Upper-division Writing Requirement Review Form (12/1/08)

I. General Education Review – Upper-division Writing Requirement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dept/Program Subject</th>
<th>Journalism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course(s) Title</td>
<td>Public Affairs Reporting</td>
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II. Endorsement/Approvals

Complete the form and obtain signatures before submitting to Faculty Senate Office.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dennis Swibold</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nadia White</td>
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<tr>
<th>Phone / Email</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swibold: 2230,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:dennis.swibold@umontana.edu">dennis.swibold@umontana.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>White: 6720,</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:nadia.white@umontana.edu">nadia.white@umontana.edu</a></td>
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<th>Program Chair</th>
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<tr>
<td>Carol Van Valkenburg</td>
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III. Overview of the Course Purpose/Description

The course teaches beginning journalists to cover local institutions crucial to democracy. Students are introduced to the public affairs beats common to most news organizations (the justice system, local governments, education, and others). They will write articles in some or all those areas. The class is primarily a reporting and writing course. Students should acquire a better understanding of journalism’s role in democracy and of the ethical and professional challenges reporters face. Students should get a sense of the pace of daily reporting and the demand that their writing be accurate, clear, thorough, fair, timely and compelling. Their success as writers hinges on their ability to gather and analyze information quickly and clearly. To that end, students are introduced to the information sources specific to their beats and the research tools and analytical techniques professionals use to ensure accuracy and provide context for their stories. Successful students should be able to succeed as interns at community news organizations.

IV. Learning Outcomes: Explain how each of the following learning outcomes will be achieved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student learning outcomes:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify and pursue more sophisticated questions for academic inquiry</td>
<td>Students are expected to produce news stories, features and analyses about complex issues of public concern and local interest. In addition to daily or weekly assignments, students are required to produce an in-depth report on a subject approved by the instructor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Find, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information effectively from diverse sources (see <a href="http://www.lib.umt.edu/informationliteracy/">http://www.lib.umt.edu/informationliteracy/</a>)</td>
<td>Students will access and research public records, databases, and Web sites and augment their findings by interviewing decision makers and people affected by the news.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manage multiple perspectives as appropriate</td>
<td>In their efforts to be thorough and fair, students are required to seek out and understand different perspectives on public controversies.</td>
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</table>
Recognize the purposes and needs of discipline-specific audiences and adopt the academic voice necessary for the chosen discipline

Use multiple drafts, revision, and editing in conducting inquiry and preparing written work

Follow the conventions of citation, documentation, and formal presentation appropriate to that discipline

Develop competence in information technology and digital literacy

The idea that students are writing for a diverse audience is constantly enforced through vigorous critiques of their writing in which clarity is second only to accuracy.

Students are required to revise several of the dozen or so articles they produce in a semester. Students are giving the chance to rewrite every story they submit.

Students must follow the rule on style and attribution outlined in the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.

Every story begins with an online search for background and potential sources, and those skills are sharpened under deadline pressure. Beyond that, students rely on the Internet for communicating with both sources and editors, and they frequently post their work to class web sites or blogs.

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<th>V. Writing Course Requirements Check list</th>
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<tr>
<td>Is enrollment capped at 25 students? If not, list maximum course enrollment. Explain how outcomes will be adequately met for this number of students. Justify the request for variance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are outcomes listed in the course syllabus? If not, how will students be informed of course expectations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are detailed requirements for all written assignments including criteria for evaluation in the course syllabus? If not how and when will students be informed of written assignments?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Briefly explain how students are provided with tools and strategies for effective writing and editing in the major.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will written assignments include an opportunity for revision? If not, then explain how students will receive and use feedback to improve their writing ability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are expectations for Information Literacy listed in the course syllabus? If not, how will students be informed of course expectations?</td>
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VI. Writing Assignments: Please describe course assignments. Students should be required to individually compose at least 20 pages of writing for assessment. At least 50% of the course grade should be based on students’ performance on writing assignments. Clear expression, quality, and accuracy of content are considered an integral part of the grade on any writing assignment.
Formal Graded Assignments

Students are graded on at least a dozen formal assignments pertaining to the issues and subjects covered by the class and by students working their individual beats. Grades on these assignments are based primarily on the writing and the reporting implicit in it. I impossible to judge the quality of student reporting unless the writing is accurate, clear and compelling.

