

**MCOM 3301—Feature Writing**  
**Monday/Wednesday 2:30 p.m.-3:50 p.m. (HPR 252)**  
**Syllabus—Fall 2015**

**Faculty Information**

- Instructor: Rauf Arif
- Office: HPR 264
- Office Hours: Fridays 11:10 a.m.-2:10 p.m., or by appointment.
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**Course Overview**

MCOM 3301 will focus on feature writing & multimedia production both in the online and offline world. Students will create *original* content in analytical, advocacy, how-to and business feature styles, to name a few. In addition, students will create related blog material, audio/visuals, and use social media to promote their work.

In this class you will learn the basics of feature writing. We will discuss various types of features, including profiles, short features, news features, trend features and personal essays. You will learn how to develop ideas for features and how to pitch stories to editors, including writing effective feature story lede. We will focus on interviewing techniques, developing an eye for detail, organizing material and keeping it lively<sup>1</sup>. Since feature writing is considered as a creative side of journalism, it is expected that each student develop his/her own voice and style.

Students, over the course of the semester, will learn how to serve the needs of a diverse mass media audience. Just as in previous courses, plan to spend a good deal of time seeking out sources and producing assignments you'll create for this class. Feature assignments will be longer and show considerably more depth than articles you've produced for your news courses. Plan your time and your work schedules accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup> Larsen, P. (2012). Journalism 316: Feature Writing.

## Student Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Write correctly and clearly using the formats and compelling storytelling styles appropriate for the audiences and purposes for public relations/integrated communication or multimedia journalism.
2. Demonstrate proficiency in writing including basic grammar and style and use of the Associated Press Stylebook and Manual.
3. Demonstrate the ability to create news stories/news features for multimedia platforms using the proper style and standards of journalism.
4. Understand and practice the First Amendment and other principles.
5. Understand and practice ethical principles of journalism.
6. Demonstrate the ability to develop publishable stories.
7. Develop the ability to analyze feature stories.
8. Recognize a variety of feature formats and storytelling techniques that are appropriate for different feature markets and audiences.
9. Begin building a professional clip portfolio.
10. Learn teamwork and presentation skills to promote their work in professional settings

## Course Requirements

### Required Texts

- Garrison, B. (2010). Professional Feature Writing, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Routledge. ISBN-13: 978-0-415-99897-0
- Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual. (MOST RECENT EDITION)

### Recommended Texts

- Strunk Jr., W., & White, E.B. (2000). The Elements of Style 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, New York: Longman. (OR MOST RECENT EDITION)
- A good dictionary

## IV. Hardware and Software

- **Recommended, not required:** 100-gigabyte or larger portable external hard drive with FireWire 800 interface. This is only to make sure you develop a habit of saving your work in an external hard drive so as to avoid technology-related mishaps.
- All other equipment used in this class is available for checkout (make sure that you are aware of the equipment checkout policy at UT, Tyler)

### Suggested Reading:

- Gutkind, L. (1997). The Art of Creative Nonfiction: Writing and Selling the Literature of Reality. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

- Neff, J., & Neff, G. (Eds.). (2000). *Formatting & Submitting Your Manuscript*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books.
- Nickell, K. (Ed.). (2003). *The Writer's Digest Writing Clinic: Expert Help for Improving Your Work*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books.
- Noble, W. (2000). *Writing Dramatic Nonfiction*. Forest Dale, Vermont: Paul S. Eriksson.
- Writer's Digest Magazine and online WD articles at [www.WritersDigest.com](http://www.WritersDigest.com).
- Any of the books/references listed in the Garrison text book pp. 407-417.

### Course Organization

MCOM 3301 will begin with a run-through on how magazine journalism differs from newspaper journalism. It then will focus on the techniques and skills needed for shooting and editing video and audio. We may spend some time on learning techniques to use smartphone technologies to perform journalistic duties. The course will also focus on the techniques and skills needed for creating feature story ledes. Students will learn to create and maintain their blogs. The course will quickly transition into feature writing assignments. It is important for students to understand that all work produced in this class will be published on their *WordPress* blogs.

Depending upon the number of students, you will work on stories in five-person teams throughout the semester. I will organize these teams during the first week of the semester. Students will evaluate each other's work in class. In-class reviews will be conducted for instructional purposes. We'll follow this format for all work produced in this course.

