ENGLISH 312Z: NEWS AND FEATURE WRITING

Class meeting: 6:30-9:30 p.m. Mondays, 330 PPHAC
- Class WILL NOT meet January 17 (Martin Luther King Jr. holiday) but an assignment will be given for completion by January 24 class meeting.
- Class WILL NOT meet March 7 (spring break).
- Class WILL meet March 28 (Easter Monday). The day is part of the Easter weekend, but the evening is not.
- Our last class meeting will be April 25. You will have until May 2 to turn in your portfolio. There will not be a final exam.

Course description:

News writing is the practice of writing short, concentrated, objective, organized prose under deadline pressure. Our repertory will include breaking news and second-day stories; obituaries; news analysis; live sports and event coverage; “process” stories; profiles; reviews; if time permits, an extended feature or takeout. There will be out-of-class activities to provide raw material for stories: on-campus lectures, local government meetings or courtroom proceedings, and cultural events for review.

In the second half of the course, we will begin to integrate the craft of feature writing. The basics of news writing apply to feature articles, but their scope is broader and their intention quite different.

The course will include an introduction to the “inverted pyramid” form; practice in note-taking; strategies of interviewing; writing under time and space constraints; and the whys and hows of editing. As necessary, we also will review common grammar and usage problems and questions about non-fiction writing in general.

Texts:
- Associated Press Stylebook. I had thought this was available on-line but discovered that it can be accessed only by subscribers. I have put in an order at the bookstore. I hope it will be here by the second class meeting (January 24).
- Chapters from William Ruehlmann’s Stalking the Feature Story, now out of print. These will be posted on the course’s Blackboard site, and a copy of the book will be on reserve at Reeves Library.
- You will be expected to read The Morning Call, for which you can take out a monthly subscription or buy daily at the bookstore for 50 cents. Occasionally I will send you to the library for the New York Times. We also will read articles from other publications, essays on the art of writing, and a few journalism classics. For each class meeting, please bring a significant error or an exceptionally good story, turn of phrase, or piece of display type from the week’s newspapers.

Other supplies: Please provide yourselves with a couple of standard reporter’s notebooks or stenographer’s notebooks. Be prepared to write your in-class assignments longhand in ink.

Methodology: There is no way to learn to write other than to write. This course is described in the catalogue as a “guided practice,” and that is exactly what will take place, in and (as much as possible) out of class.

In the first half of the semester, and as necessary thereafter, many assignments will be completed in drafts or stages and submitted via Blackboard for preliminary discussion. Most assignments will be completed under deadline conditions (limited by time or word count or both). The first draft of a story will be graded +/- rather than with letter grades. Ungraded assignments may continue throughout the semester.

Blackboard: A week between class meetings is tough on undergraduates. I do not want to leave students out in the cold trying to complete out-of-class assignments that they may not fully understand. We will, therefore, communicate between class sessions using Blackboard, an interactive learning tool that permits safe interchange of materials and postings of supplementary texts. For those who have not used Blackboard: there is a link on the College’s Intranet (www.moravian.intranet.edu, available only on campus) and home page on the Internet (www.moravian.edu). Bookmark one of these pages. The name of the course is ENGL312Z.SP05 (zero-five) and the passcode is news. Please check the Blackboard site at least twice a week. “I didn’t have time to check Blackboard” is not a valid excuse. Send all completed assignments to me through the digital drop-box.

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Office hours: by appointment.
Evaluation:
About half your writing assignments will be drafted (and some will be completed) in class. Therefore, you will be graded on class attendance and participation. If you must miss a class for a justifiable reason*, you may be given a makeup assignment. Class attendance and participation counts as more than half your grade. Some of the areas in which you will be graded:

- Reading assignments.
- Evaluation of news sources.
- Editing.
- Quality of in-class assignments.
- Improvement in writing skills and organization.
- Grammar reviews, etc., as needed.

*A justifiable reason for missing class requires a written medical excuse or other documentation or a really good explanation.

The portfolio represents one-fifth of your grade. The portfolio must be complete (see below) to be given maximum credit. (After discussion, I may allow you the option of dropping one assignment from the portfolio, but this cannot be a unilateral decision. You must discuss it with me.) This does not mean that a complete portfolio gets an automatic A. It is graded on the improvement in quality of the work it contains. But if it is incomplete, points will be deducted from the letter grade, down to the next letter grade.

Grade component:
- Class participation 20%
- In-class assignments 25%
- Grammar and style exercises 10%
- Out-of-class assignments* 25%
- Portfolio 20%

*may include revision of in-class work

Portfolio: In lieu of a final exam, you are to keep a portfolio of your work (including all drafts) and submit it to me on or before May 2. It will be returned during finals week or mailed to a forwarding address. The best way to make a portfolio is to print out the assignments when completed and keep in chronological order in a three-ring binder. You will not be graded on the aesthetics of the portfolio, but it must be neat and organized. If you hand in a grubby sheaf of dog-eared notebook pages crammed all anyhow into a report folder, I will deduct your grade according to how long it takes me to organize the contents.

Classroom demeanor:
- You will often be asked to trade papers and edit one another's work; or an assignment may be projected for group discussion. I assure you that students are far harder on one another than I will be ever be. Please keep comments constructive if possible and professional at all times.
- You are welcome to ask me, a guest speaker, or a student presenter for an explanation, definition, or clarification at any time (unless directed to save questions for the end of the session), but please make your request in a professional and non-intrusive manner.
- No cell phones, pagers, or other noise-making electronics should be brought to class with their ringers or buzzers active. The first time a cell phone rings in class, I will answer it. The second time . . . you don't want to know about the second time.
- Feel free to bring coffee, sodas, and other beverages to class. No food, please, and alcohol is not permitted in the classroom. Please try to eat supper before you come. Three hours is a long, unhappy time when you're hungry.
- There will be a 10-minute break at or around 8:00 p.m. for phone calls, restroom use, coffee refills, and other needs.
- If you must leave during class, please try to be non-intrusive.
- If you must come late or leave early, let me know in advance (call or e-mail) or at the beginning of class.

Academic honesty:
All students are expected to follow the principles of academic honesty as set out in the Moravian College Student Handbook or, for CGS students, the blue Undergraduate Academic Policies pamphlet that has been sent to you. Any and all written work must be your own. Journalism, by nature, is not scholarly and does not require citations, but it does require direct quotations (noted as such) and other kinds of acknowledgment, often called attribution. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, may result in a failing grade in the course. We will cover attribution and plagiarism in class discussions, so there should be no confusion as to what constitutes a violation of academic honesty.