Informal Ungraded Assignments

Students’ first stories on specific public affairs subjects are often critiqued but ungraded to allow them a chance to familiarize themselves with the topic’s special demands.

VII. Syllabus: Paste syllabus below or attach and send digital copy with form. The syllabus should clearly describe how the above criteria are satisfied. For assistance on syllabus preparation see: http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/syllabus.html

Paste syllabus here.

Public Affairs Reporting

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Journ331-Sec. 1
Autumn 2008
nadia.white@umontana.edu

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406-243-6720 (office)
406-529-9839 (cell)

Class meets: 11:10 am - 12:30 pm
Mondays and Wednesdays
Don Anderson Hall Rm 005

Introduction

H.L. Mencken said democracy is only a dream and should be put in the same category as Santa Claus and Heaven. Thomas Jefferson, thinking about the democratic experiment that was to become the United States, said: “Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.” Molly Ivans, writing in current era Texas, was an expert on seeing clearly through the cloudy mess of political process: “The thing about democracy, beloveds, is that it is not neat, orderly, or quiet. It requires a certain relish for confusion.”

Welcome to Public Affairs Reporting at the University of Montana School of Journalism. The goal of this class is to teach students to make sense of the confusion and report news that informs people so they might chase the dream. It will emphasize accuracy, clarity, news values and deadlines in news reporting.

This class is designed to introduce students to a variety of topics they may expect to cover as a reporter at a daily or weekly newspaper, broadcast news station, news Web site or wire service. A student who succeeds in this class should feel confident in his or her abilities to field an
assignment, identify what is newsworthy, collect background materials, identify and interview key sources, report and write a clear, accurate and balanced story in an engaging way, all on deadline.

Broadly defined, public affairs are the issues and debates involving agencies that are fueled by tax dollars to take care of public business. Public Affairs reporting is concerned with the people, places and organizations that are affected by these agencies. Public affairs often involve politics, because politics are about the people and the power that drive institutions.

This class is intended to simulate the conditions of a real world local newsroom. That means accuracy, fairness, deadlines and showing up (attendance) are all taken very seriously.

You will choose or be assigned to a public affairs beat. It will be your job this semester to become very, very familiar with the people, places and news of your beat. It will be your job this semester to care about a community that is bigger than your place here on campus.

Journalists live their lives out loud. Their work appears, ready or not, for public consumption. In this class we will read and critique each other’s work. The idea is to provide constructive feedback about how a given story resonates with readers. Critiquing writing involves preparation, thought and compassion on the part of readers. It requires thoughtful, active listening on the part of writers. One goal of critiquing is to get used to having your work read by your peers – that’s what journalism is all about, right? Another, bigger goal, is to learn both from what others have to say about your work and to let the work of others inform your own writing and reporting.

Learning Outcomes
A successful student in this class will demonstrate the ability to:

- Determine newsworthy stories on a beat. Weigh ethical and practical considerations to determine how and when to pursue a story and what sources to use.
- Collect and analyze background materials relevant to a given beat, story and subject using online and text documents and past news coverage as well as primary sources and interviews.
- Effectively interview a diversity of sources and perspectives for stories.
- Write clear, accurate news stories for a diverse audience of readers and online viewers.
- Know AP style and write stories that are grammatically and stylistically clear.
- Meet deadlines and work with an editor to revise and update stories.
- Post stories online and submit stories electronically for peer review.

Attendance
I expect you to attend class and participate in classroom discussions. In order to be excused, I must approve an absence before (not after) class meets. Medical emergencies will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Holidays
This class will not meet Monday Sept. 1 or Wednesday Nov. 26.

