

COMM 1421, Section B: Writing for the Media Spring 2011

Mondays and Wednesdays, 4 – 5:15 p.m., Arts & Sciences 208A

Professor: Kyle Heim, Ph.D.
Office: Fahy Hall B12
Telephone: (973) 761-9475 (office); (973) 761-9474 (department)
Office hours: Mondays, Wednesdays, 10 – 11 a.m.
Tuesdays, 1 – 2 p.m.
or by appointment

Instructor e-mail: kyle.heim@shu.edu

Turn in assignments to: COMM1421B@gmail.com (Use ONLY to submit assignments)

Contacting the instructor

Many questions about this course are answered in the syllabus. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions that are not addressed in the syllabus or if you wish to discuss assignments, grades or anything else related to the course. It is usually easier to reach me by e-mail than by phone. I check my e-mail daily and reply to messages as promptly as possible. Please be patient if you don't receive an immediate response. You are always welcome to meet with me during my office hours or to schedule an appointment if those times are not convenient for you.

Course goals/objectives

This course is designed to introduce communication majors to various types of media writing, Associated Press style and copy editing techniques. Special emphasis will be given to writing styles across platforms (print, audio and video) and for public relations. Students will also be introduced to appropriate information-gathering techniques for media writing.

Core proficiency

This course meets the requirements for a reading/writing intensive-course and has been approved by the core curriculum committee. This policy states: "A Seton Hall University reading/writing-intensive course will include a significant amount of formal and informal writing, several hours of academic and professional reading per week, all contributing to at least one-third of the course grade."

Required texts

- Tim Harrower, *Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism* (2nd edition), 2010. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- *The Associated Press Stylebook 2009*.
- Additional readings are posted to the course Blackboard site in a folder called "Readings."

Bring to EVERY class

- Textbook
- *Associated Press Stylebook*
- Laptop computer
- Pen and paper

Blackboard site/e-mail

To succeed in this course, you must check the course Blackboard site and your Seton Hall e-mail account regularly. This syllabus is posted on the Blackboard site, and all grades will be recorded there. You may check your point total at any time. Assignment instructions will be posted on Blackboard in addition to being distributed in class. Announcements and supplemental readings may be posted to Blackboard as well. Assignments will be returned via e-mail, and I may send messages to the class or to individual students via e-mail.

Attendance policy

Regular attendance is essential in a writing-intensive course such as this one. Lessons in one class session build upon those from previous sessions, so you will fall behind if you miss class.

Classes will begin on time and end on time. You are expected to be ready for class activities at 4 p.m. and to remain engaged in class activities until 5:15 p.m.

Attendance record:

I will circulate a sign-in sheet at the beginning of each class day once the add/drop period has ended. That sheet constitutes the official record of attendance. You are responsible for signing the attendance sheet. If you come to class late, sign in at the end of class. If tardiness becomes a habit, however, I may begin counting you as absent on those days when you are late.

If you are absent:

- You are still responsible for material covered in class that day. Please consult a classmate and the course Blackboard site to obtain notes and a copy of any assignments or handouts you missed. If you still have questions after consulting a classmate and the Blackboard site, you may e-mail me at kyle.heim@shu.edu. Do not e-mail me to ask, "What did I miss?"
- You are still responsible for submitting **on time** any assignments that are due. If you are unable to meet the deadline because of extreme circumstances, contact me. I *may* grant an extension and waive the deadline penalty if you have a documented excuse (such as illness or emergency).
- You will receive a zero on any quiz that you miss, and you cannot make it up. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped, so it is possible to miss one quiz without hurting your grade.

Extra-credit attendance bonus policy:

- Students who have **no recorded absences** during the semester will receive a **12-point attendance bonus** added to the final score at the end of the semester.
- Students with **one absence** will receive an **8-point attendance bonus**.
- Students with **two absences** will receive a **4-point attendance bonus**.
- Students with **three or more absences** will not receive any bonus points.

