

COM 373 - Feature Writing and Magazine Management
Dr. Tamara Gillis
206G Steinman Center
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2 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.
Tuesdays and Thursdays
S204
Fall 2006

Prerequisites: Com 311 or permission of instructor.

Textbooks (required):

The Best American Magazine Writing 2005. Columbia University Press: New York.

Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual

Recommended Reading/Resources:

- *Writer's Market*
- A good dictionary and thesaurus
- *Writer's Handbook*
- *Editor & Publisher*

Read, read, read magazines, features in newspapers, books about magazines and authors that you respect. The more you read the better you will write.

“Reading is important — read between the lines. Don’t swallow everything.” - Gwendolyn Brooks

Course Description and Purpose:

This course will focus on the writing, editing, production and management skills necessary for the successful publishing of a magazine. The semester’s brevity requires that students work on more than one assignment at a time. Skills needed to write as a free-lance writer and a staff writer in the magazine industry are developed. Among the types of writing covered are human interest, personality sketch, humor, how-to, background and informational pieces. Story titles, openings, closings, structures, research and query letters are examined. The impact of new media on the traditional print magazine is also explored. The course culminates with the production of a mass circulation publication: The Jay Crew magazine.

Course Objectives:

The objectives of this course are:

- For students to develop skills in long-form journalism (feature writing).
- For students to improve journalistic writing and editing skills.
- For students to develop the skills in writing different types of feature articles that are found in the majority of magazines, e-zines and newspapers today.
- For students to experience the production and management components associated with starting and maintaining a periodical publication.

As a writing intensive production course, the students will produce a number of magazine articles before the end of the semester.

Course Policies:

Attendance: It is expected that all students attend every class and be on time. Absences severely handicap the learning process and reflect on the student's ability to meet deadlines. Being late for class interrupts the momentum of the class and distracts other students.

A student may miss two class sessions without penalty; however, on each successive absence, a grade reduction will be made from the course final grade.

Student athletes must discuss their schedules individually with the instructor. There may be occasions when the absence of a student athlete will not be permitted.

Submission of Assignments: Unless otherwise stated, assignments and class exercises are to be handed in during the class. In an attempt to provide a professional experience, deadlines will be made for some in-class assignments. In such cases, if the story is not ready at the deadline, it will not be accepted. Work assigned for overnight will be due at the beginning of the next class meeting, unless otherwise agreed.

Makeup Work: Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period. No late work will be accepted and a grade of 0 will be given.

Assignments, quizzes or tests missed as a result of absence will only be made up by prior arrangement with the instructor. If permission is not secured, a grade of 0 will be given.

Written Work: All work must be typed including drafts (although editing marks ... as shown in the AP Stylebook ... are OK).

Specifications: All written submissions (in class and out of class assignments) must be type-written or printer generated, double spaced, 12 point type, Times or Times Roman, one inch margins on all edges, and proper slugs. If assignments do not meet these specifications, a grade of 0 will be assigned.

College Statement on Disability: If you have a documented disability and need reasonable accommodations to fully participate in course activities or meet course requirements, you must 1) contact the director of disability services, Shirley Deichert, in the Center of Student Success, and 2) meet with me within two weeks of receiving a copy of the accommodation letter from Disability Services to discuss your accommodation needs and their implementation.

The Jay Crew Magazine

We will produce a professional-quality magazine as we study the magazine industry. This course requires substantial outside work for the production of this magazine. Be prepared to budget time outside of class to meet and discuss stories, advertising sales and design, strategy and deadlines.

This course draws on the entire range of communications skills: interpersonal, group decision making, writing and editing, design, advertising, production, photography, as well as the art of time management – meeting all deadlines. AP style will be followed for all writing in this class; please brush up on it.

Typically it takes 18 months to two years from the time a magazine idea is conceived until its premiere issue is published, assuming it successfully runs the gauntlet of approvals. This process will be compressed into a single semester for this course. On the second meeting of the course, the class will form a working magazine staff. Candidates will be assigned to serve management positions: editor in chief, art director, production chief, copy editor, advertising director and managing editor. The remainder of the class will be placed on staff according to expertise and need. There is one position already filled on the magazine: I am the publisher. The magazine staff will have freedom, but the publisher will have the final say on editorial formula.

Regardless of positions held, everyone is encouraged to work in all areas of the magazine. Please note that all jobs are important, and that grades certainly do not reflect “status.”

Deadlines are NOT subject to negotiation in this course. Think of the magazine as a line of dominoes — miss one deadline and it affects the other deadlines down the line. The class will set the deadlines for the production and some assignments.

We will firm up the production schedule, make assignments for stories, photos, etc. after the staff has been formed. A *tentative* production schedule is listed in the class schedule.

Projects, Tests and Assignments

Each student will conceptualize, plan, finance, staff and complete a magazine this semester. Class readings and lectures will show how, and we will be doing the same steps for the class magazine. There are deadlines for various parts of this project found in the project deadlines column on the class schedule. This makes the task less daunting.

Project 1: Conceptualizing your magazine: In general describe the magazine you plan to create, giving it a working title, describing the audience and geographic boundaries, competition, etc. Give specifications: size, appearance, content, angle, editorial philosophy. State your concept, formula and objectives. Be realistic and do your research into the competition and niche of your publication.

Project 2: Planning your magazine: Produce a dummy of the first issue of your magazine, including placement of titles, illustrations, ads, copy and color.

Project 3: Staffing and scheduling your magazine: How will you organize your staff? Will you rely on freelance talent or staff writers? How will you schedule the production of an issue? How will you schedule 12 issues a year/six issues a year/four issues a year?

Project 4: Financing your magazine: What is your advertising policy? What percentage of advertising to editorial will you carry? Who are some potential advertisers? What percentage of your budget will come from advertising? From subscriptions? From single copy sales? How will you promote the magazine? What will it cost you to produce your magazine?

Final Project: Final paper and complete sample: This should be visualized as a sales pitch to investors. It will include a written description of your publishing plan and a sample of your first

issue. It will also include a list of stories for future issues. The final project will take the form of an eight-to-ten-minute oral presentation before the class when it is submitted.

The final project is a comprehensive of projects 1 through 4. Your grade for this project will be separate from the grades for the four smaller projects.

Things to consider: Choose a project concept based on viability, uniqueness or strength compared with existing titles in the field, advertising and circulation bases, potential and as a learning experience. I will provide input and may ask you to reconsider an idea if it seems to be limited or implausible.

Please approach trade magazines with an open mind; a majority of the nation's titles fall into this category, as do the bulk of jobs in the field. Whether you propose a consumer or trade magazine, don't present ideas espousing a particular religion or political party, ones that obviously can't be profitable, or ones that duplicate previous efforts.

A magazine is not a newspaper, nor a diary. It involves voice, pacing, focus, targeting, as well as departments that express the concerns of its readers. It must have something to offer potential advertisers. It needs a design capable of expressing editorial material, adding an appropriate artistic element. Your publication will come alive amid social trends, market forces, competing titles and financial considerations. It will involve audience research, from focus groups to national surveys.

Your publication concept must be supported by editorial, advertising and circulation. Consider: audience, competition, niche definition, sustaining the future of the publication, advertising. Rewrite opportunities are listed in the class schedule. Original and rewrite grades are averaged to arrive at a final grade for each piece.

Stories to be completed during the semester, listed below, are in addition to the project and class magazine work:

Story 1: A news feature story. (1,000 words) Identify the publication for which you are writing this feature. Consider the audience of the publication when selecting the topic. *

Story 2: A profile for a magazine. (1,500 words) This story may be written for a consumer, trade or class magazine. Identify the magazine for which you are writing this feature.*

Story 3: A feature story for a magazine. (2,000 words) This story may be written for a consumer, trade or class magazine. Identify the magazine for which you are writing this feature.*

Story 4: A feature story for an e-zine (1,000 words) This story may be written in one of many styles, but must be prepared for use in an online forum.*

* One of these stories will appear in the class magazine. One or more will appear in a fellow-student project.

Additional extra-credit opportunities may also arise as the semester progresses. These will also take the form of writing assignments for publication.

Exams: There will be a midterm and a final exam. These tests may include a writing assignment or questions about class readings (essay, short answer, multiple guess). These are minor compared to the writing assignments throughout the semester.

Grading Stories:

- A The story is exceptionally well-written and edited, thorough and free of errors (that includes style errors). The lead is clear, concise and interesting. The story is well-organized and contains effective transitions, quotations if possible, descriptions and anecdotes if applicable.
- B The story contains a few minor errors. The lead clearly and accurately summarizes the story and presents the news of the story. The other paragraphs present all the information necessary for a comprehensive story. Most of the information is presented in a cohesive, well-organized manner.
- C The story is superficial and needs extensive editing. The lead may be too wordy or may fail to clearly emphasize the latest, most interesting and most important part of the story. The story is disorganized and contains a number of errors.
- D The story contains most of the necessary facts but is presented in a disorganized and confusing manner. The story needs a re-write and probably contains many careless errors.
- F The story could not be published because it is incomplete, misses the point of the assignment entirely and is riddled with errors.

Grading:

Projects 1 – 4 (P/NP)	10%
Final Project and Presentation	15%
Midterm	5%
Final Exam	5%
Story 1	10%
Story 2	10%
Story 3	10%
Story 4	10%
Jay Crew participation	25%

Position Descriptions

editor in chief (1) — decides which articles and artwork will be published ... supervises editorial staff and production of the issue... may write editorials or special columns ... helps select illustrations and plans layouts ... must have a keen sense of what the magazine's readers want... reports to the publisher about the status of the operation.

art director (1) — supervises graphic design of the magazine, including cover, art, photographs, layout and typography ... works in conjunction with editors to plan visual treatment of stories ... responsible for desk top publishing of magazine ... must have experience with desk top publishing and production.

production chief (1) — responsible for sending completed copy to printer, either in form of edited manuscripts and artwork, or as paste up mechanicals or on disk from desk top publishing ... oversees proofing, printing quality and deadline schedules ... must have knowledge of graphics and experience with production.

copy editor (1) — reviews finished manuscripts for clarity, length and readability ... edits grammar, spelling and punctuation to conform to the magazine's style and checks facts ... must have strong writing and editing skills.

advertising director (1) — manages the sale of advertising space, which may include retail and national advertising as well as classified ads ... may also supervise advertising research and promotion.

managing editor (1) — supervises the entire information gathering operation ... consults with the editors and writers to choose stories for publications ... may assist in page layouts ... responsible for smooth flow of stories, headlines and graphics to the production department. [In the real world, this title is sometimes synonymous with editor-in-chief.]

staff writer (many) — researches and writes articles as assigned by an editor... may specialize in a particular subject or write a regular column ... must be a skilled researcher, interviewer and writer.

Schedule: Subject to change, but not likely.

Day	Date	Discussion	Project Deadlines/Magazine
Tues	Aug 29	Introduction to course and planning for The Jay Crew Magazine	
Thur	Aug 31	Presentation: Feature Writing Styles	“Home” pp. 3-23 Sept: Choose staff members and begin to plan the magazine
Tues	Sep 5	Staff vs. Free-lance Writers Writer-Editor Relations	Specific departments, assignments, columns, etc.
Thur	Sep 7	Writing Features Review of Leads	Schedule deadlines, advertising and printing.
Tues	Sep 12	Researching Stories Interviewing Skills	Idea for Story 1 Due.
Thur	Sep 14	Narratives & Style	“Stomping Grounds” pp. 24-47 “American Communion” pp. 264-296
Tues	Sep 19	Profiles	“Walking His Life Away” pp. 120-137
Thur	Sep 21	Issue Planning	Oct: Staff-written features finished, outside assignments are finished, being collected.
Tues	Sep 26	Specialized Features Human Interest Stories Travel & Lifestyle Stories (Leisure Interests)	Story 1 Due. Plans for design and stories are underway. “Grail Trails” handout
Thur	Sep 28	Guest Speaker: TBA	Idea for Story 2 Due. Editing begins.
Tues	Oct 3	Color Stories, Brights/Humor Staff Time – Production Meeting	Rewrite Story 1 Due.
Thur	Oct 5	Trade & Association Publications	Project 1 Deadline: Conceptualizing magazine
Tues	Oct 10	Midterm	Writing and editing captions and shorts. Story 2 Due.
Thur	Oct 12	No class. Fall Break.	By Oct’s End: Dummy layouts underway. Project 2 Deadline: Planning magazine.
Tues	Oct 17	The Production Process Magazine Design	Idea for Story 3 Due. Nov: Polish final pages and fit copy.
Thur	Oct 19	Backgrounders	Rewrite Story 2 Due.
Tues	Oct 24	Seasonal Stories	
Thur	Oct 26	How-tos	Project 3 Deadline: Staff & scheduling
Tues	Oct 31	Working with Artists/Creatives	Query for Story 3 Due.
Thur	Nov 2	Magazine Staff Time	Late Nov: Pages proofed and OK’d by staff and sent to printer.
Tues	Nov 7	Ethics & Legal Issues	Photo memos for Stories 1,2,3 Due.
Thur	Nov 9	Investigative Reporting (Public Interest)	Project 4 Deadline: Financing magazine. “Innocence Lost” pp. 176-211

Tues	Nov 14	Essays and Fiction as Feature Forms	Story 3 Due. "Was Darwin Wrong?" pp. 314-331 "Foaling Season" pp. 372-394
Thur	Nov 16	Guest Speaker: TBA	
Tues	Nov 21	Circulation and Marketing in the Magazine Industry	Rewrite Story 3 Due.
Thur	Nov 23	Thanksgiving Recess	
Tues	Nov 28	Evaluation of magazine Class critiques the results.	All Final Projects due. Final paper, complete sample.
Thur	Nov 30	Future of Magazines in an Electronic World	
Tues	Dec 5	Presentations (1-8)	Absolute Deadline for delivery of Jay Crew
Thur	Dec 7	Presentations (9-16)	
Tues, Dec 12		Final Exam, 2:30 to 5:30	