Assignments
This class aims to give you the tools and the confidence to find news and turn events or trends into news stories. To that end, you will practice, practice, practice, finding and writing news. The class will quickly fall into a pattern of weekly deadline-writing assignments, monthly beat reports
and two longer-format news stories. I will also assign a variety of in-class and homework exercises aimed at helping you sharpen your reporting, writing and information gathering skills.

Each story should begin with background research using the Internet, a review of past news coverage and possibly interviews to determine the news value and scope of your ideas. You should ask yourself about any practical or ethical considerations that may affect how you pursue each story.

Your grade for each assignment will be based on the work done by deadline. However, I encourage you to rewrite any assignment using the feedback you receive. I expect you to use the detailed feedback I give on one assignment to inform and improve your next story.

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class unless you receive prior approval from the professor for this course. To do so without permission will result in an “F” for the assignment and could result in an “F” for the course.

Let’s take a closer look at assignments for the semester:

**Monthly beat reports**
To help you stay focused on your beat, you will turn in a beat report on the first Monday class of each month. This is not a news story, but a log or journal that sums up what went on on your beat the month prior and how you tackled it, if you did. What were the hot news stories, what meetings did you attend, what phone calls or conversations did you have with sources for stories or background? What story ideas emerged this month that are percolating, perhaps to be written later?

I suggest you keep a notebook this semester that you use to catalog story ideas, contacts, news nuggets. If you maintain your notebook, the monthly beat report should be a straightforward matter of compiling information you’ve already jotted down.

**Weekly beat stories**
A story on your beat will be due each week. They can be either breaking news stories, or features. Over the semester, you should mix it up and pursue some of each. I expect no more than 60 percent of your stories to be either breaking news or features.

Breaking daily news stories are due by midnight of the day the news breaks. For breaking news stories, your competition is the Missoulian and the Kaimin. You need to tie or beat them both to get full credit for your story.

Feature stories need to have a compelling news hook. Why are you telling this story now? These also may not have appeared in the local media this semester.

Occasionally, I will require you to focus your story on a given angle. For example, in late October I will likely ask you to write a story that involves presidential campaigning on their beat. In late November, I might ask everyone to find a story on your beat related to Thanksgiving. I reserve the right to assign you stories that are not on your beat instead of your weekly beat story. I reserve the right to give everyone a week off of writing your weekly beat stories.

**Longer format stories**
Toward the middle and end of the semester you will each tackle a larger story on your beat in addition to your weekly stories. I suggest you keep your eyes open from the start of the semester to identify stories that might fit the bill for these assignments. Once you know what you’d like to write about, it’s never too early to start gathering string for your story. The stories will be:

**A trend story** Everybody’s doing it. Or so it seems. What’s the new hot “it” on your beat? Are people stealing waste fry grease from restaurants now that bio fuel is in demand (they were over the summer.) Are scooters in the bike lane posing an enforcement problem for police and a hazard to cyclists? Are students at the notoriously car happy Big Sky High trading in their cars for bikes as gas prices skyrocket?

This story might have hard numbers to back it up, but it must have the opinions of several regular old sources -- not just authorities, like the police, or the principal -- but student drivers and biofuel producers too. Use the story to show that a couple of anecdotes are in fact an interesting trend and not just gossip.

**A numbers story** Numbers – data – can reveal all sorts of stories on a beat. But stories, at their heart, are about people. For this story, you will be asked to crunch some numbers that enhance a story about people on your beat. You should get the data and work the numbers yourself. You must turn in your data analysis with this project.

Examples might include stories on government budgeting, a census analysis, standardized test scores. There are many, many data stories waiting to be done – has construction on Hwy 93 South lead to an increase in accidents on the Eastside Highway? Has fishing pressure on the lower Clark Fork River changed with the removal of the Milltown Dam?

You will be able to write two drafts of the numbers story. This does not, however, mean leaving the bulk of your work until the final draft. Grading for the numbers story will be a weighted average of first and final drafts. The first draft will be 60 percent of your grade, the final, 40 percent. That means your first draft should be complete and require little more than mop up editing and restyling for readability in order to earn an A.

