The scene: A newsroom in Virginia, sometime before you were born. A young reporter, eager to make his mark, was spending the last precious minutes before deadline polishing one of his first feature stories that was bound for the front page. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, the gruff and gravel-voiced assistant editor stomped up behind him, his toxic breath matched only by his noxious personality. “F*$&#! it son,” the editor fumed (using words you shouldn’t use in a syllabus). “Just send the $^*%story. You’re not creating $(!* literature here.”

The editor was wrong. Good journalism can be good literature. And that is what we will examine in this course.

The overall goal of this class is to explore the broad concept of literary, long-form journalism and to help you to gain an appreciation for this particular style of non-fiction narrative. We will look at the writing and reporting techniques used by literary journalists and see how they compare and contrast with traditional journalism. Long-form journalism has become its own art form, an expression that combines the best of newsroom and literary cultures. At its most effective, it can have a deep and powerful impact on readers that goes well beyond the daily headlines.

HOW THE CLASS WORKS

This is a seminar course, which means less straight lecture from me and more discussions from everyone. In other words, we are creating a learning community. That means it is essential to do the assigned reading before class since the direction and tone of our discussions is based on everyone being fully prepared. Everyone will get at least two assigned days to lead the class discussions.

You will be expected to analyze every piece we cover during the semester. We will carefully consider the writing styles of each author, how they tell stories and what literary and reporting techniques they use. You may consider the purpose the writer has in telling a particular story. Is he or she mainly trying to entertain, inform, enlighten or illuminate? Is there a social, political, civic or moral purpose? How do you know, and what was or could be the impact?

You can expect to be inspired, intimidated, enlightened, challenged, comforted, disturbed and disrupted by the assigned readings. Your views will be broadened and in reading other voices, perhaps you will discover your own.
ATTENDANCE

Come to class on time every day. Your presence is essential to your personal success as well as that of the entire group.

Let me know in advance if you have to miss a class for a non-emergency. You are responsible for finding out whatever assignments or material were covered in class. Missing class doesn't mean you can miss a deadline, unless you're dealing with an emergency. Please keep me informed of such events.

If you miss a class, we will miss you. If you miss two classes, I will call you. If you miss three classes, I may have the entire class march over to your room and we will hold our session there.

Here is an incentive: if you miss no classes, I will drop your three lowest quiz grades. If you miss just one, I will drop two. If you miss more than three classes, I will bring you into my office to discuss whether I will drop you. If you have five unexcused absences, you will fail the course.

Please note: if you are having an issue of any kind related to your mental or physical health or a circumstance of some difficulty, please come to see me and let us work together to get you back on track.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The Best American Magazine Writing, 2018

Missoula, Krakauer

The New Yorker, online edition


The New Yorker has been running a three-month subscription deal that will work for the course of this semester. Wait until I say so before you order so we can maximize your investment.

As you probably know, the Times has a student/education rate. Subscribe now if you have not already.

Any books you will need for your book/author reports are available at the library or inexpensively at any number of retailers.

I will also make available through links, email, Blackboard or old-fashioned paper the specific pieces that we will read.
ASSIGNMENTS

a) Enthusiastic participation in each class discussion  
b) Short weekly reading quizzes  
c) Midterm analysis paper or profile of the writer or work of your choice (see details)  
d) One additional profile of a literary journalist  
e) One 2-3 page book analysis – many options for this  
f) Two solo poetry slams – (see details)  
g) Final: a partnered 10-minute Ted-style talk on an aspect of literary journalism

POETRY SLAMS

In the tradition of Mike Spear, who created this course, we will have two poetry slams during the semester. In doing these, follow this procedure: 1. Pick out a poem of at least 15 lines; 2. Memorize the lines; 3. Get speech center help (required) on how to perform the poem. These will graded by outside judges. This assignment should be an easy A.

MIDTERM AND PROFILE

Write a magazine-style profile on any literary journalist. This should include:

1. A list of the writer’s books, if any  
2. A list of this writer’s magazine articles – as many as you can find.  
3. Provide a thorough description of the kinds of topics the writer picks.  
4. Provide detailed and thorough criticism from at least five sources of the writer’s work.  
5. Provide at least three passages that clearly demonstrate the writer’s skill and style. You should explain what it is about these passages that you like also.  
6. List the characteristics in this writer’s work that show why he or she is part of the new journalism movement.  
7. Include as much as you can about the writer’s life, especially early life that may have influenced his or her writing.  
8. Beyond the writing, what is the reputation of the writer? What are the good and bad things that are being/have been said about him or her?  
9. You should write this as a fast-paced, long-form magazine article.

Alternatively, you may do a detailed analysis of a particular piece of literary journalism. See me for details on specifics

GRADING – BREAKDOWN

50 percent assignments  
25 percent weekly quizzes  
25 percent progress and participation
HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

Unless I tell you otherwise, do your own work in this course. Attribute information that comes from other sources. When in doubt, ask me. **Presenting fictional interviews, quotes, etc., as factual is an honor code violation, as well as a grave breach of trust. Plagiarism is grounds for failure in this course and possible university sanction.**

OFFICE HOURS, ETC.

I am on campus every day during the week, but it’s best to send an email a day ahead of time to set up a meeting. I am available by email, phone and in person during most reasonable hours and some unreasonable hours. I generally respond quickly to emails, but if I don’t respond to yours right away, it’s personal and I just don’t like you. Or I am awash with other emails from other students and I’ll respond as soon as I can. Pick whichever explanation is best for your self-esteem and believe that it is true.

Please communicate – if you are not clear about something or are concerned about something, get in touch with me right away. If you are shy and don’t want to ask questions in front of others, send me an email.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

This is a **guideline.** We will add relevant pieces from The New Yorker, The New York Times or other outlets. We will discuss changes in class or via email, and we will always make room to include anything that is particularly newsworthy. You are encouraged to bring up good pieces you come across.

**Week 1:** “A Most American Terrorist,” [https://tinyurl.com/ycjjmksn](https://tinyurl.com/ycjjmksn); “Last Words,” [https://tinyurl.com/yxf65fzu](https://tinyurl.com/yxf65fzu); “Travels in Georgia,” [https://tinyurl.com/y2eyv9t3](https://tinyurl.com/y2eyv9t3); “Best Magazine” selections

**Week 2:** “How to get away with murder in small-town India,” [https://tinyurl.com/y7hoeuor](https://tinyurl.com/y7hoeuor); “Best Magazine” selections

**Week 3:** “Seven days of heroin,” [https://tinyurl.com/yybat6q6](https://tinyurl.com/yybat6q6), and Nieman Storyboard commentary; “Best Magazine” selections

**Week 4:** “Sinatra has a cold,” [https://tinyurl.com/yxkt7aym](https://tinyurl.com/yxkt7aym); “Mrs. Kelly’s Monster,” [http://hollander.grady.uga.edu/mrskellymonster.pdf](http://hollander.grady.uga.edu/mrskellymonster.pdf); “The Detective of Northern Oddities,” [https://tinyurl.com/y5dy6j85](https://tinyurl.com/y5dy6j85)
TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE - continued


Week 6: Start “Missoula”

Week 7: First poetry slam, finish “Missoula”


Week 9: “Harvey Weinstein’s Army of Spies,” https://tinyurl.com/y3gcsc4e

Week 10: “Snow fall: the Avalanche at Tunnel Creek,” https://tinyurl.com/ybxrt7ym

Week 11: “Invisible lives,” https://tinyurl.com/y3y9rp4k (just the first three)

Week 12: Second poetry slam; “What Bullets Do To Bodies,” https://tinyurl.com/yc7bphvk


Week 14: Ted Talks presentations

Week 15: Ted Talks presentations