### Assignments and Grading (total of 1000 points)<sup>2</sup>:

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Feature stories (3@200 points each)                        | 600 points |
| Workshop activities for feature stories (3@25 points each) | 75 points  |
| <i>WordPress</i> Blogs                                     | 50         |
| Submit Feature Stories to <i>Patriot Talon</i>             | 50         |
| Attendance & in-class participation                        | 25         |
| Final exam   | 200 points |

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<sup>2</sup> Note: For this class, the assignments and grading criteria has been adopted and modified by following the syllabus of JoAnne C. Broadwater who teaches at Towson University's Department of Mass Communication and Communication Students.

### **Feature Story #1 (Text & Still Images)**

Feature story#1 will be based on the combination of text and still images. Based on a travel destination that you have visited, select a destination that is unique and intriguing, not overwritten about. All stories will be 1000 words. It will be written based on many interviews along with your research. This assignment, and all others that follow, have the following components:

- Focused story idea
- Outline
- Source list (Names, titles, phone numbers, possibly age and address if relevant) of all people or information used in the story.
- Interview notes (Required. May not be replaced by audio recording.)
- First draft with the editing of two of your peers and their signatures. Word count.
- Second, final draft showing your revisions. Word count.
- Illustration/photo potential. Make five photo or art assignments that might go with the story.

### **Feature Story #2 (Text, Audio, Visuals/IDVs)**

Develop a clearly focused idea based on any type of feature story: Profile, How-to, Travel, Lifestyle, Trend, Human Interest, Seasonal/Anniversary, News-feature, etc. Your instructor must approve the topic. It should be based on multiple human sources—not yourself, your friends and acquaintances, or your family. 1000 words.

### **Feature Story #3 (Text & Video)**

Develop a clearly focused idea based on any type of feature story: Profile, How-to, Travel, Lifestyle, Trend, Human Interest, Seasonal/Anniversary, News-feature, etc. Your instructor must approve the topic. It should be based on multiple human sources—not yourself, your friends and acquaintances, or your family. 1000 words.

### **Workshops**

We will have three workshops in total. Workshops will be held in the week prior to the due date for the feature story. The purpose of these workshops is to provide students opportunity to peer edit, rewrite, and improve their feature stories. Students will receive a grade based upon their preparation for the workshop and the quality of their participation

in the activities on the scheduled date. All reporting for the feature story and the well-written first draft should be completed in time for the workshop.

Students-led groups will edit it for you, making recommendations and signing the documents. Students will be graded on the quality of their editing of classmates' papers. You will meet with your editors to discuss their recommendations. You will then be responsible for editing your own paper. You will be turning in your edited version and your final draft to the instructor for grading.

If you are absent you may not earn the points for the workshop. You will be expected to make a serious effort to get your stories published in *Patriot Talon* or publications outside of the University campus. Students will submit each story to the instructor as part of a writing package in a folder. In addition to the grade given for the entire folder, students will also receive a grade based upon their attendance at, and the quality of their participation in, the workshop activities, or classes, when work on features is being completed<sup>3</sup>.

### **Examination**

There will be only one final exam given during the semester. You must take the exam during the scheduled time for your section. It will be a two-part examination:

Part I: Short answers/essay.

Part II: Analysis of a feature story.

### **Assignments Submission to *Patriot Talon***

It is required that every group will submit their best feature to the *Patriot Talon* for publication. You will not be penalized if your work is not published in *Talon*, however, you will lose 50 points (out of total 1000) for not submitting your work. I will discuss the procedures and deadlines for submissions later in the semester.

### **Grading Criteria for Writing Assignments**

- 94 – 100 (A) Publishable work. It is a story that is clear, interesting, and well-written. It illustrates excellent interviews and research, is well organized, has effective quotes and smooth transitions and no spelling, grammar, or accuracy errors.
- 80 – 93 (B) Publishable with some editing. It may have some minor spelling or grammatical errors but has evidence of good interviews and research. The lead is effective. The body is cohesive and well-organized.
- 70 – 79 (C) Requires extensive editing to publish. Several sections must be rewritten. The lead may not be a good fit for the topic or may fail to entice readers. The body of the story is disorganized, lacks focus, and contains many minor errors. It uses weak or no quotes and no evidence of research.

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<sup>3</sup> For source, look at the footnote# 2

- 60 – 69 (D) Needs a complete rewrite to be published. The facts are presented ineffectively, and information may be missing. The story contains an unacceptable number of spelling, grammar, or accuracy errors.

