**JOMC 253 Opinion Writing; Fall 2014; Syllabus**

Paul O’Connor, lecturer

JOMC 258:001 Tu-TH 3:30-4:45 p.m. in CA 143

Office Hours: Tu-TH, 9:30 -10:30 a.m. in CA 394

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**I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

Course Description: JOMC 258, Opinion Writing, is a writing intensive course that explores the methods and formats of persuasive and convincing argumentation for mass media. We begin with a elementary discussion of the classical discipline of argumentation and then adapt its principles for media use. Students are expected to develop a deep understanding of, and expertise in, their chosen topic and then to argue with honesty, dignity and integrity. Students will also be expected to stay abreast of current events for those assignments not necessarily related to their chosen topics.

Required Textbooks:

*The Associated Press Stylebook*

*JOMC School Stylebook, Tenth Edition or online.*

Course Structure: Class discussion and labs.

Students will submit writing assignments in nearly every class. Thirteen regular assignments, due on Tuesdays, will be given a numerical grade. The 13th of these assignments will be counted as a double grade. On Thursdays, students will complete shorter, ungraded exercises. They will only be included in the final course grade if they are exceptionally good or bad. There is no final exam.

Students are required to complete:

1. A summary of the “beat” to be covered this semester. It is due Thursday, Aug. 21.
2. 13 weekly assignments. See “Schedule of Assignments” in Sakai “Resources” folder.

**II. WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

**Beat Summary:** You will pick a topic about which you will write this semester. Although this is an opinion writing class, it also relies on original reporting. Writers will be expected to find new and interesting topics. On Thursday, August 21, each student will present the instructor with a one-paragraph summary of the topic he or she wishes to cover with additional lists of the people who will be worth following and the events worth attending this semester.

Two topics will not be allowed: Religion and sports. The instructor will challenge students on their opinions and won’t get into a matter as personal as religion. Also, students will pick a topic that is suitable for discussions with the professor. Elements of your personal life probably don’t qualify for that.

***Weekly assignments are due on Tuesdays by the end of class.***

**Deadline:** The School puts considerable emphasis on the importance of deadlines. Therefore, JOMC 258 has very strict deadline standards. All stories must be submitted by the Tuesday deadline unless other arrangements are made. Assignments may be printed in class.

Assignments are considered late when not submitted by the end of Tuesday class and will be reduced by 10 points. You MUST come to class and submit your paper. Sending a story by email on Tuesday and not appearing in the lab is unacceptable, and your story will be considered LATE if you do this without permission.

Assignments will suffer a second 10-point penalty if not turned in at the BEGINNING of the following Tuesday’s session. That’s a total of 20 points deducted if it is submitted after the start of class on Tuesday.

Assignments submitted more than a week late, that is after the start of the Tuesday lab one week after it was due, will be docked 50 points.

Final project stories will be docked 20 points if not submitted by the end of lab on the November 25. If a student does not submit this advocacy story by that deadline, he or she must discuss plans with the instructor to submit one later. In the event that an advocacy piece is not submitted by the start of class on December 2, the instructor will assign it a zero. Even if a paper is assigned a zero, the student must submit an acceptable enterprise piece to gain academic credit for the course.

***The instructor receives assignments sequentially. A student cannot skip a due date because an assignment is late. For example, if a student fails to submit the fifth assignment, but submits an assignment on the due date for number six, then that submission is considered assignment five and it is penalized accordingly. Assignment six is now late and the clock starts ticking on its penalty.***

Prof. O’Connor will further reduce a student’s semester grade by a partial grade when that student submits three or more late papers. For example: A student with an average in the C range for the semester but three late papers will get a C minus.

Students should list all sources and how those sources may be contacted through email, or by phone, at the end of each submission. Students should also list all events attended with date and time. Student sources are allowed, but submissions heavy on student sources will not be highly regarded.

**III. PUBLISHING**

The School encourages its students to publish as much as possible during their collegiate careers. In this class, there is no publishing requirement, but the instructor strongly encourages you to find a market for your writing. He suggests that you explore possibilities with The DTH, other campus publications and even commercial publications in the region. The instructor is willing to work with any students who are seeking to get their work published. DTH students can coordinate their writing for the paper with pieces required for this class.

**IV. FINAL PROJECT**

Students are required to write a 1,000-word, advocacy story that is developed from the beat covered during the semester.

Each student will discuss the topic for this assignment with the instructor during a scheduled appointment after Fall Break.

The assignment requires the use of at least THREE HUMAN SOURCES, each of whom will be identified by name, title and contact information at the end of the story. All source rules for regular weekly assignments apply. The instructor will not accept an advocacy story that does not have a source list.

Stories may exceed the 1,000-word requirement with the instructor’s approval.