NOTE: Excused absences (including absences because of illness or emergency) still count as absences under this policy. There are **only** five exceptional cases in which I might consider counting you as present even though you were absent: (1) if you are involved in an official Seton Hall sports team or extracurricular activity and must miss class to participate in a game, competition or performance; (2) if you have a life-altering event such as a death in the immediate family that forces you to miss class; (3) if you are hospitalized for an extended period

of time; (4) if you must report for jury duty; or (5) if you must miss class to observe an officially recognized religious holiday. In any of those five situations, I may request verification.

Deadline policy

You will submit assignments in this class via e-mail to a special Gmail account. Submit all assignments to COMM1421B@gmail.com unless instructed otherwise. **All assignments must be submitted by 3 p.m. (an hour before class) on the due date, unless instructed otherwise. Assignments submitted late will be penalized.** An assignment submitted up to 48 hours late will be lowered a full letter grade (e.g., a B+ will become a C+), an assignment submitted from 48 to 72 hours late will be lowered an additional letter grade (e.g., a B+ will become a D+), and an assignment submitted more than 72 hours late will receive a zero.

Extensions may be granted at my discretion and may require documentation of illness or an emergency. **Extensions must be requested at least one day before the assignment due date.** A deadline penalty may be imposed *even if* an extension is granted. Students who are too ill to meet deadlines are encouraged to visit health services, which can provide documentation of a student's visit. Students who have a personal emergency are urged to work with the Office of Student Affairs, which can assist in notifying professors and direct students to support services.

Laptop/electronic devices policy

Bring your laptop to every class session. You will need your laptop for in-class exercises and writing. Your laptop must be used for **class-related purposes only**. I may require you to close your laptops for some class sessions, and if I discover that students are using their laptops to check e-mail, update Facebook pages, etc., I may ban the use of laptops altogether. Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off and stowed away during class to avoid disrupting your classmates. "Texting" and instant messaging are not allowed in class.

Course requirements

Writing assignments (total of 330 points): Because this is a writing course, more than 60 percent of your final grade will be determined by grades on writing assignments. Graded writing assignments include an analysis paper, four assignments covering various aspects of media writing and a feature story. The feature story meets the following reading/writing core proficiency requirements: drafting process, with feedback and opportunity for revision; and writing based on research, referencing, use of outside sources and/or citations.

Reading assignments: In addition to the assigned reading, you are expected to stay current with major campus, state, national and international news stories. Links to several news sources have been posted to the course Blackboard site in a folder called "News sites." Reading the news will provide you with a professional model for your own writing. In addition, the development of a "news habit" that will make you an informed and critical reader is an essential part of your education as a citizen in a global society. Some of you aspire to media careers, but all of us are consumers of information. Developing the tools to analyze and evaluate the media will help you in your selection of news sources in our information-saturated society.

Quizzes (total of 50 points). There will be six closed-book, multiple-choice quizzes. The quizzes will cover the assigned reading and current news events. Each quiz is worth 10 points.

Your top five quiz scores will count toward your course grade; your lowest quiz score will be dropped. If you miss a quiz, you will receive a zero. There are no make-up quizzes.

Homework assignments (total of 50 points). There will be several homework assignments during the semester. These assignments are designed to evaluate your mastery of the material presented in class and should be your own work. Collaboration is not permitted.

Class discussion. Some class periods may begin with a discussion of the day’s news coverage and how it relates to class material. You should read the newspaper (in print or online) and any assigned reading before coming to class so you are prepared for discussion.

Final exam (70 points). There will be a final exam on **Tuesday, May 10, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.** This exam will be a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. It will test your understanding of important concepts of media writing as well as your writing skills. You must take the exam at the designated date and time. Only in the most extreme circumstances will you be permitted to reschedule the exam. You must take the exam in order to pass the course. Failure to take the exam will result in an automatic “F” in the course.

Grading

Grades will be recorded on the course Blackboard site. When grading writing assignments, I will consider such factors as newsworthiness, accuracy, organization and structure, use of appropriate sources and attribution, clarity, word choice, grammar, spelling, punctuation and adherence to Associated Press style. **Double-check all facts and the spelling of all names and places before turning in an assignment. Factual errors and misspelled names are among the worst mistakes a media professional can make.** Proofread every assignment before turning it in.

