also be numerous handouts and supplemental readings.

## Requirements

In the classroom, we’ll dissect and discuss the work of top magazine writers—stories about everything from the death penalty to rock and roll, terrorism, and fishing. Above all, you will write, beginning with shorter pieces and working up to one substantial story of 2000 words. For that major project, you will submit a list of story ideas based on preliminary reporting; we will settle on one for you to pursue; you will continue reporting and file progress memos; you will write a first draft which I will edit; and you will write a final draft which I will critique. There are no exams or quizzes, but you will be expected to report rigorously and imaginatively, to work hard on your writing, to keep up with the reading, and to come to class prepared for lively and substantive discussion. **In particular, you are expected to pace yourself steadily and stay current on your long-form feature project, which counts for 35% of your course grade. The project requires a significant amount of reporting and research, and careful and imaginative writing. That means you must meet the intermediate deadlines for story ideas, progress memos, and the first draft, and attend the story conferences. There is no way you can do a good job if you leave most of the work until the last minute, or if you must switch topics late in the game because your original story idea fell through or couldn’t be reported. Note that your final grade on this project will be determined in part by your success in meeting these intermediate steps.**

In addition, you are required to publish at least two of the stories written for this class in *Shift*.

## **Grades**

Your grade will depend on the quality and progress of your written work, your classroom participation, and the publication requirement.

Written work: 70%, split between the shorter pieces (35%) and the final project (35%)  
Classroom participation: 25%. Publication requirement: 5%.

**In addition, the following policies have been adopted by the Division of Journalism. By enrolling in this class you are agreeing to the following terms and conditions:**

### **Reporting standards for all media projects**

Your story will be graded on content: is it fair, is it newsworthy, is it well sourced? Is the story organized, are all questions answered, and is all relevant information properly attributed? Are direct quotes preceded by strong transitions in print stories? At least 5 points may be taken off for problems like these. For errors of fact, expect 10 or more points off.

You must always tell all of your sources that the story you are reporting could be published or aired on multiple platforms. Your work could appear on news sites both on and off campus. Your stories, in other words, are for public consumption and your sources must know that.

Friends, colleagues, and family members are not acceptable sources. Unless you have cleared the source with your editor, expect at least 5 points to be taken off for each unacceptable source.

### **Mechanical standards for writing**

\*Associated Press style and grammar errors: 2 or more points

\*Punctuation errors: 2 or more points

\*Spelling: 10 or more points for misspelled names or other proper nouns; 2 or more points for all other spelling errors

\*Awkward or unclear phrasing: 2 or more points

### **How to earn an "F" on any media project**

Miss a deadline. Misquote or misrepresent someone. Rewrite or submit a story or package that was produced for any reason other than this class.

## **Plagiarism and Fabrication**

Plagiarism is stealing someone's words or ideas and passing them off as your own. Fabrication is making stuff up. Both strike at the heart of the journalistic process, where proper attribution and fact checking are paramount. We will deal with plagiarism and fabrication in the harshest manner possible, including referral to the honors council.

## **Use of technology in class**

You may use a computer in class only to take notes, to work on in-class assignments, or to conduct story-related research during workshops. That means no emailing, web surfing, text messaging, tweeting, friending, unfriending, refriending, etc. You must mute and put away cell phones, BlackBerries, iPhones, and other PDAs. Failure to adhere to this policy will automatically lower your in-class grade by at least 10 points. If you are caught more than three times failing to adhere to this policy, you will receive an “F” for your class participation and attendance grade.

## **Attendance**

Roll will be taken every day. Any student who misses the first day of class may be dropped. More than three unexcused absences and you could be dropped from the course or receive an “F.”

You are responsible for contacting your teacher within 24 hours of an absence. An absence will be considered unexcused unless you are able to provide a doctor's note or some other good reason why you were not in class. Absences will be factored into the in-class portion of your grade and will result in a lower final grade. Please note that the SMU Health Center has changed its policy on giving forms for excused absences. The Health Center's new policy is found at <http://smu.edu/healthcenter/policy/absenceclass.asp>. Please note that there is a PDF file in this information that you can download and submit to me for consideration of an excused absence. This form must be filled out fully for me to consider your absence as excused. As in the past, if you consult a physician for an illness and receive specific certification for a recovery time, absences will be excused if I

am given a form from the physician's office.

Tardiness will not be tolerated. Stroll in late? You will receive an unexcused absence unless you can provide a compelling reason (AFTER CLASS) why you were tardy. All course work is, of course, governed by the SMU honor code.

### **Excused absences for extracurricular activities**

Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

### **Religious accommodations**

Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

### **Disability accommodations**

Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) at 214-768-1470 or [www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp](http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4.)

### **Additional grading information**

1. "A"s are rare. They are awarded only for truly excellent work. Very good work receives a "B"; average work a "C"; below average a "D." This is in accordance with university regulations.
2. All work will be judged rigorously. Letter grades are based on a 10-point scale. For example, the "B" range is as follows: 80-82 B-; 83-86 B; 87-89 B+. The same spread applies to all letter grades (except there is no A+).

3. Your teachers will be happy to discuss the content of your papers. If you wish to protest a grade, a formal process is available.

