

COURSE SYLLABUS

SOCIAL SCIENCES 184GW

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES 155BW

MEDIA WRITING

Spring 2017

Instructor: Ricardo Chavira

Teaching Assistants: Joseph Barnett and Kelsey Norman

Course Description and Objectives:

This course is designed to teach you how to write succinctly, clearly and quickly in any professional environment.

We will study media writing and the gathering of information--the essentials of professional contemporary communication. You will learn how to organize information, ask effective questions, research facts and write on deadline. Lectures will cover in detail the media writing process.

Good writing for most of us is a skill acquired by directed practice. As with any skill, the more you practice, the more you will improve. So, be prepared to write often. You will receive lots of feedback geared toward making you a better writer.

By completing a variety of assignments, you will sharpen your writing skills and expand your knowledge of the news-gathering process.

By the end of the course, you will understand mass media and how to report and write media stories and other documents appropriate for publication online, in print and, to a limited extent, for broadcast.

While this class fulfills your upper division writing requirement, it is important for another reason. If you invest the effort, you will see marked improvement in your writing. You should have a much better appreciation for what it takes to become even better in the future.

Course Requirements:

A major course goal is to help you improve your writing, so there will be a variety of writing assignments.

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Avoid grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors
- Produce media documents that are accurate, concise, objective, and in media writing style
- Demonstrate effective use of attribution in media writing
- Demonstrate skill in analyzing facts from interviews, fact sheets and other sources to produce effective news leads and use proper organization of facts in the body of media documents

Participation:

You will find we have several discussion forums arranged by topic. Be an active participant, and your online learning experience will be greatly enriched.

Course Outcomes:

Through lectures, several assignments and detailed guidance you will be able to write more effectively.

Most the students who complete this course become demonstrably better writers. You will also become a more skilled researcher.

The writing critiques we offer should be clear and precise. If we fail to pinpoint ways to improve your writing, please contact

the instructor or teaching assistant who graded your work. You should always understand the feedback you are provided.

Media writing follows unusually specific guidelines. Typically, a low score indicates that the work strayed from those guidelines. Of course, grammatical, syntax, word usage and capitalization errors also will lower the overall score.

You should have command of these skills. Check out this site for a refresher: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/>

Communication:

Please use the appropriate forum for questions regarding assignments. We will monitor the forums. Think of them as collective office hours. Personal matters should be addressed to us at our listed email accounts. **You can find those on the UCI online student, faculty and staff directory.**

Grading:

Eight assignment, 30 points each: 240 total possible.

Midterm, 50 points

Final, 100 points

MAXIMUM COURSE POINTS POSSIBLE: 390

We will not use a class curve, and there are no extra credit assignments.

Course grades will strictly follow UCI guidelines. Your final grade will be in accordance with the university's grade scale.

No textbooks are required.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

Because this is a distance learning class, it is crucial that you focus on and meet assigned deadlines. These are posted week-to-week on the class site. They are also listed in the syllabus.

The deadline times are all Pacific Zone.

If you are confused or unsure about specific deadlines it is your responsibility to contact the instructor or teaching assistants for clarification.

Do not do so at the last minute, as we are not always immediately reachable.

Similarly, it is vital that you adhere to the class structure. All work **must be** submitted on the class site. This is important to ensure accounting integrity. The site is quite secure and registers student activity, including submissions and date and time of submissions. As you will appreciate this function provides a faithful record of assignments and exams. **Course work sent to us by e-mail will not be accepted.**

Such assignments and exams can go missing, end up in spam file or simply not get transmitted for whatever reason.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments or exams, except for quizzes, submitted later than the deadline time will be subject to a 10-point deduction.

No work will be accepted after the deadline day.

Exceptions can be granted if for reasons beyond your control you are unable to turn in work on time.

Discuss with your instructor or TA if you believe you have a legitimate reason for submitting work after the stated deadline. It is best if you discuss the granting of an exemption before the due date.

Reasons not deemed acceptable for late or missed assignments include:

**Minor illness*

**Work*

**Travel*

**Late enrollment*

**Forgetting the deadline*

**Scheduling conflicts*

**Not having access to the Internet*

In sum, unless it is impossible for you to submit assignments, quizzes or exams by deadline, you most likely will not be excused. We urge you to plan on completing all assignments and submitting them on time.