There are **500 points** possible for the course, broken down as follows:

Media Writing Assignments	160 points
News story (40 points)	
Deadline writing – in class (40 points)	
Broadcast writing (40 points)	
News release (40 points)	
Website Analysis Paper	40 points
Feature Story	130 points
Story “pitch” (10 points)	
Research and interview questions (20 points)	
Feature story draft (40 points)	
Final feature story (60 points)	
Top 5 Quiz Scores (10 points each)	50 points
Homework Assignments	50 points
Final Exam	70 points
TOTAL	500 points

NOTE: Failure to turn in assignments will severely damage your course grade. It is far better to receive a low grade on an assignment than to skip the assignment and get a zero.

Point totals at the end of the semester will be converted to letter grades as follows:

Point Total	Grade
470-500 (94%)	A
450-469 (90%)	A-
430-449 (86%)	B+
410-429 (82%)	B

Point Total	Grade
390-409 (78%)	B-
370-389 (74%)	C+
350-369 (70%)	C
330-349 (66%)	C-

Point Total	Grade
310-329 (62%)	D+
275-309 (55%)	D
Below 275	F

Borderline grades within a half point (0.5) of the next highest grade will be rounded up or down based on class participation. Only students with exemplary participation will earn the higher grade. For example, a point total of 429.5 will earn a B+ if the student's contribution to class discussion has exceeded expectations.

To determine your standing in the class at any point in the semester, divide your point total by the total possible points to date and compare the percentage with the percentages in the scale. A sheet has been provided at the end of the syllabus for recording your scores.

Retain all returned assignments until you receive your final course grade. Keep an electronic copy of all assignments. Questions concerning grades should be raised when the assignment is returned. I will NOT re-evaluate scores on individual assignments at the end of the semester.

Make-up/extra credit policy

No make-up work or substitute assignments will be given for missed assignments or quizzes. Extra-credit points are available for excellent attendance (see "Attendance policy" above). There are no other opportunities for extra credit in this course.

Plagiarism/academic dishonesty

It is unethical to plagiarize the work of others or to fabricate quotes or other information. Media professionals who get caught doing this get fired. Any incident of academic dishonesty may result in **an F for the course**. Students suspected of academic dishonesty on any assignment may be required to re-do that assignment or a similar assignment **at the sole discretion of the instructor**, with no proof of academic misconduct required.

Disability policy

Students at Seton Hall University who have a physical, medical, learning or psychiatric disability, either temporary or permanent, may be eligible for reasonable accommodations at the University as per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. In order to receive such accommodations, students must identify themselves at the Office of Disability Support Services (DDS), provide appropriate documentation and collaborate with the development of an accommodation plan. The DDS phone number is (973) 313-6003. For further information, please go to the Web site at <http://studentaffairs.shu.dds>.

Important dates

Tuesday, Jan. 25

Friday, Feb. 25

Monday, March 14

Last Day of Add/Drop and Late Registration

Last Day for Withdrawal with No Signature Required

Last Day for Withdrawal with Professor, Dean Signatures

Tentative Course Schedule

This schedule may be modified and updated during the semester. Changes will be announced in class or posted to the course Blackboard site. Readings listed below by chapter or page number are from the *Inside Reporting* textbook. Readings preceded by an asterisk (*) are available as pdf files (viewable in Adobe Acrobat) or Web links on the course Blackboard site in a folder called "Readings." **All readings must be read by the day on which they are listed.** Check Blackboard for updates to reading assignments.

Wed. 1/19 – Introduction to the course

Assigned: Introduction assignment

Mon. 1/24 – Language, grammar and the writing process

Reading: pp. 22-31, browse pp. 60-61

* "10 Words You Need to Stop Misspelling"

DUE: Introduction assignment

Wed. 1/26 – Journalistic writing & AP style

Reading: pp. 36-41, 56-59

Assigned: Homework #1

Mon. 1/31 – Deciding what's news

Reading: pp. 18-21

* Robert Knight, "What is News in the Age of Blog and Tweet?" *Quill*, March/April 2010, pp. 26-30.

