

## SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Colorado State University, Academic Partner

<b>Voyage:</b>	Fall 2018
<b>Discipline:</b>	Journalism and Media Communication
<b>Course Number and Title:</b>	JTC 328 Feature Writing
<b>Division:</b>	Upper
<b>Faculty Name:</b>	Vauhini Vara
<b>Semester Credit Hours:</b>	3

**Prerequisites:** One (1) newswriting course (or equivalent course in reporting) or permission of instructor

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Feature writing, in its union of reportage and storytelling, is a particularly challenging form of written communication for both writer and reader. It is also a particularly rewarding one. The best stories immerse readers in places they may know little about and introduce them to people and social issues that they might never have encountered on their own. Students in this rigorous course will practice the reporting and writing of a feature article from beginning to end: researching topics by reading and talking with sources; using the resulting material to craft and refine original story ideas; constructing a reporting plan; interviewing sources and collecting observations while reporting; conceptualizing and writing a feature with close attention to structure, narrative, character, theme, and language; and going through the editorial process. That this course will be taught aboard the *MV World Odyssey* is not at all incidental. Working journalists often find that their access to stories is limited by geographical constraints. By contrast, journalists in this course will have access to places, people, and stories on four continents – a rare, rich opportunity. Students should be prepared to work on their journalism both while in port and at sea. The feature that each student pursues will be dictated by her own interests and expertise. Students will be expected to finish the course having written a sophisticated, magazine-length feature article that is fit for publication.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students are expected to:

- become familiar with feature writing as a journalistic form.
- practice the craft of feature writing, including: conception, reporting, writing, editing, and revision.
- learn to analyze feature writing, both their own and that of other journalists, through critical reading.

– develop an understanding of the ethics of reporting and writing a feature.

## REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: Philip Gerard  
TITLE: Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life  
PUBLISHER: Waveland Press  
ISBN #: 1478635304  
DATE/EDITION: 2017/2nd Edition

### Depart Hamburg, Germany – September 9

**B1–September 12:** An introduction to the course.

**B2–September 14:** Seminar – an introduction to feature writing. What is its purpose? What forms can it take? What are its component parts?

Readings:

Philip Gerard, Chapter 1, “What Is Creative Nonfiction Anyway?”  
Lizzie Presser, “Below Deck,” *The California Sunday Magazine*  
Tom Bissell and Morgan Meis, “After the Fall,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*

Other assignments:

None.

### Barcelona, Spain – September 15-16

### Valencia, Spain – September 17-18

**B3–September 20:** Seminar – how feature stories are crafted. What kind of reporting goes into writing a feature? How is that reporting conveyed in writing?

Readings:

Brian Goldstone, “A Prayer’s Chance,” *Harper’s*  
Katherine Boo, “Opening Night,” *The New Yorker*

Other assignments:

None.

**B4–September 22:** Master class – finding stories. How do journalists mine source material for stories? How do we choose topics of interest? How do we zero in on stories?

Readings:

Gerard, Chapter 2, "Finding An Original Subject"  
Justine van der Leun, "Portrait of a Township," *Harper's*

Other assignments:

Conduct interviews with three people and produce a 200-word synopsis of each interview. Find one to three pieces of research material — articles, research reports, or other found material — that might inspire stories, and bring them to class.

### **Study Day—September 23: No Class**

**B5—September 25:** Ideas meeting. We'll each present our ideas, discussing them among ourselves and refining them. We'll learn to craft a proposal.

Readings:

None.

Other assignments (due by noon on September 23rd):

Conduct more interviews and read more research material as needed for the purposes of idea-gathering. Submit three 200-word story ideas by e-mail by noon on September 23rd.

### **Tema, Ghana — September 27-28 Takoradi, Ghana — September 29-30**

**B6—October 1:** Story conferences — meeting with classmates and instructor to discuss story proposals.

Readings:

None.

Assignments:

Submit a 500- to 800-word proposal describing the feature article you'd like to write.