QUIZZES

Some assignments are presented in quiz format. These require you to submit your work within 90-minute windows.

Generally, the windows open at 6 a.m. and close at 12 p.m. Once you log on to the quiz, you have 90 minutes to complete it. **Once the submission is closed**, you will not be able to turn in your quiz.

Consequently, the 10-point deduction for tardiness does not apply to quizzes. Your score will be zero.

The submission times will be inconvenient for some of you.

Over the years, we have used a variety of submission times, and none proved ideal for all. The times we are now using have been the least objectionable. Please do not ask that we change submission times.

A SPECIAL NOTE REGARDING ASSIGNMENT

SUBMISSIONS: Several assignments include **draft submissions**. We encourage you to submit a draft so that you may receive audio feedback that will be helpful in preparation of the final version.

However, you are not required to turn in a draft. First drafts will not be graded. Points will be assigned solely to the final draft. To listen to our comments, click on the icon in the right column.

Very Important Note about Paragraph Lengths

Effective online writing is presented in short paragraphs.

Online reader research that finds long paragraphs repel readers, while short, clear paragraphs attract them. Thus, odd as it may seem, the word limits have not been arbitrarily set.

Our course is based on the premise that you will not be writing books or for academic journals. Instead, what you write will be online.

So, **no paragraph should exceed 40 words.** Yes, that will take some getting used to. Soon, it will seem natural.

The exception to this rule is the initial paragraph, or the lead. It should not be longer than 35 words. There is no minimum length requirement.

**This rule applies to every assignment and exam.
Failure to adhere to it will cost you points.*

After a week or so, short paragraphs will seem natural. Really!

SCHEDULE

ORIENTATION WEEK: March 27-April 2

WEEK ONE: April 3-April 9

Upload your introduction and photo.

Print and carefully review the syllabus

Review instructional material

Lecture: *Introduction to the class: learning to not hate writing*

Writing Assignment: Prison labor story

Due Date: Friday, 5 pm

WEEK TWO: April 10-April 16

Lecture: *Media writing overview and elements of news*

Lecture: New Media

Lecture: The Lead

Writing Assignment: Writing direct and summary Leads

Lead Assignment

Due Date: Wednesday, 12 pm

WEEK THREE: April 17-April 23

Lecture: *It's complicated: writing stories using multiple sources of information*

Writing Assignment: Protest Story

Draft Due Date: Tuesday, 12 pm

Final Due Date: Wednesday, 12 pm

WEEK FOUR: April 24-April 30

Lecture: *How do they know that? Sources of information: distinguishing fact from fiction*

Lecture: Ethics

Writing Assignment: Smallville Story

Due Date: Wednesday, 12 pm

WEEK FIVE: May 1-May 7

Lecture: *How to Conduct Successful Interviews. Everyone has a story.*

Writing Assignment: Interview Story

Due Date: Thursday, 9 am

WEEK SIX: May 8-May 14

Midterm: Accessible Tuesday 6 am

Due Wednesday, 12 pm

Lecture: *Writing for Broadcast*

Midterm Exam: Assigned Tuesday

Due Date: Wednesday, 12 pm

WEEK SEVEN: May 15-May 21

Lecture: Writing about Controversial Events

Writing assignment: Domestic Violence Story

Due Date: Wednesday, 12 pm

WEEK EIGHT: May 22-May 28

Lecture: *Selling ideas and products: public relations and advertising; writing press releases*

Writing Assignment: Crisis management press release

Draft Due Date: Wednesday, 12 pm

Final Draft Due: Thursday, 12 pm

WEEK NINE: May 29-June 4

Lecture: *The Feature Story: Writing with Detail and Flair*

Assignment: Feature Story

Draft Due: Tuesday, 12 pm

Final Due: Wednesday, 12 pm

WEEK TEN: June 5-June 9

Lecture: *Final exam discussion*

Review final exam material and begin its preparation

Work on final exam

FINAL EXAM DUE: MONDAY, June 12, 9 a.m.