

**MCOM 3301.001 Feature Writing – Fall 2020**  
**MWF 11:15 a.m. - 12:10 p.m. CAS 106**

**Instructor:** Professor Lorri Allen

**Office:** FAC 2012, (903) 566-6120

Email: [LorriAllen@uttyler.edu](mailto:LorriAllen@uttyler.edu)

Twitter: @LorriAllenTV, @SoundbiteCoach

**Office Hours: 2:30-4:30 p.m. Tuesdays (in person);**

**4-5 p.m. (open Zoom) Mondays and Wednesdays, and by appointment**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** A study of the purposes, character and subjects in feature stories. Learn how to develop the feature for multimedia platforms, including print, digital and video.

See the basics of feature writing and how it differs from news coverage. We discuss different types of features, and you'll learn how to develop ideas and find sources. You'll improve interviewing, observation and creativity techniques.

It's no longer simply about writing, though. Every entry-level job requires you to take pictures, shoot video, create an infographic, promote your story on social media and/or create interactivity and a complete broadcast package.

You may spend a good deal of time seeking sources and producing stories. Feature assignments are longer and show more depth than articles you've written so far. **So plan your time accordingly.**

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:** By the end of this course, you'll be able to:

- 1 Write correctly and clearly using the formats and compelling storytelling styles appropriate for the audiences and purposes of public relations/integrated communication or multimedia journalism. (Competency: Writing/Storytelling)  
*You can demonstrate writing proficiency with correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and use of the Associated Press Stylebook.*
- 2 Conduct research and evaluate information using methods appropriate to public relations/integrated communication or multimedia journalism professions. (Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry)
- 3 Demonstrate an understanding of and be able to apply First Amendment and other legal principles for public relations/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism. (Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry)
- 4 Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and issues for public relations/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism. (Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry)
- 5 Develop the ability to analyze feature stories.
- 6 Demonstrate the ability to develop publishable stories and airable videos.

7 Recognize a variety of feature formats and storytelling techniques appropriate for different markets and audiences.

### REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Froke, Paula, *et.al* (2020). *2020-2022 The Associated Press Stylebook, 55<sup>th</sup> Edition*. New York: Associated Press. Also available online at [www.apstylebook.com](http://www.apstylebook.com). You may get the online version, but adhere to online classroom policies.
- Kramer, Mark, *et.al* (2007). *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Nieman Foundation. ISBN-13: 978-0452287556
- Readings assigned in class with links on Canvas

Because I want to save you money on an expensive textbook, I've created original material, gleaned from research and personal experience. I'll have worksheets posted, but I won't post slides or answers. I found that students weren't reading the expensive textbooks anyway, so this method allows you time to read articles as they're assigned as well as the inexpensive *Telling True Stories* book.

### REQUIRED MEDIA CONSUMPTION:

Immerse yourself in news media to get the most out of this class. Read newspapers and magazines daily in print and/or online. Watch news programs daily to distinguish between current events and features.

Good sources:

**Newspapers:** *The New York Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Washington Post*

**Magazines:** *The New Yorker*, *Texas Monthly*, *Smithsonian*

**Viewing:** 60 Minutes, Steve Hartman on CBS

**Online:** [Politico.com](http://Politico.com), [bbc.com](http://bbc.com), [TexasTribune.org](http://TexasTribune.org), <https://www.propublica.org>

**Listening:** NPR (100.1) or streaming at NPR.org

### WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT this CLASS:

#### Important Covid-19 Information

Students are required to wear facemasks covering their nose and mouth, and to follow social distancing guidelines, at all times in public settings (including classrooms and laboratories), as specified by [Procedures for Fall 2020 Return to Normal Operations](#). The UT Tyler community views adoption of these practices consistent with its [Honor Code](#) and a sign of good citizenship.

Students who are feeling ill or experiencing symptoms such as sneezing, coughing or a higher than normal temperature will be excused from class and should stay at home and join the class remotely. Students who have difficulty adhering to the COVID-19 safety policies for health reasons are also encouraged to join the class remotely. Students needing additional accommodations may contact the Office of Student Accessibility and Resources at University Center 3150, or call (903) 566-7079 or email [saroffice@uttyler.edu](mailto:saroffice@uttyler.edu).

