Course Description & Goals

The purpose of this course is to teach an appreciation of science and medical journalism and provide you with skills to report on science, medical, and health news for a variety of media, principally print or text, but also video and audio.

As a participant in this course, you'll learn the following:

- How to find news value in scientific research reports.
- How to integrate scientific and medical statistics from source materials into news reports.
- How to research, report and write science, medical and health news stories for popular media.

Reading

Readings for the course include a text about medical statistics, a classic book on writing well, a compendium of great writing about health and medicine from the New York Times, an anthology of the best science and nature writing published in 2014, a primer about science writing from masters in the field, a Pulitzer Prize-winning book about environmental contamination and human health, and a memoir from a physician writer. Please complete the reading assignments before the appropriate classroom discussions. In addition to the list below, I'll supply additional source materials and articles from various publications. The following books are all available at the UNC student store and copies of all the books (except A Field Guide for
Science Writers) will be on reserve in the Park Library (second floor) in the School of Media & Journalism. Please note that the books on reserve in the Park Library may be earlier editions that can be substituted for current editions. Students should also consult the AP Stylebook for proper style and usage for all written assignments.


Also, starting with the class for Wednesday, September 9, students should begin reading the print version of the Tuesday Science Times section of the New York Times. On the assigned dates, please bring the Science Times section to class. Consult the course schedule below for the exact dates for which the section should be read. Please note that the online version of the New York Times is not an acceptable substitute since the online and print versions do not necessarily have the same content. The New York Times is available in the UNC Student Store and is also available at a reduced rate by subscription. To subscribe, you can call 1-800-NYTIMES and ask for college subscriptions. Receiving the print edition by subscription also gives you unlimited online access.

Participation

A working medical journalist typically talks and discusses relevant issues with colleagues and others before preparing his or her report. This class will be no different. I'll expect you to share your thoughts with your peers and with me. Classroom discussion will help clarify your ideas and sharpen your focus. You'll also be posting all written assignments on Sakai where your classmates will critique your work.

Each graduate student will be responsible for two 15- to 20-minute presentation on assigned reading. I'll assign the presentations at the beginning of the second class meeting. As critical thinking and discussion with peers are integral to the work of journalists, I'll count classroom participation as 25 percent of your final grade. I'll base the classroom participation grade on the quality (not
necessarily the quantity) of your discussion. I'll judge quality of your classroom discussion on the following two criteria:

1) Whether it's clear that you've read and thought about the readings.

2) Your ability to integrate ideas gleaned both from readings and from contributions of your classmates.

After one unexcused absence, each absence will result in a drop of one letter grade. This is a graduate-level seminar, and your presence and contribution are essential. You cannot pass the course with more than two unexcused absences.

Assignments

To succeed in science and medical journalism, you must write well. Good writing requires an understanding of the material and the ability to communicate ideas simply and clearly.

To sharpen your writing skills, you'll write a series of stories in various journalistic genres. The writing assignments will count for 75 percent of your final grade.

All assignments must be posted on the Sakai discussion site at least two days before they are due in class. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior permission. Even with prior permission, submission of late assignments will result in a 10-point deduction per day. Not turning in an assignment within two days of the due date will result in a zero grade. Misspelling of proper names will result in a 10-point deduction per misspelling. Misspelling of other words will result in a two-point deduction for each word misspelled. We'll follow the print style guidelines of the AP Stylebook. If you intend to pursue journalism as a career, I strongly encourage you to purchase a copy of the stylebook. As per the usual practice in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication, a major factual error will result in a failing grade for that particular assignment. Fabricating sources or quotations or engaging in plagiarism will constitute a violation of the Honor Code (for more information about the UNC Honor Code, go to http://instrument.unc.edu).

Exams

There will be no midterm or final exam.

Grading Scale (for undergraduates)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>98 - 100</td>
<td>A+</td>
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<td>94 - 97</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>91 - 93</td>
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<td>88 - 90</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>64 - 67</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>61 - 63</td>
<td>D-</td>
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<tr>
<td>60 and below</td>
<td>F</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Grading Scale (for graduate students)

93 - 100 Honors
74 - 92 Pass
61 - 73 Low Pass
60 and below F

How To Succeed in This Course

- Attend classes consistently.
- Complete readings before the appropriate classroom discussions.
- Participate actively in class discussions.
- Ask the Professor questions either during class or during office hours if you’re unclear about any aspect of the course.
- Turn in stories on time, both on Sakai and in class.
- Check online syllabus frequently throughout the semester (preferably before each class) as assignments and topics may change without e-mail notice.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1:

AUG. 19: INTRODUCTION TO SCIENCE AND MEDICAL JOURNALISM

* Turn in Student Data Sheet that was emailed to you.

