

CCJN 4310: Editorial and Opinion Writing

Spring, 2011: Tues. Thurs. 3:30-4:50 p.m.

Umphrey Lee 283

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Office hours: noon-1 MWF, 2:30-3:30 T-Th, and by appointment

Required texts

NCEW's *Beyond Argument: A Handbook for Opinion Writers and Editors*,
edited by Maura Casey and Barbara Mantz Drake

Course Pac at Lone Star Shipping Co. (See Readings List)

AP Style Book

Other readings provided by professor or posted on Blackboard

Most editorials/opinion columns are about current events. Students in this class are expected to keep up with the news by daily reading of newspapers and/or online news sites, blogs and watching TV news. Information gleaned from the *Dallas Morning News*, *New York Times*, *Daily Campus* and from online news sites and broadcast media will provide ideas and information for editorials, columns, blogs and other assignments.

Course Description

In a hyper-connected world of 24/7 media, news analysis and opinion writing is becoming more important for readers and viewers of the news. Journalists are increasingly being asked to supplement reporting with thoughtful, information-based analysis and opinion. This course is designed to promote an appreciation for forceful and effective advocacy journalism and to help students develop skills in writing opinion from solid reporting and research.

The course will cover the role of the editorial and op-ed page, editorial writing, personal column writing, critical writing and niche columns (arts/entertainment, sports etc.), letters and comments, and advocacy journalism on different platforms, from magazines to blogs and cable TV. We will examine the work of influential and effective opinion writers, both historically and today. We will look at how commentary is used online and in the broadcast media and write for those platforms as well as for print. Writing assignments will include editorials, columns, blogs, letters/comments.

Strong, creative writing and editing should be the standard, regardless of subject matter, platform or placement. Students are encouraged to take risks and experiment with new and different forms of writing. In addition to learning how to develop an opinion and express it and to develop their own voices, students are expected to use this advanced course to refine and hone their writing skills.

Learning Outcomes

1. Develop an appreciation for informed and well written commentary and understand the role of persuasion/advocacy in modern journalism.
2. Become a critical consumer of news and opinion and develop the ability to judge the worth of opinion and critical writing.
3. Learn to write supported, logically argued opinion pieces and informative, entertaining and effective commentaries.
4. Become more original, provocative thinkers
5. Develop a solid and refined sense of critical thinking, including the ability to understand complex subjects and synthesize ideas
6. Analyze and practice opinion writing on different platforms: print, broadcast, online
7. Develop voice as a writer; Improve and refine writing skills

Course Requirements

Students will be graded on two editorials, two columns and two blogs. Editorials will be written from topics selected in Editorial Board meetings in class. Editorials will be 350 (300-400) words. Columns will be 700 (650-750) words and subjects will be student's choice and may be in such niche areas as sports, fashion, or arts/entertainment, including reviews. Topic/budget lines must be submitted in advance. At least two blogs of 350-400 words with at least 3 links are required. Each student also will write a broadcast commentary, which may be a shorter version of a previous edit/column (or it may be a new and different topic) written to broadcast standards. All members of the class are expected to participate in the studio production of the broadcast commentary program.

Each student is expected to publish two commentaries (edit, column, blog or letter) in the Daily Campus, dailymustang.com, Dallas Morning News or other publication.

In addition to the graded commentaries, students will be graded on a homework/classwork. Students also will receive a class participation/attendance grade, that will include postings on Twitter or Discussion Board.

Grading

- 2 edits, 2 blogs, 2 columns: 60 percent (10 percent each)
- 1 broadcast commentary/studio production: 10 percent
- homework, classwork: 20 percent
- participation, attendance, Twitter/Discussion Board: 10 percent

Format for papers

Editorials and columns should be typed and double-spaced. Pages should be stapled or paper clipped. In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, type the following information: your name, editorial/column number, slug line and word count. A deduction will be taken for failure to include the word count. Each piece should include a budget line or blurb and a headline. Backup information -- Internet research, interview notes, clippings -- may be attached or submitted in a folder or links may be provided to research/other info. Blogs will be posted on the

class blog on Blackboard and may be submitted to smudailymustang.com for publication.

Criteria for grading editorials/commentaries

1. Is the editorial/commentary well supported and logically argued. Do arguments support conclusion. Is the writer's basic point clear.
2. Does the writer use the right amount of fact (too much, too little). Does the piece contain unnecessary, extraneous or irrelevant information.
3. Does the writer maintain a consistent point of view (first, second or third person) and address the same audience throughout.
4. Are the antecedents and referents clear. Does the reader know what "it" is or what "that" is, or to what they refer.
5. Is sentence length appropriate. Are sentences too long, complicated, rambling.
6. Is writer guilty of wordiness, ineffective repetition or use of passive voice. Are words used correctly. Is writing awkward.
7. Does writer use correct grammar (such as noun-pronoun agreement) and punctuation.
8. How original, creating is the writing? Does writer use jargon or clichés or does he/she strive to present material in original ways.
9. Does the tone fit the topic. Is writing preachy or immature.
10. Does the piece accomplish its purpose – to persuade, criticize effectively, admonish, support, entertain or provide added value to news.

