

# **MeJo 553: Advanced Reporting, Spring 2018**

## **Master Syllabus**

**Paul T. O'Connor, lecturer. MeJo 553:001. Tu-Th 9:30-10:45 a.m. CA 128 (Halls of Fame Room, first floor).  
Office Hours in CA 392, Tuesdays 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. and by appointment.**

### **Required Texts**

**You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction – from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between, by Lee Gutkind.**

**Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life, Second Edition, by Philip Gerard.**

**Instructor's Online Coursepack.**

**On Writing Well, by William Zinsser (30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition). Students should carry this book with them throughout their lives.**

### **Suggested Texts**

**Unofficial Ancestry.com Workbook, by Nancy Hendrickson**

**Unofficial Guide to Ancestry.com, by Nancy Hendrickson**

### **General Information**

**In this section of Advanced Reporting, students will use tools most often associated with fiction writing to tell non-fiction stories.**

**The course has three main components: beginning genealogical research, in-depth interviewing and creative non-fiction story telling.**

### **Course Structure**

**Classes will involve lectures, writing labs and discussion. Students will compile a family genealogical tree, conduct in-depth interviews with family members, compile a written summary of those interviews and verify information through public records. Each student will compile a writing plan with the instructor that will include family vignettes, short stories, descriptive context assignments and a final project. Students will submit their completed portfolio at the end of the semester.**

## **Genealogical Research**

Using university library resources, students have access to the enormous genealogical databases of Ancestry.com. Go to: <http://guides.lib.unc.edu/go.php?c=23609213> and use onyen and password prompts. Students should establish their own accounts for building family trees. The company's free service will be adequate. The first task will be to establish a family tree and to record important dates and events in family history. Using Ancestry's resources, and those in other publicly available databases, students will find public records that provide more information. Students may choose to seek public records at the appropriate repositories; for example they may search county courthouses, church files or local libraries. The goal here is to find as much information about family members as possible in hopes of finding good stories.

## **In-Depth Interviewing**

Students will establish a work plan for a series of extended interviews with key family members. This will involve the collecting of interview prompts from family members and associates and the development of an interview script. Students should learn how to use a digital recorder and or audio/video devices to record interviews. These are to be preserved for the students' grandchildren.

## **Creative Non-Fiction**

Fiction writers employ tools not often available to news writers. But, increasingly, journalists are using these tools for complex stories. Popular historians have long employed these techniques.

Students will seek to develop the narrative arc most appropriate to their stories. They will find historical resources, such as old letters and diaries, to reconstruct dialogue and to develop character. They will mine a wide range of artifacts, such as old photographs and news stories, to reconstruct the physical settings of their stories.

## **Additional Readings**

Creative non-fiction is often cited as the fastest growing genre in American publishing. This is a short list of examples. Students will choose readings from this list and prepare a report on one of those marked with an asterisk\*. Students can also suggest a book report book.

All Over But The Shoutin', by Rick Bragg

Angela's Ashes, by Frank McCourt

**A Book of One's Own, by Thomas Mallon**

**\*The Boys In The Boat, by Daniel James Brown**

**\*Devil in The White City, by Erik Larson#**

**Going To School In Black And White, by Cindy Geary & LaHoma Romocki**

**Hillbilly Elegy, by J.D. Vance**

**Holidays On Ice, by David Sedaris**

**\*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, by Rebecca Skloot**

**\*Irena's Children: The Extraordinary Story of the Woman Who Saved 2,500 Children from the Warsaw Ghetto, by Tilar Mazzeo**

**It's All Relative: Adventures Up and Down the Family Tree, by A. J. Jacobs.**

**\*The Jew Store: A Family Memoir, by Stella Suberman**

**The Liar's Club, by Mary Karr**

**\*The Night of the Gun, by David Carr**

**\*The Right Stuff, by Tom Wolfe**

**Roots, by Alex Haley**

**\*The Secret Of Chanel No. 5: The Intimate History Of the World's Most Famous Perfume, by Tilar J. Mazzeo**

**South and West, by Joan Didion**

**Where I Was From, by Joan Didion**

**\*The Widow Clicquot: The Story of a Champagne Empire And The Woman Who Ruled It, by Tilar J. Mazzeo**

**#Larson has written a number of non-fiction works using creative non-fiction techniques. He is one of the instructor's favorite authors.**

## **Assignments**

**The portfolio, 75 percent of final grade includes:**

**Four vignettes/scenes.**

**One photo interpretation report.**

One 5-page single incident memoir.  
One 2-3 page historical context report.  
Two 1-page physical descriptions.  
One 2-hour audio interview.  
Four 2-4 page short stories.  
One book report.  
One family shoebox of key details

Final Project, 25 percent of final grade.  
Choose One:  
Short story of 10+ pages.\*  
Audio/video story of 15+ minutes.  
Audio story of 22+ minutes.