## **Deadlines**

Just as no professional reporter would miss a deadline, all your assignments must be submitted on time. No late assignments will be accepted, and no makeup assignments given.

## **Format for writing assignments**

Use AP style for all assignments.

Type your name and a story slug on the top left corner of EVERY page.

Use a clear font, such as Times New Roman, and indent paragraphs. At the end of each story, you will list or attach your sources. Telephone numbers or email addresses must accompany human sources. When you have used documents, such as studies, reports, or official records, you must either attach the document or provide a URL I can follow.

You may also be asked to provide your notes to a story. There will be **NO EXCEPTIONS** to any of these rules.

**VERY IMPORTANT: You will submit all assignments as Word documents attached to an email to me at [mvamos@smu.edu](mailto:mvamos@smu.edu). The email containing the assignment must reach me by the BEGINNING of the class in which it is due (including if you are out sick). I do not need hard copies of your assignments.**

You will receive back a Word document, via email, containing my editing comments, overall discussion and appraisal, and grade.

## **Sourcing**

You will be writing more complex, multi-layered stories in this course. That means that each story will require multiple live sources, as well as, in all likelihood, studies, reports, websites, and so on. Key interviews must be conducted in person; where necessary, secondary interviews may be done by phone. Email is for follow-up, fact-checking, hole-filling, etc. You may not quote from email interviews, nor may you quote anonymous sources, unless cleared to do so by me. Under no circumstances may you lift unattributed quotes from publications, nor may you rely on websites for anything other than background, facts, and statistics. You may not quote from websites, and you may not use family, friends, or roommates as sources.

You are required in all cases to fully disclose your identity and purpose to sources, and any promises of anonymity or other special arrangements with sources must be discussed with your professor before such agreements are made.

## **Class Schedule**

The class schedule below is subject to change depending on the needs, interest, and progress of the class, the availability of guest speakers, and news events.

### Week 1

Tuesday, January 18

Introduction to the class, explanation of class policies and grading.

Thursday, January 20

What is a magazine, anyway? A look at magazine “architecture”—why do magazines look the way they do? The front of the book, the well, and the back.

### Week 2

Tuesday, January 25

In-class magazine presentations, Group 1.

Thursday, January 27

In-class magazine presentations, Group 2.

### Week 3

Tuesday, February 1

Magazine story ideas: Where do they come from? Topics vs. ideas. Read: Words’ Worth, Chapter 8

Thursday, February 3

Story generation exercises. FRONT-OF-BOOK STORIES DUE.

### Week 4.

Tuesday, February 8

Reporting the long-form story: Access, observation, participatory reporting. Interviewing and quoting. Read: “The Recruit” in Magazine Writing and Chapters 5 and 8 in Words’ Worth.

Thursday, February 10

Profile writing. Read: “He Knew He Was Right” (handout) and Chapter 1 in Words’ Worth. Advanced ledes. In-class lede-writing exercises. PROFILE BUDGET MEMOS DUE.

### Week 5

Tuesday, February 15

Structure: The nut graf, transitions, basic and advanced magazine story structures. Read: Words' Worth, Chapters 2 and 7.

Thursday, February 17

Guest speaker: Laura Kostelny, executive editor, *D Home* and *D Weddings*. NOTE: PROJECT STORY PITCHES DUE SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 20

### Week 6

Tuesday, February 22

Project story conferences.

Thursday, February 24

Project story conferences.

### Week 7

Tuesday, March 1

Narratives and investigative narratives. Read "The School" (handout) PROFILE DUE.

Thursday, March 3

The power of voice—and controlling it. Read: "Upon This Rock" in Magazine Writing and Words' Worth, Chapter 6.

### Week 8

Tuesday, March 8: Narrative workshop

Thursday, March 10: Guest speaker: Skip Hollandsworth, executive editor, Texas Monthly

TUESDAY, MARCH 15 AND THURSDAY, MARCH 17: NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK!

### Week 9

Tuesday, March 22

First person, columns, and essays. Read: "A Matter of Life and Death" and "Girl Meets Bluegill" in Magazine Writing. PROJECT REPORTING MEMOS DUE.

Thursday, March 24

In-class story workshop. NARRATIVE STORY DUE.

### Week 10

Tuesday, March 29

In-class story workshop.

Thursday, March 31

Writing about big issues: The microcosm/macrocosm. Read “Trial By Fire” (handout).

Week 11

Tuesday, April 5

Magazines and the web: successful and unsuccessful strategies. Discussion of multimedia packages. It ain't all *The New Yorker*: Enthusiast magazines, service magazines, trades. FIRST DRAFT OF PROJECT DUE.

Thursday, April 7

Magazine careers: staff, freelance. Writing, editing, production.

Week 12

Tuesday, April 12

Story conferences.

Thursday, April 14

Story conferences.

Week 13

Tuesday, April 19

In-class draft polishing.

Thursday, April 21

In-class draft polishing.

Week 14

Tuesday, April 26

Writing pitch letters. Read Words' Worth, Chapter 9.

Thursday, April 28

Packaging and presentation: magazines as a visual medium. What makes covers work. The writer's role. Course review and wrap-up. FINAL PROJECT DUE