Grading Policy

1. "A" is rare and awarded for excellent work. Very good work receives a "B," average work a "C," below average a "D."
2. 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 "A," "C," and "D" grades, except there is no "A+"
90-91 A-
92-99 A
Below 60=F

Extra Credit

Any extra commentaries (or blogs) that are published (or broadcast) may be submitted for extra credit.

Deadline extensions, late papers

Deadline extensions may be arranged with the professor for valid reason, i.e. illness, death in the family, family emergency, personal emergency, approved

school trip or out-of-town athletics. Contact the professor in advance if you need a deadline extension. Otherwise, appropriate points will be deducted for a late paper. Deadline is the beginning of class on the day due, unless you obtain an extension. No paper will be accepted that is more than one week late unless special arrangements are made with the instructor.

Attendance

If you're not in class, you can't participate in the editorial discussions or do in-class assignments. Please notify the instructor if you must miss class. An excused absence will be considered ONLY if you provide the instructor with a form that may be downloaded from:

<http://smu.edu/healthcenter/policy/absenceclass.asp>

This form is to be used for illness, family situation or any other issue that warrants an excused absence. Doctor's notes also are accepted. More than three unexcused absences will affect a student's participation grade, and a student may be dropped from the course for excessive absences. Likewise, tardiness will not be tolerated. If there is a valid reason why you are tardy, tell the instructor after class. If you come in after roll is taken, you must notify the instructor after class that you were present or you will be counted absent. Two unexplained tardies will be counted as an absence.

Religious holidays, athletes, extra-curricular activities: Religiously observant students who will be absent on holidays must notify the instructor in writing at the beginning of the semester of the holiday and date of absence. Athletes should inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester of class dates that will be missed for out-of-town trips. Opportunities will be given to students to make up assignments missed for excused absences, including officially sanctioned university extracurricular activity. It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements with the instructor for make-up work.

Using Technology in Class

During class, computers should be used for in-class assignments only. You may check your e-mail, Facebook or other Web sites before class begins, but shut it down once roll is taken. Likewise, texting or use of I-phones, Blackberries, cell phones during class is not allowed. Put your phones on mute while you're in class. Students who attempt to multi-task during class, whether using technology or trying to do homework for other classes, will be penalized on their participation grade. Failure to adhere to this policy will lower your participation grade by at least 10 points. Three strikes and you're out, i.e. you will receive an "F" for class participation if you are found ignoring this policy three times.

Disability Accommodations

If you need academic accommodations for a disability, you must contact the coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities to verify the disability and establish eligibility for accommodations, 214-768-4557. You also should

schedule an appointment with the instructor. A verification letter from Rebecca Marin or another official is required. (See University Policy No. 2.4)

Academic Dishonesty

You are expected to do original work in this class. Previously written material may be used as research, with credit given where appropriate, or included as resource material or hyperlinks. Plagiarism, fabrication and resubmission of work performed for another course are all acts of academic dishonesty. Violations will result in an F on the assignment. Grievous Honor Code violations may result in failure of the course or referral to the university's Honor Council. All students are expected to abide by the standards of academic integrity set forth in the SMU Honor Code. Students who are aware that others in the class are cheating or otherwise acting dishonestly have the responsibility to inform the professor and/or bring an accusation to the Honor Council.

CCJN 4310 EDITORIAL/OPINION WRITING COURSE PAC: SPRING 2011 READINGS

Rystrom, *The Why, Who and How of the Editorial Page* (4th ed.)

- Ch. 10, Nine Steps to Editorial Writing
- Ch. 11, Ten Steps to Better Writing
- Ch. 16, Other Types of Opinion Writing

Rivers et al, *Writing Opinion: Editorials*

- Ch. 1, The Editorial Writer (Mencken)
- Ch. 2, Organizing, Drafting and Revising

Douglas, *The Golden Age of the Newspaper*

The Newspaper Sage, pp. 200-207 (Mencken, Lippman)

H.L. Mencken examples (Gamaliel, Why Truman Won)

Mary White by William Allen White

Poynter, *Best Newspaper Writing, 2008-2009 Edition*

- Marie Dillon, Editorial Writing
 - Don't Let Your Kids Read This
 - Infelicities in Attribution
 - Take Your Dog to Lunch Day
- Behind the Story: An Interview with Marie Dillon

Leonard Pitts Jr., Column Writing

- Murder is the Greatest Injustice of All
- Memorial to a Father Who Served Proudly
- After the Flood, the Big Easy is Still a Target
- Multiply Sense of Betrayal by 388 Years
- Behind the Story: An Interview with Leonard Pitts Jr.

Poynter, *Best Newspaper Writing, 2006-2007 Edition*

Nicholas Kristof, Commentary/Column Writing

Mr. Bush, This Is Pro-Life?

Never Again, Again?

What's to be Done About Darfur? Plenty

When Rapists Walk Free

A Conversation with Nicholas D. Kristof

A Conversation about Convergence with Nicholas D. Kristof and Naka Nathaniel

Zinsser, *On Writing Well*

Ch. 8, Unity

Ch. 9, The Lead and the Ending

Ch. 18: Writing About the Arts

Zinsser, *Speaking of Journalism*

Ch. 2: Jennifer Allen: The Personal Column

(Examples of personal columns provided later)

Sullivan: "Why I Blog"