Opinion Writing
Journalism 4321 Fall 2009

Class: M/W 11:30 a.m.-12:50 p.m. GAB 114
Instructor: Kathie Hinnen
Office: GAB 112A
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(responses within 24 hours, except Saturdays)
Office Hours: M/W: 10:30-11:15 a.m.; 1-3 p.m.
T: 10-10:45 a.m.; 1-5:30 p.m.
TR: 10-10:45 a.m.; 1-3 p.m.
F: Afternoon, by appointment

Course Description and Objectives:
Learning to write editorials, columns and critical reviews of the arts, with an emphasis on the research and logical thought required to write informed opinion articles.

After completing the course, you should be able to:
• Identify and understand the audience you are trying to reach
• Critique newspaper opinion pages
• Develop ideas for opinion articles
• Research information to support your argument
• Write informed, fair, well-structured editorials
• Write persuasive personal columns
• Write fair, informed, well-structured reviews of literature, performing arts and visual arts

Texts:
This class does not have a required textbook. Instead, you will be required to make copies for your classmates of examples of editorials and columns, and your own work.
The North Texas Daily’s Tuesday through Friday print edition is mandatory reading. You also must closely follow current events by reading a variety of news publications, especially local newspapers such as the Dallas Morning News, Fort Worth Star-Telegram and Denton Record Chronicle. All will provide potential topics for your writing.
You should also read opinion magazines like National Review, The Nation, The New Republic and The American Spectator. In addition, the Web is an excellent source of examples of both good and bad opinion writing.

Grading:
Your work will be evaluated based on substance, logic, clarity, accuracy, fairness, persuasiveness, structure and adherence to proper grammar, spelling and language.
If you demonstrate exceptional improvement and effort during the semester, I will consider raising a borderline grade to the next highest level.
(Note: Journalism majors must earn at least a C for the class to count toward their degree.)
Course policies:
Assignments must be typed, double-spaced, and edited using Associated Press style. No e-mail submissions. Assignments turned in one class period late will be lowered one grade; none will be accepted after that.

This is a course in a professional field; students will be expected to adhere to standard workplace rules regarding deadlines and attendance. You are expected to attend every class, show up on time and turn in work on time.

Students not present at the beginning of class will be marked absent. A legitimate excuse may qualify you for one of three possible waivers. After three unexcused absences, you will be dropped from the class.

Excused absences and make-up work will be allowed only in the case of a documented illness, family emergency or other situation approved by the instructor. Documentation for an illness is a note from a doctor or nurse that states explicitly that you were too ill to attend class. Documentation for a family emergency could be a note from a relative explaining the emergency and include a phone number so the instructor can verify the note. Documentation must be turned in during the class period immediately following the absence(s).

Grading scale:
Your grade will be determined by performance on all activities on the following scale:
A: 90-100%; B: 80-89%; C 70-79%; D: 60-69%. Below 60% = F.

Grade proportions:
10%: Class participation, contributing editorials for discussion.
10%: Quizzes on lectures, current events.
20%: Written critiques of provided editorials, other homework.
30%: Three editorials publishable in the North Texas Daily.
10%: Personal column suitable for publication.
10%: Arts review
10%: Final column

Academic dishonesty:
The Mayborn Department of Journalism Honor Code prohibits cheating of any kind. Punishment for cheating in this class ranges from a zero (0) on a single assignment or an F for the class to referral to the university administration, which in extreme cases could lead to expulsion. Bottom line: attribute where you got your information.

Classroom contribution:
You are responsible keeping track of your grades. Make copies of all of your work on a computer file and save all graded copies of your work that have been returned to you. This is the only way to resolve any potential discrepancy between your grade calculation and the instructor’s.

Accommodations:
The Journalism Department complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodation for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a qualifying disability as defined in the ADA and would like to request accommodation, please see the instructor by the 12th class day.

Tentative class schedule
Aug. 31-Sept. 23: Newspaper Editorial Page
   * Sept. 14: first editorial due
   * Sept. 23: second editorial due
Sept. 28-Oct. 21: Columns
   * Oct. 12: draft personal column due (4 copies)
   * Oct. 19: personal column due
Oct. 26-Nov. 18: Critical reviews
   * Nov. 2: architecture review due
   * Nov. 23: floating editorial due
Dec. 7-9: Special Topics – Law, Ethics, etc.
Final exam: NO test. Final column due 10:30 a.m. -12:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 15, or before