**Exams and quizzes**
There will be no midterm or final exam for Public Affairs Reporting. There may well be current event or AP style quizzes.

**Textbooks**
The Associated Press Stylebook is a must-have reference book for this class.

**Evening meetings**
We will cover some Missoula city council meetings as a class. The council meets the first four Monday’s of each month. Keep Monday, Oct. 6, 20, 27 open for covering those meetings. Also, Election Day is Nov. 4. Please keep that evening open to cover election returns. Oct. 13 is a holiday and so there is no meeting to cover.

(Syllabus continues on next page)
Grades
Attendance, quizzes and class participation: 10 percent
Monthly beat reports: 10 percent
Weekly beat stories: 40 percent
Numbers and Trend stories: 40 percent

The grade scale is:
A  93-100
A- 90-92
B+ 88-89
B  83-87
B- 80-82
C+ 78-79
C  73-77
C- 70-72
D  60-69
F  Below 59

The grades you earn will reflect your ability to tell a meaningful story, using proper English grammar, spelling and AP style; your ability to hit deadline; your ability to find and use sources appropriately.

An “A” story is interesting, enterprising, timely, thorough, well written, of an appropriate length, accurate, fair and in need of almost no editing. It’s ready to be published.

A “B” story is one that could have been an “A” with a little editing or additional reporting.

A “C” story needs significant editing and additional reporting, or shows weak news judgment or bias. A sloppily written but well-reported story might get you a C. A story based on just one source or sources from just one perspective will seldom earn more than a C.

A “D” story is unacceptable. It may be inaccurate, poorly written, barely researched, badly focused or all of the above. It requires more editing or additional reporting than could or should be done on deadline to make it publishable.

An “F” story is one you failed to write or submit; one that missed deadline or any story determined to have been plagiarized or written from another reporter’s notes. A story containing particularly awful errors – a misspelled proper noun, or the the reporter’s use of the first person (I, we, us, outside of a direct quote) earns an F. A story with too many mistakes in spelling, grammar and style may receive an F, too.
**Academic Honesty**
All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at [http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321](http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321).

**Plagiarism, Honesty and Respect**
Personal integrity is an important part of being a journalist. After all, if your audience doesn’t trust you, why should they read, watch or listen to the stuff you pass off as news? To that end:

- Don’t plagiarize. This means, do not pass off the work of others as your own. Period. This includes using a classmate’s notes. Take your own notes. It includes online sources, such as Wikipedia, as well as all other media. Attribute information you get from others. Let your readers know where you got your information. Anyone caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment in question and be reported to the dean and department chair. Plagiarism may be grounds for failing the class and suspension or expulsion from the professional program.

- Be fair to your sources and honest with your readers. Don’t take quotes out of context. Don’t make up sources, quotes or narrative material. Report only what is real. This goes for composite characters. They aren’t real. Fabricating material in a story is a form of plagiarism and subject to the punitive measures outlined above.

- Respect this class. Come prepared and on time to class, contribute to classroom conversations, listen to what others have to say in class. Respect the work of your classmates and provide helpful critique of their work as we review each other’s work throughout the semester. Learn from each other’s successes as well as their struggles.

- Do not use the computers in class for anything except when expressly asked to. Keep your computer monitor turned sideways during class time that does not expressly involve using the computers. Anyone doing outside browsing during class time will be asked to leave class and be counted as absent.

**Accommodations for students with disabilities**
If you have a disability that may affect your ability to excel in this class, please talk to me immediately. This course is accessible to and usable by otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult with the instructor. Disability Services for Students will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at [www.umt.edu/dss/](http://www.umt.edu/dss/).

Student athletes, DJs, and other who anticipate participating in UM sanctioned away events that may interfere with work for this class during the semester should also speak to me immediately to review their schedule and discuss necessary accommodations.