**V. GRADING**

Published Articles: Students are encouraged to write pieces that have the possibility of being published in a local newspaper, or elsewhere, but stories will not receive extra credit for being published.

Prof. O’Connor provides a numerical grade that is a translation from the more typical letter grade with plusses or minuses. He considers a number of factors in grading.

Originality, depth of understanding, the challenge involved in getting the appropriate information, all these are considered in grading. Our goal is to produce clever, error-free writing that is well organized and both persuasive and convincing. News value is important, too.

Students who continually return to the same topic will need strong, fresh angles to it. Rehashing what was written last week doesn’t work.

Strong sources also warrant higher grades than weak ones.

Students are graded on their reporting and writing skills. Errors of style, punctuation and grammar cost a lot of points. Accuracy is essential. Inaccurate information leads to failing grades.

Students who will be late with an assignment must notify the instructor in advance and explain why. Events do happen that interfere with completing a story, such as illness or a death in the family. Be aware, however, that being untruthful to the instructor as to the reason for your missing deadline is an HONOR CODE offense and could lead to your dismissal from the university. Your instructor finds lies about a death in the family particularly offensive.

Grading for this class is as follows: A = 93 or above, A- 90-92; B+ 88-89; B 83-87; B- 80-82; C+ = 78-79; C 73-77; C-70-72; D+ 68-69; D 63-67; D-60-62.

Final Grade

Students have 13 graded assignments in this class. They will be equally weighed to reach a semester average, with one exception: The final assignment is worth double. Therefore, the 13th grade will be counted twice and the total will be divided by 14. Prof. O’Connor adheres to the above grading scale and does not add extra points at the end of the semester. You get exactly what your average says you’ll get…

Except for three exceptions. Prof. O’Connor fails a student for the semester when that student has three failing grades on the regularly assignments and/or advocacy story. He also reduces semester grades from the semester average for students who submitted three or more late papers or who had unexcused absences. Students who have at least three full A’s on the writing assignments may be elevated beyond their strict numerical average if they also do not have a single writing grade below B. Something similar applies with regard to A- grades.

During class and office hours, students can work individually with Prof. O’Connor. He will read their drafts, point out their errors, suggest re-writes and new approaches. Students should avail themselves of this opportunity to have their papers improved before they submit their final versions for grading. All students are expected to participate in these meetings regularly, preferably every week.

Students must avoid conflicts of interest. If your mother is the director of social services, you can’t write about that.

Student attendance is essential. There will be writing exercises nearly every day of class. A student who merely appears in class to hand in his or her paper on Tuesday and who misses the Thursday sections will be docked. Absences may be excused, but students should generally understand that they are expected to be in class every single class period. Prof. O’Connor will not abide unexcused absences and he considers a student absent if the student does no more than appear to submit a paper. A student with more than three absences will be docked further on the final grade, as much as a full semester grade. Be warned that the instructor is very serious about this.

**VI. HONOR CODE.**

The University’s Honor Code is in effect in JOMC 253 as in all other courses. Students may be allowed to work together on some stories. The instructor will explain and clarify under which particular, limited circumstances such cooperation will be appropriate and acceptable in the course. On all other assignments, you are expected to do your own work and abide by the Honor Code of the University. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <http://instrument.unc.edu/basicframe.html>.

Plagiarism is an increasing problem on this and other college campuses. You are to cite your sources appropriately and according to the assignment. The Code of Student Conduct states that expulsion or suspension can result from “(a)cademic cheating, including (but not limited to) unauthorized copying, collaboration or use of notes or books on examinations, and plagiarism (defined as the intentional representation of another person’s words, thoughts, or ideas as one’s own). If you have questions, ask your instructor.

Students are reminded that their failure to do all of their own interviews, research, note-taking, documentation, writing and reporting is a violation of the University Honor Code and could result in disciplinary action by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

For more information on plagiarism, go to The Writing Center’s Plagiarism site at: <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/avoid.html>.

If you are writing in conjunction with another publication, the DTH for example, you must do all of the work that appears in the version you submit to your instructor. That means you cannot accept any help from your editor at that publication for the work you submit for class. You may take an assignment from that editor, but the editor’s preparation of a research memo for you or the editor’s handing of a press release to get you started constitutes unacceptable assistance.

**Keep in mind that your instructor is a veteran news reporter who spent his career finding cheats and liars in the political world, and that powerful search engines have been designed to help instructors catch plagiarism. Don’t try your luck.**

Note: This statement comes from the J-School and our accrediting council. The proficiencies noted below are those that apply particularly to this course.

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

 Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;

 Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;

 Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;

 Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;

 Think critically, creatively and independently;

 Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;

 Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;

 Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;

 Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;

 Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.