Reading:


WEEK 2:

Aug. 24: A GUIDE TO WRITING NONFICTION -- Guest speaker, Stephanie Brown, Director, Park Library, 9:40 - 10:10 a.m.

* Learn the basics of writing nonfiction.

Reading:

Zinsser, William, On Writing Well, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Browse online resources from the JOMC Park Library.

Aug. 26: A GUIDE TO WRITING NONFICTION (cont.) & ETHICS OF SCIENCE AND MEDICAL JOURNALISM (Yasmin)
Reading:


SPJ Code of Ethics: http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp?


Zinsser, William, On Writing Well, Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

WEEK 3:

AUG 31: INTERPRETATION OF MEDICAL STATISTICS -- Skype interview with Dr. Ivan Oransky, vice president and global editorial director, MedPage Today, and co-founder of Retraction Watch, 9:30 - 10:15 a.m.

Reading:


Oransky, Ivan, "Covering Medical Studies; How Not to Get It Wrong," Powerpoint presentation downloadable from Sakai.

Oransky, Ivan, "How to avoid 'he said-she said' science journalism," Not Exactly Rocket Science guest blog, February 18, 2010.

Browse the web sites of the World Health Organization's International Clinical Trials Registry Platform (ICTRP) and the National Institutes of Health's clinicaltrials.gov.

Browse Retraction Watch, the website co-founded by Dr. Ivan Oransky.

SEPT. 2: INTERPRETATION OF MEDICAL STATISTICS (cont.)(Mary)

Reading:


Kolata, Gina, online at "Fifty Years' War -- Advances Elusive in the Drive to Cure Cancer," also in New York Times Reader, pp. 156-162.


WEEK 4:

SEPT. 7: Labor Day (no class)

SEPT. 9: NEWS STORIES (Rossie)

Reading:

"Science Times" section from Tuesday, Sept. 8, New York Times.

Blum et al., editors. A Field Guide for Science Writers, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6.


Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 1, pp. 7-24.

Assignment #1: News story due Monday, Sept. 28. Please upload your draft of your news story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #1 by Saturday, Sept. 26, at 6 p.m.

WEEK 5:

SEPT. 14: NEWS STORIES (cont.) (Alex)

Reading:

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 2 & 3.

Oransky, Ivan, "If you must use embargoes, here's how to do it right," Epidemiology Biostatistics and Public Health, 2013, Vol. 10, No. 3.

SEPT. 16: NEWS STORIES (cont.), Skype interview with Benedict Carey, NYT

Reading:


WEEK 6:
SEPT. 21: INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING (Susana)

Reading:

SEPT. 23: INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING, Skype interview with Dan Fagin, author of "Toms River," 9:05 - 9:55 a.m

Reading:

Assignment:
Assignment #1 due Monday, Sept. 28. Please upload the draft of your news story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #1 by Saturday, Sept. 26, at 6 p.m.

WEEK 7:
SEPT. 28: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #1

Assignment #1 due today.

SEPT. 30: COMMENTARY: COLUMNS & ESSAYS

Reading:


**Assignment #2**

Rewrite of assignment #1 due Monday, Oct. 5. Please upload the rewrite of your news story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #2 by Saturday, Oct. 3, at 6 p.m.

**WEEK 8:**

**OCT. 5: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #2**

**Assignment #2 (rewrite of Assignment #1) due today.**

**OCT. 7: HISTORICAL STORIES**

**Reading:**


**Assignment #3:** Essay due Wednesday, Oct. 21. Students are encouraged to attend the Memorial Hall performances of "Antigone" at UNC Memorial Hall either Friday, Oct. 9 or Saturday, Oct. 10. I'll talk about in class how you can use the play as a jumping-off point for an essay on issues that arise from the story.

**WEEK 9:**

**OCT. 12: EXPLANATORY & PERSPECTIVE STORIES (Alasdair)**

**Reading:**

Blum, Deborah & Mary Knudson, editors. *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, Ch. 17 (pp. 111-117), Ch. 20 (pp. 132-137).