DUE: Homework #1

Wed. 2/2 – Journalists' roles and responsibilities

Reading: Chapter 7

Mon. 2/7 – Sources, quotes and attribution

Reading: pp. 68-71, 82-85

QUIZ #1

Wed. 2/9 – Writing the lead

Reading: pp. 42-45

Assigned: Homework #2

Mon. 2/14 – Writing basic news stories
Reading: pp. 48-55
DUE: Homework #2

Wed. 2/16 – Writing basic news stories
Assigned: News story

Mon. 2/21 – Introduction to feature writing
Reading: pp. 116-119
DUE: News story
Assigned: Feature story idea “pitch”

Wed. 2/23 – Writing feature stories
Reading: pp. 120-125, 46-47
QUIZ #2
Assigned: Homework #3

Mon. 2/28 – Interviewing
Reading: pp. 76-81
DUE: Homework #3
IN CLASS: Interviewing assignment

Wed. 3/2 – Interviewing/feature writing

Mon. 3/7 and Wed. 3/9 – NO CLASS (Spring break)

Mon. 3/14 – Feature story conferences
DUE: Story idea “pitch”

Wed. 3/16 – Introduction to Web writing/Feature story conferences (cont.)
Reading: pp. 158-167
Assigned: Feature story research and interview questions

Mon. 3/21 – Writing for the Web
Reading: pp. 168-174
QUIZ #3

Wed. 3/23 – Deadline writing
IN CLASS: Writing on deadline

Mon. 3/28 – Social media and citizen journalism

Reading: * Claire Cain Miller and Brad Stone, “‘Hyperlocal’ Web Sites Deliver News Without Newspapers,” *The New York Times*, April 12, 2009.

* Brenna Ehrlich, “How Journalists Are Using Social Media for Real Results,” *Mashable*.

DUE: Feature story research and interview questions

Assigned: Website analysis paper

Wed. 3/30 – From interview to feature story

Mon. 4/4 – Introduction to audio/video writing

Reading: Chapter 9

Wed. 4/6 – Writing for audio

QUIZ #4

DUE: Website analysis paper

Mon. 4/11 – Writing for audio

Assigned: Homework #4

Wed. 4/13 – Writing for video

DUE: Homework #4

Mon. 4/18 – Writing for video

DUE: Feature story draft

Assigned: Broadcast writing

Wed. 4/20 – Introduction to public relations

Reading: Chapter 10

QUIZ #5

Mon. 4/25 – NO CLASS (Easter Monday)

Wed. 4/27 – Writing news releases

DUE: Broadcast writing

Assigned: News release

Mon. 5/2 – Internships and jobs

Reading: * Joe Grimm, “How to Get Real-World Journalism Experience as a College Student,” *Poynter Online*.

* Greg Linch, “Top Ten List of Tips for Journalism Students,” *The Linchpin*.

* Robert Niles, “This Year’s Advice for Journalism Students,” *OJR: The Online Journalism Review*.

* Mark Glaser, “10 Reasons There’s a Bright Future for Journalism,” *MediaShift*.

DUE: News release

Wed. 5/4 – Wrap up, Review for final exam

QUIZ #6

Tues. 5/10, 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. – FINAL EXAM

DUE: Final feature story

Record of Class Performance:

Homework assignments (50 points possible; list below)

Top 5 quiz scores (50 points possible; list below)

Website analysis (40 points possible) = _____

Media writing assignments (160 points possible)

News story = _____ (40 points possible)

Web writing on deadline = _____ (40 points possible)

Broadcast writing = _____ (40 points possible)

News release = _____ (40 points possible)

Feature story components (130 points possible)

Story idea "pitch" = _____ (10 points possible)

Research/questions = _____ (20 points possible)

Feature story draft = _____ (40 points possible)

Final feature story = _____ (60 points possible)

Final Exam (70 points possible) = _____

Attendance Record (record all dates absent below):

___ Jan. 19	___ Feb. 21	___ March 30
___ Jan. 24	___ Feb. 23	___ April 4
___ Jan. 26	___ Feb. 28	___ April 6
___ Jan. 31	___ March 2	___ April 11
___ Feb. 2	___ March 14	___ April 13
___ Feb. 7	___ March 16	___ April 18
___ Feb. 9	___ March 21	___ April 20
___ Feb. 14	___ March 23	___ April 27
___ Feb. 16	___ March 28	___ May 2
		___ May 4