### Recording of Class Sessions

Class sessions may be recorded for your use in this course. Recordings that contain personally identifiable information or other information subject to FERPA will not be shared with individuals not enrolled in this course unless appropriate consent is obtained from all relevant students. Class recordings are reserved *only for the use of students enrolled in the course and only for educational purposes*. Course recordings should not be shared outside of the course in any form without express permission.

**Attendance: mandatory.** We're partners, and I expect you to show up as you expect me to show up. Attendance and *participation* are a part of your grade.

- Students who anticipate being absent due to religious observance or university-sponsored activities should inform the instructor by the second class meeting.
- **WORK is not an excused absence.**
- You're responsible for turning in all assignments by deadline. You're also responsible for lecture materials, announcements and assignments made during any absence. But DON'T BE ABSENT.
- **If you're habitually late or leave early, you will earn absences.**
- No make-up tests or quizzes allowed.
- If you're late to class on test/quiz days, you will not be allowed to take the exam or quiz if another student has finished.
- To qualify for an excused sick absence, you must provide a doctor's note.
- You may be excused for a death in the family IF the person who died is your parent, grandparent, sibling, spouse or child. Please email or bring the obituary or funeral program to me.
- I won't ask for your doctor's note or funeral program. Unless you show the evidence to me, you will simply lose your A and P points for the day.
- Entering and exiting the class is annoying to your classmates and me. Take bio breaks and make calls before or after class.
- **Schedule story interviews outside of class time.**

**COVID-19 note** | I hope you read all of those bullet points above. They tell you I take attendance seriously. Here's why: those who attend every class make better grades. But a) if you've been exposed to C-19, quarantine, b) if you're feeling C-19 symptoms,

quarantine, or c) or for other health reasons, you need to quarantine, you can take this class synchronously by Zoom. I'm only giving the Zoom link to those who have reached out to me. So, you're expected in class or on Zoom.

### **Assignment Policy:**

Please turn in all assignments by deadline. **They must be turned in the way the rubric instructs you.** *If the assignment is not turned in correctly, it won't be accepted and earns a grade of zero.*

### **WHY?**

Being a good journalist requires good observation skills. Being a great feature writer requires noticing little details. To reinforce these skills, the assignments will differ, so *read each rubric carefully.*

- Due dates may change at my discretion with fair notice, always in your favor.
- NO LATE PAPERS will be accepted--not even one minute late. So I urge you to submit papers well before the deadline.
- You must complete all assignments to pass the course. This does not mean, however, that merely completing all assignments guarantees a passing grade.
- All assignments must include your name, date, assignment name, course name and word count on the upper left of page 1.
- According to Bloom's Taxonomy, the assignments will increase in difficulty and the grading will become stricter through the semester. Plus, you're required to show both a mastery of understanding and skills.

### **Classroom policy:**

No eating is allowed in this lab. You may drink away from the computers if you have a lid on your container.

### **Electronics policy:**

- No cellphone, tablet or other device use during class unless the assignment calls for the use. No calls, no texts, no social media.
- The first time you use a device when you're not supposed to be, I will take it for the rest of the class period. The second time, you must pay \$5 to get it back, the third \$10 and so on. The money is donated to a scholarship fund. And you get a "0" for that day's participation grade.

This includes taking photos of visual aids without permission.

### **WHY am I so mean?**

As a graduate student only seven years ago, sitting behind and beside classmates on their laptops, I was distracted. Read this:

<https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/>

Studies show that taking notes by hand helps you synthesize and prioritize. Other

studies indicate having your computer on EVEN TO TAKE NOTES lowers your grade. Please read the articles on Canvas about this.

### Communicating

- I use Canvas to communicate, post readings, present feedback and grades.
- My email policy: on weekdays, I answer questions in 24 hours. On weekends, I will do my best to answer you in 48 hours.

### Academic Honesty:

- Practice academic integrity and accept responsibility for your actions.
- Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, unattributed use of others' work (including test and paper "banks"), disruption of class, and discourtesy to, or harassment of, other students or your instructor.
- Anyone caught cheating will earn a "0" for that assignment and be subject to academic and disciplinary action.

PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. This includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit. Students caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment, may fail this class and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action.

Thanks to Dr. Emily Scheinfeld for the following nuances:

- **Intent:** When reviewing a possible case of plagiarism, your intent will not be taken into consideration. In other words, an act of plagiarism is plagiarism.
- **Mistakes and accidents:** The possibility you mistakenly or accidentally committed plagiarism will not be taken into consideration.
- **Appeal to ignorance:** Your claim to ignorance about this policy is not ever a valid justification to plagiarize.
- **Collaboration:** Students are not permitted to collaborate on an essay, discussion post, quiz, test or any written assignment. Having someone proofread your work is OK, but can only entail matters of style, grammar, punctuation and spelling.

**GRADING:** 1,000 points possible.

- **Attendance and Participation** (100): Be at all classes, ready to discuss.
- **10 AP Quizzes** (10 points each for 100 total): Quizzes cover the AP Stylebook and grammar, spelling and punctuation skills. Feature-related current events questions may also appear.
- **Find a Feature** (25 points)

- **Story Pitches** (25 points)
- **Sources** (25 points)
- **Interviewing** (25 points)
- **Feature Biography Report** (100 points)
- **Story Assignments** (400 points each): Four writing/media assignments
- **Option Assignment** (100 points)
- **Final Exam** (100 points): Covers all readings and lectures.
- **Extra Credit:** It's available! Ask me if you're interested.

Grades are based on the points you earn.

**A:** 900-1,000   **B:** 800-899   **C:** 700-799   **D:** 600-699   **F:** 0-599

I'll post grades as soon as I can; however, attendance and extra credit aren't tallied until the end of the semester.

**Grading rubrics:** I'll give a rubric for each assignment, and the following applies to all:

- **Clean copy is important.** Your grade for each assignment will be reduced depending on how many grammar, spelling, punctuation or AP errors you have.
- **Facts are important.** A fact error results in a zero for the assignment.
- **Names are important.** If you misspell a name (including mine), you will get a zero for the assignment.
- **Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** Students caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment, may fail the class and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action. Go here for more:

<http://www.uttyler.edu/judicialaffairs/scholasticdishonesty.php>

Thanks to Dr. Emily Scheinfeld for the following additions to this course:

#### Email:

It's my preferred form of contact (note the address on page 1). I don't guarantee a response to emails sent to other addresses, including Canvas. If an email is after 6 p.m. on any given day, you might not hear back before 9 a.m. the following business day. Emails about assignments will not be responded to after 9 p.m. and are not guaranteed after 5 p.m. the night before the assignment is due. Treat our online correspondence with the same respect as any business or legal communication. Emails that do not conform to these standards (including correct GSP) will not be answered. So it's in your best interest to write emails with intelligence and respect.

#### Grade Grievance Policy:

If you wish to appeal a grade, please follow this procedure:

- Wait 24 hours before contacting me unless I made a math error. Wait so you can look back over the assignment or exam, your notes and think about the reasons you earned the grade. Act rather than react to the grade.
- Submit the appeal in writing. Email me within one week; include your specific appeal and which grade you believe you earned.
- Disputes will not be entertained after 7 days of the date the assignment was returned. If any grade is to be reevaluated, the new grade may be lower than the previous grade. If I reevaluate an assignment, I may find errors I didn't find before that lower the grade.
- I won't hold conversations in the last week of class or after final grades have been posted about being only a few points away from earning a particular letter grade. I provide bonus points and extra credit, so you will receive the grade you earn throughout the semester. *Please start working hard now.*

#### General Classroom Infractions:

- Electronic devices must be turned off and put away before class begins.
  - If I can hear it vibrating, it must be turned off. If I hear a device again in the semester, it stays home for good.
- Cell phones, ear buds, headphones and other electronic devices aren't welcome in the classroom.
  - It doesn't matter why you have a phone out. Without permission to have it out, you'll be asked to leave.
- Working on unrelated material, copying or writing on someone else's notes during class is prohibited.
  - If you need a pen, paper, etc., raise your hand - a lack of preparedness on your part doesn't give you the right to interrupt.
- Private comments, jokes, nudges, pokes, texts or written notes between students are a major disruption.
  - If your attention is not exclusively on the board, your notes, or the person talking, you will be told to leave.
  - Laptops and tablets are not allowed in the classroom (see Electronics policy on page 3). Also keep phones and smart watches put away.
- Inattention, sleeping or the appearance of sleeping (as decided solely by the professor) is prohibited.
- Disruptions such as closing books, zipping bags or packing up before being dismissed are not welcome.
- Please be extra polite and attentive when we have guest speakers.

