Feature and Magazine Article Writing – JOUR 202  
University of Richmond  
Department of Journalism  
Fall, 2018  
Tuesday and Thursday – 10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.  
Weinstein Hall 314

Instructor: Shahan Mufti  
Email: smufti@richmond.edu  
Office: 425 Weinstein Hall  
Office hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will put you to work as a feature writer. Through the semester you will report and write articles in a range of lengths, styles and on various topics, suitable for publication in magazines or in the pages of newspapers. To become a good writer, it is essential to become a good reader. So while we report, plan, organize and write stories we will also read some of the feature length journalism that has been published in magazines and newspapers in the past few decades. We will extract the ingredients of truly memorable and remarkable writing and work to include them in our own craft. By familiarizing ourselves with the contemporary landscape of American publishing we will also learn how to best match stories to publication and how to appeal our work to the particular sensibilities of editors and audiences.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, you will be able to successfully take on and execute feature assignments of any length for a magazine or newspaper. Through several intensive reporting and writing exercises you will develop the skills to report and craft in-depth feature length stories that are seen most often in the pages of the best publications and websites. You will also refine your interviewing and research skills with a special eye to reporting for in-depth stories. Through the course, you will develop the necessary skills to successfully pitch stories to editors. To be successful in this course, you should expect to devote an average of 10-14 hours each week to preparing for class, participating in class sessions, studying course related materials, and completing course assignments.

READINGS

- For each class session, relevant magazine and newspaper articles, book chapters, and web- links will be posted to Blackboard
- A subscription to Texture magazine subscription service
ASSIGNMENTS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Blackboard Responses: 10 percent
You are required to complete all assigned readings and post a brief response to them (200 – 300 words) on Blackboard by 5 p.m. on the day before class. In your responses, you may analyze the pieces you read, applying ideas from class discussions to these readings. You must also pose at least three questions related to the reporting or writing of the piece that may be tackled during the class session on the following day. You will be graded (check, check minus, check plus). Late entries will receive no grade. Your graded responses will be returned to you at the end of each week.

Participation: 15 percent
Attendance and active participation are essential for you to do well in this course. Vibrant participation – comments, questions, criticisms – will allow all members of the group to benefit from the exchange of ideas. The class discussions will also allow us all to sharpen our own ideas and techniques for good feature writing. For every three classes that you miss, your final grade will drop by one letter grade. If you end the semester with a perfect attendance record, you will receive extra credit for the course.

Two feature articles: 25 percent
Twice during the course, you will report and write shorter feature articles. Before you begin your reporting and writing you will be required to pitch your idea to me and get me to sign off on it. The pieces are due at the beginning of class on the dates noted in the syllabus.

Short writing exercises: 15 percent
You will periodically be required to complete short writing assignments in class or at home, which will be graded. Your final story outline is graded as one of these short writing exercises.

Final piece: 35 percent
At the end of the semester, working in a reporting team of two or three, you will submit a 3000-word piece on a topic of your choice. It should be a story that you can easily report from the city of Richmond over the fall semester.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES

Topic for Story #1: Thursday 9/6
Story #1: Thursday 9/27
Pitch three ideas for final story on Tuesday, October 2 before 5 pm
Final story pitches: Tuesday 10/2
Topic for Story #2: Thursday 10/11
Topic for final piece: Thursday 10/18
Story #2: Thursday 11/1
Final story outline: Thursday 11/11
Final story deadline: Friday 12/15 at 5 p.m. via email
WRITING GUIDELINES

You are required to meet all deadlines on the syllabus without exception. If you foresee trouble meeting a deadline, you must inform me at least one week in advance and we will discuss whether an extension might be useful or possible. A late submission without any warning will not be read and will receive an “F” grade.

On the first page, in the upper left corner please list your name, a one or two word title description, the date and the word count. This can all be done in the “header” space on a Microsoft Word document.
Example: Mufti — Tattoo – 10/16/18 – 1005 words
Please include page numbers at the bottom of each page.
Name your Word document as shown in this example:
MUFTI_TATTOO_PARLOR_AUG292018.doc

GRADING

You will be graded on your stories according to the following standard (as published by the Poynter Institute):

A: Publishable in current form with few or no revisions
A- /B+: Publishable with minor work
B: Solid elements; will be publishable with some rehabbing
B- /C+: Some serious flaws but other strengths; will be publishable with reasonable work
C: Major flaws; needs overhaul before being publishable
D: Critical errors; could not be considered publishable without dramatic change
F: Work not completed, lacks merit over-all, was late, or misspelled a personal or business name.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Observe the honor code. You need to properly attribute all the sources you use in your stories. All work submitted should be done by the student in preparation for this specific course. (You may not, for example, hand in a story for this class that you are also using in another course). Evidence of plagiarism and cheating of any kind will result in immediate “F” on the assignment and this may be reported to the university administration for further consideration. If you have difficulty understanding how to cite sources or have questions concerning any of the above contact me immediately.

DISABILITY ACCOMODATION

Students with disabilities who have been formally granted accommodations by a University of Richmond Disability Advisor must show their “Disability Accommodation Notice” to me within the first week of the academic term. The student and I will agree upon an accommodation in advance for each scheduled major assignment. You must meet with me at least one week prior to any deadline to discuss your accommodation.
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 - Introduction
Aug. 28 - Introduction to the course, between participants
Aug. 30 - The features of a feature

WEEK 2 – The anatomy of a feature article
Sep. 4 - Understanding structure
Sep. 6 - Creating structure
**Announce subject for Assignment #1**

WEEK 3 – Time as an element of story
Sep. 11 - Creating Timelines
Sep. 13 - Narrative and movement

WEEK 4 – Characters
Sep. 18 - Interviewing for features
Sep. 20 - Characters as vehicles for storytelling

WEEK 5 – Descriptive writing
Sep. 25 - Describing scenery, objects, people
Sep. 27 - Description as narrative
**Due: Assignment #1 - 1,000-word story**

WEEK 6 – Scenes and Dialog
Oct. 2 - Scene and point of view
**Oct. 4 – One-on-one meetings**

WEEK 7 – Explanatory writing
Oct. 9 - Distilling information
Oct. 11 - Explaining complex processes
**Announce profile subject for Assignment #2**

WEEK 8
**Oct. 16 - FALL BREAK**
Oct. 18 - Announce final story topics in class

WEEK 9 – The Profile
Oct. 23 - The idea of the profile
Oct. 25 - Situating the central character

WEEK 10 – Investigative features
Oct. 30 - Researching records and trends
Nov. 1 - Cultivating sources
**Assignment #2: 1,500-word profile**

WEEK 11 – Immersion journalism
Nov. 6 – Refining the “I” character
Nov. 8 - Reporting day

WEEK 12 - In class one-on-one meeting
Nov. 14 - Post your final story outline before 5 p.m. on 11/11
Nov. 15 - Post your final story outline before 5 p.m. on 11/11
Extra Credit Opportunity

WEEK 13 – Editing
Nov. 20 - Editing your own work
Nov. 22 - THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 14 – Pitching your work
Nov. 27 – Pre-reporting and adapting ideas
Nov. 29 - Writing the perfect magazine pitch

WEEK 15 – The future of magazine journalism
Dec. 4 - Readings from online magazines
Dec. 6 – Wrap-up

Final story due on 12/15 at 5 p.m. via email