Below 60 (F) Contains major factual error(s). Names are misspelled. The facts are so distorted that they could not be rewritten and published.

### **Blogging and Social Media Use**

Using social media and blogging are now part of the everyday activity in media organizations. You'll be expected to demonstrate that you have the ability and skills to use these media forms as well.

### **Class Participation**

Class discussions are the heart and soul of this course. Every student is required to participate in each session. Poor class participation can be a considerable drag on an otherwise higher final grade. Similarly, good class participation can help you achieve greatness.

**AP Style Error Policy:** the instructor assumes students have AP style knowledge well in hand. Each AP style error will result in a .10 grade reduction. For example, a story earns a 3.75, but has seven AP style errors ( $7 \times .10 = .70$ ;  $3.75 - .7 = 3.05$ . Thus, an 'A' story becomes a 'B' story).

**Factual Error Policy:** one factual error in a story results in an automatic D. Two factual errors in the same assignment will net an F.

### **Video Grading Criteria**

Students will produce one video of no more than 1:30 minutes in length for the feature# 3 assignment. Below are some of the elements that will determine your grades for video components:

#### Quality of Video Shooting

- Steady shots (you used a tripod)
- Minimal panning and zooming
- Clear audio, both natural sound and interview
- Well-lit
- Sources are interviewed at eye level
- Interviewees are shot from a slight angle to the left or right
- Interviewees are not looking at camera
- You are silent during interviews (no laughter, "uh-huhs," etc.)
- Composition:
  - Rule of thirds

- In focus
- Level
- No distracting backgrounds or poles emerging from people's heads
- Close to source or action
- Varying angles and perspectives
- Fill the frame

#### Quality of Video Editing

- No jump-cuts
- Well-paced shots
- Good mix of wide, medium and close-ups
- Good transitions
- Lower-thirds

#### Quality of Overall Storytelling

- Well-focused
- Tells a coherent story
- Beginning, middle, end
- Good characters
- Interesting shots and action
- Grabs attention quickly
- Includes action, emotion

**Deadline Policy:** Since this class simulates a real-life journalistic environment where deadlines are everything, we will make sure that all the assignments are turned-in following their deadlines. Any assignment turned in after its due date and time may receive a zero grade.

**Electronic Devices:** Turn off all electronic devices including cell phones and MP3 players. Allowing a cell phone or other device to ring during class is rude and disrupts class. No text messaging or checking the time on your cell phone during class. Keep these devices in your backpack during class.

**Use of Computers in Class:** Keyboards must be placed to the right of each monitor and remain untouched during class unless otherwise instructed to use the computer as part of an in-class assignment. Do not use computers during class for reading/writing e-mail, surfing the Web, playing games, working on assignments for other classes, or writing letters.

#### **Assignment Policy:**

1. Assignments will be given throughout the semester. Students are responsible for all course materials, including, but not limited to, class lectures, handouts, workbook and textbook reading assignments.
2. Assignments and due dates may be changed at the instructor's discretion with fair notice to students.

3. Students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course. This does not mean that merely completing all assignments guarantees the student will pass the course.
4. Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due at the beginning of class.
5. ALL PAPERS MUST BE TYPED OR WORD-PROCESSED USING THE FORMAT REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNMENT.
6. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, style, and diction count. Deductions for each error are:
  - a) -10 AP error
  - b) -5 punctuation
  - c) -5 grammar
  - d) -5 misspelled word
  - e) -10 factual error
  - f) -50 misspelled names
7. ALWAYS ATTACH EARLIER VERSIONS TO REWRITES.
8. Multiple pages must be stapled or paper clipped together, unless otherwise specified. It is your responsibility to see this is accomplished.

**Late Assignments:** Late assignments will not be accepted. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the date specified.

**Attendance and Tardiness Policy:** Attendance in the course is mandatory; however there are times when an absence is unavoidable. **Four** absences are allowed – this includes illness, university-sponsored activities, etc. A **fifth** absence will **lower the final grade by 5 percentage points**. A **sixth** absence will **lower the grade by 10 percentage points**. See the current UT Tyler catalog for the university's policy on student responsibility for missed classes and assignments. Be familiar with the university's drop policy. Students who anticipate being absent from class due to religious observance or university-sponsored activities should inform the instructor by the second class meeting. **Students over 15 minutes late are considered absent. Students working on anything other than materials for this course during class time are considered absent. If a student must be absent the day an exam or presentation is scheduled, he/she must notify the instructor before class time. No make-up tests or presentations will be allowed if the instructor is not given a legitimate excuse before the time of the exam or presentation.**

**Cheating Policy:** students who are discovered to be fabricating sources, quotations or information or submitting material they did not create solely by themselves (plagiarism) will be awarded an F in the course. Look at the UT Tyler's Honor Code at the end of this syllabus.