**Consequences:** Attendance/Participation grade drops. Further infractions result in your permanent dismissal from class. Also, I reserve the right to assign seats to counter disruptive behavior.

#### Major Course Infractions:

- Arguing during class with me, especially when you've been accused of an infraction.
  - We can discuss your behavior later in my office, but arguing with me during class worsens your offense.
  - If you ever find yourself being sent out of class, gather your things and quietly leave. Be aware that, from the moment the infraction started, everything you are saying and doing will be written in a report to the Dean.
- Disrespectful or uncivil conduct of any form, either online or in the classroom.
  - While you have a right to your opinion, inflammatory language, including discriminatory language based on race, religion, appearance, class, ethnicity, gender, dis/ability, sexual orientation or national origin, is unacceptable.
- Academic dishonesty is prohibited in any form.

**Consequences:** You will be dismissed from class and sent to the Dean for disciplinary action. The Dean may determine a note be permanently placed on your transcript, barring you from any future college plans.

## **University of Texas at Tyler Policies**

### **Honor Code**

Every member of the UT Tyler community joins together to embrace: Honor and integrity that will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.

Educating students to take their place in the world engenders a serious responsibility for any educational institution. The University recognizes that future decisions made by these citizens must be grounded in ethics as well as in academic knowledge if these decisions will protect and benefit society. For these reasons, UT Tyler takes a proactive stand and adopts an Honor code so students may be equipped with an ethical framework for their future.

### **Students Rights and Responsibilities**

To know and understand the policies that affect your rights and responsibilities as a student at UT Tyler, please follow this link: <http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php>

### **Campus Carry**

We respect the right and privacy of students 21 and over who are duly licensed to carry concealed weapons in this class. License holders are expected to behave responsibly and keep a handgun secure and concealed. More information is available at <http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php>

### **Tobacco-Free**

All forms of tobacco are banned on any property owned by UT Tyler. This applies to all members of the University community, including students, faculty, staff, University affiliates, contractors and visitors. Forms of tobacco not permitted include cigarettes, cigars, pipes, water pipes (hookah), bidis, kreteks, electronic cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chewing tobacco and all other tobacco products. Cessation programs are available to students looking to quit smoking, including counseling, quitlines and group support. For more information on cessation programs, please visit [www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free](http://www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free).

### **Grade Replacement/Forgiveness and Census Date Policies**

Students repeating a course for grade forgiveness (grade replacement) must file a Grade Replacement Contract with the Enrollment Services Center (ADM 230) on or before the Census Date of the semester in which the course will be repeated. Grade Replacement Contracts are available in the Enrollment Services Center or at <http://www.uttyler.edu/registrar>. Each semester's Census Date can be found on the Contract



itself, on the Academic Calendar, or in the information pamphlets published each semester by the Office of the Registrar. Failure to file a Grade Replacement Contract will result in both the original and repeated grade being used to calculate your overall grade point average. Undergraduates are eligible to exercise grade replacement for only three course repeats during their career at UT Tyler; graduates are eligible for two grade replacements. Full policy details are printed on each Grade Replacement Contract.

The Census Date is the deadline for many forms and enrollment actions of which students need to be aware. These include:

- Submitting Grade Replacement Contracts, Transient Forms, requests to withhold directory information, approvals for taking courses as Audit, Pass/Fail or Credit/No Credit.
- Receiving 100 percent refunds for partial withdrawals. (There is no refund for these after the Census Date)
- Schedule adjustments (section changes, adding a new class, dropping without a “W” grade)
- Being reinstated or re-enrolled in classes after being dropped for non-payment
- Completing the process for tuition exemptions or waivers through Financial Aid

#### **State-Mandated Course Drop Policy**

Texas law prohibits a student who began college for the first time in Fall 2007 or thereafter from dropping more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career. This includes courses dropped at another 2-year or 4-year Texas public college or university. For purposes of this rule, a dropped course is any course dropped after the census date. Exceptions to the 6-drop rule may be found in the catalog. Petitions for exemptions must be submitted to the Enrollment Services Center and be accompanied by documentation of the extenuating circumstance. Please contact the Enrollment Services Center if you have questions.