Volunteer assignment: Audio or Video panel.

### **Schedule of Assignments**

Jan. 11 – Show up on time. Bring laptop and any family notes already collected.  
Jan. 16 – Begin your five-generation ancestral table and devise a list of living persons to interview. Begin devising interview prompts. Read Gutkind pp. 100-104. Read Zinsser Chapter 12.  
Jan. 18 – Write first scene/vignette. 200-word maximum. Read Gutkind pp. xv – 38 and Gerard p. 1-11.  
Jan. 23 – Second scene/vignette. Read Gerard, chapter 4, pp. 47-67.  
Jan. 25 – Read Gutkind, pp. 89-95; pp. 204-206; pp. 218-225; pp. 226-231.  
Third scene/vignette. 200-word maximum  
Jan. 30 – Gerard Read chapter six, pp. 81-94. Fourth scene/vignette.  
Feb. 01 – Re-read Gutkind and Gerard from Jan. 25 & 30.  
Feb. 06 - Gutkind read pp. 124-134. In-class details exercise. 200 words.  
Feb. 08 – Gerard, read pp. 112-115 regarding dialogue.  
Feb. 13 - First short story due. Read Zinsser Chapter 1.  
Feb. 15 – Read Zinsser Chapter 2  
Feb. 20 – Book report due. Read Zinsser Chapter 3.  
Feb. 22 - Read Zinsser Chapter 4.  
Feb. 27 – Second story due. Read Zinsser Chapter 5  
Mar. 01 – Read Zinsser, chapters 14 & 24.  
Mar. 06 – Third story due. Read Zinsser Chapter 6  
Mar. 08 – Prepare for Dr. Geary visit. Read Zinsser Chapter 7.  
Mar. 20 – Fourth story due.  
Mar. 22 – Student panel on audio recording.  
Mar. 27 – Historical Context Report due.  
Mar. 29 – Student panel on video.  
Apr. 03 – Prepare for Prof. McDonald Visit  
Apr. 05 - Revision day.

**Apr. 10 – Audio recording due.  
Apr. 12 – Writing and Revision day.  
Apr. 17 – Portfolio due for final grading.  
Apr. 19 – Prepare for Jim Jenkins visit.  
Apr. 24 – Writing and Revision.  
Apr. 26 – Final project due.**

**May 4 --- Final exam period (8 a.m.) to be used for review of final projects and portfolios.**

## **Grading**

**Portfolio will count as 75 percent of the semi-final grade. The final project will constitute the semi-final 25 percent. Class participation will then sway that grade up or down as much as a full grade. Each unexcused absence will mean a one-point reduction of the portfolio grade. Each late appearance after the first will, also.**

**The portfolio's grade will be an average of the graded assignments with the four scenes counting as one assignment while the memoir and book report will each counting double.**

**Because revision and rewrite are a big element of this class, the portfolio assignments can be revised during the semester to improve the grade. See instructor for details.**

**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 60-67.**

## **Honor Code**

**At UNC, we expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.**

**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.

If you are writing a story that you plan to submit for class in conjunction with another publication, the DTH for example, you must do all of the work that appears in the version you hand 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 story memo for you or the editor’s handing of a press release to get you started constitutes unacceptable assistance.

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

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.

## **Seeking Help**

If you need individual assistance, it’s your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness. Do not wait for the professor to contact you regarding poor performance, missing or late papers.

## **Diversity**

The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin

<http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

**Special needs:** If you have any disability or other special situation that might make it difficult to meet the requirements described above, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. If you have not done so already, you should also contact the Department of Accessibility Resources & Service (AR&S) at 919-962-8300 or [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu).

## **Accreditation**

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on the last six bullet dots under "Professional values and competencies" in the link above.

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