**OCT. 14: ESSAYS -- Guest speaker, Alasdair Wilkins, freelance writer & second-year master's student, UNC Science and Medical Journalism Master's Program**

**Reading:**


Wilkins, Alasdair, "I lost 100 pounds in a year. My 'weight loss secret' is really dumb." Vox, July 7, 2015.


Assignment #3: Essay due Wednesday, Oct. 21. Please upload the draft of your essay to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment 3 by 6 p.m., Monday, Oct. 19.

WEEK 10:

OCT. 19: PROFESSIONAL MEMOIR -- Skype interview with author Wolf Pascoe

Reading:


Assignment #3: Essay due Wednesday, Oct. 21. Please upload the draft of your essay to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment 3 by 6 p.m., Monday, Oct. 19.

OCT. 21: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #3 (essay)

Assignment #3 due today.

WEEK 11:

OCT. 26: SCIENCE WRITING FOR MAGAZINES (Bhavini)

Reading:

Blum, Deborah (editor), The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2014, pp. assigned TBA.

OCT. 28: COVERING HEALTH NEWS -- REPORTING ON HEALTH NEWS -- guest speaker: Rose Hoban, publisher of North Carolina Health News

Reading:

Please browse the North Carolina Health News web site.


North Carolina Health News, "Medicaid Managed Care Outcomes Vary
WEEK 12:

NOV. 2: PROFILES - REPORTING FROM THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT - science and medical journalism Program Guest Lecturer: Judith E. Tintinalli, MD, MS, Professor, Dept. of Emergency Medicine, UNC-CH. Please meet at 9:05 a.m. in conference room A on the second floor of the Starbucks Cafe adjacent to the lobby of the UNC Cancer Hospital. Please allow 15 minutes to walk from the UNC Quad to the UNC Cancer Hospital.

Assignment #4: 900-word profile from the UNC Emergency Department due Wednesday, Nov. 18. Please upload the draft of your story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #4 by Monday, Nov. 16, at 6 p.m.

Reading:

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 6, pp. 103-119.


NOV. 4: REPORTING FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

* Discuss "Science Times" section from Tuesday, Nov. 3, New York Times.

Reading:


WEEK 13:

NOV. 9: REPORTING FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA -- Skype interview, Dan Childs, Managing Editor, ABC News Medical Unit

Reading:

Handout on television script writing tips (in Resources folder of Sakai).


Viewing:

"This Week": Opting Out on Vaccines?," ABC News, April 6, 2014.
NOV. 11: RACE AND MEDICINE, guest speaker Dr. Damon Tweedy, author of *Black Man in a White Coat*

Reading:


Assignment #4: 900-word profile from the UNC Emergency Department due Wednesday, Nov. 18. Please upload the draft of your story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #4 by Monday, Nov. 16, at 6 p.m.

WEEK 14:

NOV. 16: RADIO REPORTING

Listen to "My Lobotomy," "Mastodons in Manhattan," and "Why A Teenage Mom Was Jailed in El Salvador After A Stillbirth."

NOV. 18: IN-CLASS CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #4 (ED assignment)

Assignment #4 due today.

Assignment #5: Rewrite of assignment #4 due Monday, Nov. 30. Please upload the draft of your UNC Emergency Department story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #5 by Saturday, Nov. 28, at 6 p.m.

WEEK 15:

NOV. 23: SCIENCE WRITING FOR MAGAZINES (cont.) (Joy)

Reading:

Blum, Deborah (editor), *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2014*, pp. assigned TBA.

Assignment #5: Rewrite of assignment #4 due Monday, Nov. 30. Please upload your draft of your UNC Emergency Department story to Sakai -> Forums -> Assignment #5 by Saturday, Nov. 28, at 6 p.m.

NOV. 25: No Class (Happy Thanksgiving)

WEEK 16:

Nov. 30: IN-CLASS CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #5 (rewrite of ED assignment)

Assignment #5 due today.

Dec. 2: Class wrap-up and evaluation

The Honor Code

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the
guidelines of the University honor system (http://honor.unc.edu). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor’s responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help

If you need individual assistance, it’s your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity

The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

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Professional Values and Competencies

Among the many skills students will learn in this course, it’s expected they will be able to fulfill the following values and competencies as enumerated by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication:

- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
• apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

Special Accommodations

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at https://accessibility.unc.edu/

--syllabus revised August 31, 2015