### **CENSUS DATE is Sept. 4**

### **Last day to withdraw is Nov. 2**

#### **Student Absence due to Religious Observance**

Students who anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance are asked to inform the instructor of such absences by the second class meeting of the semester.

#### **Student Absence for University-Sponsored Events and Activities**

If you intend to be absent for a university-sponsored event or activity, you (or the event sponsor) must notify the instructor at least 2 weeks prior to the date of the planned absence. At that time, the instructor will set a date and time when make-up assignments will be completed.

#### **Social Security and FERPA Statement**

It is the policy of The University of Texas at Tyler to protect the confidential nature of social security numbers. The University has changed its computer programming so that all students have an identification number. The electronic transmission of grades (e.g., via e-mail) risks violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; grades will not be transmitted electronically.

#### **Emergency Exits and Evacuation**

Everyone is required to exit the building when a fire alarm goes off. Follow your instructor’s directions regarding the appropriate exit. If you require assistance during an evacuation, inform your instructor in the first week of class. Do not re-enter the building unless given permission by University Police, Fire department or Fire Prevention Services.

#### **Student Standards of Academic Conduct**

Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty, including but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

“**Cheating**” includes, but is not limited to:

- Copying from another student’s test paper;
- Using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
- Failure to comply with instructions given by the person administering the test;

- Possession during a test of materials, which are not authorized by the person giving the test, such as class, notes or specifically designed “crib notes;” The presence of textbooks constitutes a violation if the person administering the test has specifically prohibited them;
- Using, buying, stealing, transporting or soliciting in whole or part the contents of an unadministered test, test key, homework solution or computer program;
- Collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or other assignment without authority;
- Discussing the contents of an examination with another student who will take the examination;
- Divulging the contents of an examination, for the purpose of preserving questions for use by another, when the instructors has designated that the examination is not to be removed from the examination room or not to be returned or to be kept by the student;
- Substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for oneself to take a course, a test or any course-related assignment;
- Paying or offering money or other valuable thing to, or coercing another person to obtain an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program or information about an unadministered test, test key, home solution or computer program;
- Falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other academic work offered for credit;
- Taking, keeping, misplacing or damaging the property of The University of Texas at Tyler, or of another, if the student knows or reasonably should know that an unfair academic advantage would be gained by such conduct; and
- Misrepresenting facts, including providing false grades or resumes, for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit or injuring another student academically or financially.

“**Plagiarism**” includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift or obtaining by any means another’s work and the submission of it as one’s own academic work.

“**Collusion**” includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty.

#### **UT Tyler Resources for Students**

- UT Tyler Writing Center (903.565.5995), [writingcenter@uttyler.edu](mailto:writingcenter@uttyler.edu)
- UT Tyler Tutoring Center (903.565.5964), [tutoring@uttyler.edu](mailto:tutoring@uttyler.edu)
- UT Tyler Counseling Center (903.566.7254)

**Disability/Accessibility Services:** In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act and the ADA Amendments Act, UT Tyler offers accommodations to students with learning, physical and/or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability, including a non-visible diagnosis such as a learning disorder, chronic illness, TBI, PTSD, ADHD, or you have a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment, visit <https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler> and fill out the New Student application. The **Student Accessibility and Resources** office will contact you when your application has been submitted. For more information, please visit the SAR webpage at <http://www.uttyler.edu/disabilityservices>, the SAR office located in the UC 3150 or call 903.566.7079.

(Please read the paragraph below, **print or scan this page only**, then print and sign your name where indicated, and turn into me Friday, Aug. 28. Thanks!)

**I have thoroughly reviewed** this syllabus and **understand it**.  
If I have questions about **turning in assignments, how to behave in class or how grades are earned, I promise** to check the **syllabus and Canvas before asking**.

Print your name \_\_\_\_\_

Sign your name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_