### **Patriot Talon Publication Schedule**

By the second week of classes, I will provide you Talon's publication schedule so that you are able to turn in your completed feature stories to the paper.

Please note that students will have to be prepared to make fixes based on the edits from the editors and turn their story back in within two days.

*Talon's* regular meetings are every Monday at 5 p.m. in MB2, the communication annex across from the physical plant next to the baseball fields.

Submissions should be sent to the editor in chief at the following email address: [editor@patriottalon.com](mailto:editor@patriottalon.com). If you have questions about your story, you can reach the editor on the same email account.

Please note that students cannot tell subjects that they work for the *Talon*. Only approved staff members can do that. They should identify themselves as students who will submit their work to the *Talon*. **The Editor in chief has final say on what is published and in what form.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Note: The syllabus is for planning purpose. The instructor reserves the right to revise/change assignments to meet the course objectives and enhance students' learning in the field.

## University of Texas at Tyler Policies

### 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>

### 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 that students need to be aware of. 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% 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 that is dropped after the census date (See Academic Calendar for the specific 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 must be accompanied by documentation of the extenuating circumstance. Please contact the Enrollment Services Center if you have any questions.

### Disability Services

In accordance with federal law, a student requesting accommodation must provide documentation of his/her disability to the Disability Services counselor. If you have a disability, including a learning disability, for which you request an accommodation, please contact the Disability Services office in UC 3150, or call (903) 566-7079.

### Student Absence due to Religious Observance

Students who anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance are requested 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 two 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 reenter the building unless given permission by University Police, Fire department, or Fire Prevention Services.

## HONOR CODE THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

*An honorable man, impoverished though he may be in talent, cannot fail to attain success and high standing in the eyes of the world. A dishonorable man, though he is possessed of a multitude of abilities, cannot hope to escape for long the condemnation of his fellow men. –Robert Wood*

The University of Texas at Tyler is committed to providing a setting for free inquiry, excellent teaching, research, artistic performances and professional public service. As a community of scholars, the University develops each individual's critical thinking skills, appreciation of the arts, humanities and sciences, international understanding for participation in the global society, professional knowledge and skills to enhance economic productivity, and commitment to lifelong learnings.<sup>2</sup>

Such a commitment to a preeminent place in higher education also requires the ethical development of the entire UT Tyler community: students, faculty members, staff members, and administrators. The UT Tyler Honor Code is crucial to these ideals. The Honor Code is the means through which to apply the ethical ideal of honorable living to the lives of the UT Tyler community. Therefore, 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.**

The purpose of the UT Tyler Honor Code is to foster a commitment to honorable living, and to exhort its community members (students, staff, faculty, and administrators) to adhere not simply to the minimum standard, but to transcend the letter of the code by committing to broader ideals consistent with the spirit of the Code. The honor code has many advantages which serve to promote a relationship of trust and respect across the entire UT Tyler

community. The Honor Code strives to achieve this relationship through the following goals:

- a. To assist the UT Tyler community in developing an understanding of the importance of integrity.
- b. To enable the UT Tyler community to learn and practice ethical principles.
- c. To instill in the UT Tyler community a strong desire to maintain honor in accordance with the Code.
- d. To promote a level of commitment in the UT Tyler community to honorable conduct necessary to meet the ethical challenges faced throughout a lifetime of service to the global community.
- e. To enable the UT Tyler community to develop essential leadership skills necessary to establish an ethical climate within their organizations.
- f. To encourage members of the UT Tyler community to embrace the spirit of the honor code in their lives rather than merely verbalize endorsement.
- g. To affirm that members of the UT Tyler community will not be disadvantaged for having done his or her own work while others have violated the honor code.

Educating students to take their place in the world engenders a serious responsibility for any educational institution. The University of Texas at Tyler recognizes that the 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 the University of Texas at Tyler takes a proactive stand and adopts an Honor code throughout the campus so that students may be equipped with an ethical framework for their future lives.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmKsbYwtreo>