

JOR/WRT 415 - Perspectives on Reporting

Fall 2009 • Tuesdays 3:30-6:15 p.m. • Davis 109

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Office (Chafee 227) Hours: Mondays 10-11 a.m. and 1-2 p.m.;
Tuesdays 1-2 p.m.; and by appointment

The Course We can learn much about the profession of journalism by studying reporters and reporting, and particularly by reading the work of good reporters. Such reading is at the heart of this course.

Course Goals The department has four goals for this course; I hope you have one or two of your own. We intend that upon completion of the course, you

- are able to provide a cultural and societal context for the practice of reporting in America;
- are able to articulate how the roles of reporters have evolved;
- are able to discuss the differences between the myths and realities associated with the practice of reporting in American society; and
- are able to articulate alternative perspectives on the reporting process.

Texts The required books are listed in the order we will read them. If you have not bought one or more of them yet, remember that only *The Human Journalist* was ordered for the bookstore.

- *The Human Journalist / Reporters, Perspectives, and Emotions* by Jim Willis
- *Tell Them I Didn't Cry: A Young Journalist's Story of Joy, Loss, and Survival in Iraq* by Jackie Spinner
- *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War* by Joe Bageant
- *Outliers: The Story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell
- *In a Time of War: The Proud and Perilous Journey of West Point's Class of 2002* by Bill Murphy Jr.
- *The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters* by Rose George
- *The Day the Earth Caved in: An American Mining Tragedy* by Joan Quigley
- *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love, and Lose at Both* by Laura Sessions Stepp
- *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China* by Leslie T. Chang

Supplies Pencils and Highlighters for annotating texts and readings.

Sakai Sakai is a set of software tools designed to help instructors, researchers and students create websites for collaboration. URI is using Sakai for online instruction; you can log on to Sakai via eCampus or the URI home page. Then you might want to bookmark it.

I am taking advantage of Sakai features to provide resources and assignments to you. Everyone on my class list should have gotten a notice from me about the course site.

One feature of Sakai allows for the posting and electronic submission of assignments. This is how you will submit **all** assignments. I am not accepting paper!

We are learning Sakai together, so be patient. Begin exploring it asap.

Format This is a 400-level *seminar*, which to me implies an **advanced** level of study and discussion. If you do not enjoy reading, you will not enjoy this class. If you are not interested in reporting and journalistic writing as a topic of intellectual examination, you are unlikely to enjoy this class.

Class meetings will be discussion-intensive and, for the most part, student-led. It is imperative that you come to class having read and thought about **all** assigned material. The direction of each week's discussion will be determined by your questions and observations. Therefore, when you read you must do so *actively*. That means reading critically, highlighting selectively, jotting notes and questions in margins, making connections with other readings, knowledge you've acquired and personal experiences.

Discussion Leaders Teams of students will be designated to lead the discussion for most class sessions. Detailed information for discussion leaders and participants is available using the Resources link on our Sakai course site. **Read it!**

A senior journalism major (and JOR 415 veteran), *Natalie Rizzo*, will work with discussion leaders to maximize the experience for them and to insure that each week's session is sharply focused and complete.

Attendance Be here. Be on time. Be prepared. Be involved. *If you have not read the book, stay home!*

Illness Due to Flu The H1N1 Flu Pandemic may impact classes this semester. If any of us develop flu-like symptoms, we are being advised to stay home until the fever has subsided for 24 hours. So, if you exhibit such symptoms, please **do not come to class**. Notify me by email or voice mail of your status. We will work together to ensure that course instruction and work is completed for the semester.

Time Required The academic rule of thumb always has been that for every one hour you spend in class, you should spend a minimum of two hours preparing for that class. Thus, because you will spend three hours a week in class, you can expect to spend *at least* six hours a week outside of class preparing for JOR/WRT 415 (your reading speed comes into play here, of course). Putting in less time is your choice, but you need to understand that I believe grades reflect performance (not potential, not effort, not good intentions). A tip: You may find it helpful to calculate the number of pages you have to read each day and then make time each day to read. Trying to read an entire book the night before class is unlikely to teach you much!.

Deadlines Meet them. No excuses!

Collaborative Learning The Journalism Department is committed to collaborative learning because it recognizes that all media work is inherently a team effort. A successful seminar is by definition team-oriented because all participants accept responsibility for creating an environment of informed discussion that translates into learning. And all participants agree to respect everyone's opinions, even if vehemently disagreeing.

Weekly Reports As you read each book, and in preparation for our discussion, you should be thinking about these **core questions**:

- What does this reading teach me about reporting?
- What does this reading teach me about reporters?
- What does this reading teach me about journalistic writing?

As you read, you should be annotating the book and taking notes connected to these questions -- and formulating other questions, especially relating to journalism, that the book raises for you. Upon finishing a book, you should be prepared to critically assess it and connect it to other readings. You also should be prepared to raise questions about "perspectives on reporting" that are specific to the book.

You will demonstrate the breadth and depth of your understanding primarily during class discussions. To insure that you are prepared, **when you are not a discussion leader** you will **write a brief essay** about each book. You will **submit** one copy to me via Sakai before the start of each class and **bring a copy to class**, along with your notes and your annotated book. (Note: In the past, some students have come to class without the book to be discussed. This is not a good idea!) **(Note: Reports begin with the book for 29 Sept.)**

Each **essay** should be about 500 words. Choose **one** of the core questions **or** raise another question related to "perspectives on reporting" and answer it based on your reading of the book. Be specific. Cite passages, but don't waste space quoting them. Instead, refer to a section by page number, e.g. Luebke's book taught me how resourceful reporters must be: she found a way to get a reluctant source to talk (pp. 24-26), she made do when her equipment failed (p. 100) and she blah blah blah (p. 154).

These weekly reports, like the Final Project, will be graded on the degree of critical reading/thinking that they reflect.

A (18-20 points) = exhibits significant original thinking, reflects a **complete reading** of the book, makes connections with other readings and is strongly written **B (15-17 points)** = exhibits some original thinking, reflects a **complete reading** of the book, and is well written **C (12-14 points)** = more summary than original thinking **or** reflects a **less-than-complete reading** of the book; generally well written but would benefit from some reworking **D (11 points)** = report is turned in late **F (0 points)** = no report is turned in

Final Project Your project will require you to tie together your semester's reading, thinking and discussing. You will write a professional quality essay suitable for publication in a journalism review such as *Columbia Journalism Review* or *American Journalism Review* or an online journalism site such as Poynteronline.

Details on the project will be forthcoming. But **note well:** Your weekly reports are intended to give you a head-start. Further, to be prepared for your essay, you should take notes not only while reading but *also during class discussions*. Pay special attention to material relevant to the core questions, but also take note of other lines of thinking, questioning and discussion.

Portfolio Keep all the work you do for class. At the end of the semester, you will be asked to reflect on that work using a set of guidelines I will provide.

Grading **The course has a total of 1,000 points. You can see your progress using the Sakai gradebook.**

- **Participation (includes attendance & Portfolio Reflections) = 300 points**
 [12 weeks x 23 points each = 276 plus Reflections = 24 points]
- **Weekly Reports = 200 points**
- **Discussion Leadership = 250 points**
- **Project = 250 points**

Corresponding letter-grade-ranges are 90% A's, 80% B's, 70% C's, 60% D's and 0-59% F.

Class Schedule Here's how I expect the semester to go:

15 Sept	Introduction to the course and readings
22 Sept	<i>The Human Journalist</i> (omit Afterword) Think about: What other questions might we want to ask as we read?
29 Sept	<i>Tell Them I Didn't Cry</i> Read in this order: p. 265 About the authors; Forward; pp. xi-xv A note from the author; the text; pp. 257-262 Epilogue
06 Oct	<i>Deer Hunting With Jesus</i>
13 Oct	Sampling the magazine world Readings TBA
20 Oct	<i>Outliers</i>
27 Oct	<i>In a Time of War</i>
03 Nov	<i>The Big Necessity</i>

10 Nov	Sampling the world of public radio TBA
17 Nov	<i>The Day the Earth Caved in</i>
24 Nov	<i>Unhooked</i>
01 Dec	<i>Factory Girls</i> <i>** Distribute Final Project Question(s) **</i>
08 Dec	Sampling young reporters' work Readings TBA <i>** Distribute Instructions for Reflections **</i>
Tuesday 15 Dec Final Exam Period 3-6	<i>** Final Project due **</i> <i>** Portfolio Reflections due **</i>