### **Community Programming—October 2: No Class**

**B7—October 4:** Master class — planning. How do journalists go from coming up with story ideas to crafting reporting and writing plans? How do we outline a schedule or timeline for ourselves? How do we find and contact sources? What is Plan B?

Readings:

Gerard, Chapter 3, “Researching”

Assignments:

Submit a 500- to 800-word memo sketching out your plan for reporting your feature. We’ll refine these plans in class. (*and possibly*: Submit 800- to 1,000-word reporter’s journal reflecting on your experience on the field trip.)

**B8—October 6:** Master class — ethics. What are the ethics of reporting and writing a feature? What is the appropriate relationship between a journalist and her sources? What kind of ground rules might be set between a journalist and her sources? How should reported material be conveyed in writing in a feature article in order to be in keeping with ethical guidelines?

Readings:

Gerard, Chapter 11, “Law and Ethics”

Other assignments:

Submit a 500- to 800-word memo describing your plans for contacting sources and organizing your reporting trip.

**Cape Town, South Africa — October 7-12**

**B9—October 14:** Master class — planning a reporting trip. What did we learn on our Cape Town reporting trip? What must a reporting trip include?

Readings:

Gerard, Chapter 5, “On Assignment”

Assignments:

Begin contacting sources and organizing your reporting trip; submit a 200- to 500-word memo detailing your progress. Submit 800- to 1,000-word memo on the reporting conducted during the field class.

**Study Day—October 16: No Class**

**B10—October 17:** Master class — troubleshooting reporting plans. We’ll discuss the challenges we’ve encountered in beginning our reporting and crafting on-the-ground reporting plans and consider some possible approaches to addressing them.

Readings:

Jennifer Percy, "I Have No Choice But to Keep Looking," *The New York Times Magazine*

Other assignments:

Continue contacting sources and organizing your reporting trip; submit a 200- to 500-word memo detailing your progress.

### **Port Louis, Mauritius – October 19**

**B11—October 20:** Master class – reporting. What does reporting look like in practice? How do journalists prepare to make the most of their on-the-ground reporting? How do journalists observe and document their surroundings?

Readings:

Claudia Rankine, "The Meaning of Serena Williams," *The New York Times Magazine*  
Graeme Wood, "A Countryside of Concentration Camps," *The New Republic*

Other assignments:

None.

### **Study Day—October 21: No Class**

**B12—October 23:** Master class – interviewing. What are some of the goals of interviews? How do journalists prepare for interviews? How do we adapt our approach to interviews while they're in progress?

Readings:

Gerard, Chapter 4, "The Art of the Interview"

Other assignments:

Submit a 500- to 1,000-word memo with an update on the progress of your reporting.

### **Cochin, India – October 25-30**

#### **Reflection & Study—October 31: Global Studies Reflection**

**B13—November 1:** Mini-workshop – reporting plans. We'll discuss and give feedback on one another's reporting plans.

Readings:

None.

Other assignments:

None.

**B14—November 3:** Master class — reviewing notes. Mining the material we've gathered, through our reporting, to begin to shape the stories we'll tell. Considering the questions journalists need to answer in order to discover their storytelling approach: Who is the intended audience? Who is the writer? What is the subject matter and who are the characters?

Readings:

Gerard, Chapter 7, "Telling A True Story"  
Vauhini Vara, "Bee-Brained," *Harper's*

Other assignments:

None.

**Yangon, Myanmar — November 4-8**

**B15—November 10:** Master class — structure. What are the possible structures for a feature? How do journalists choose the right structure for their feature? How do they create an outline?

Readings:

Gerard, Chapter 9, "Mystery and Structure, Style and Attitude"  
Hannah Beech, "Fallen Idol," *The New Yorker*

Other assignments:

None.

**Community Programming—November 11: No Class**

**B16—November 13:** Master class — writing. Studying the elements of feature writing, including voice, character, plot, setting, and theme.

Readings:

John Hersey, "Hiroshima," *The New Yorker*

Other assignments:

Submit a detailed, 300- to 600-word outline of your feature.

### **Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam – November 14-18**

**B17–November 20:** Master class – editing. How do journalists bring a critical eye to their colleagues' work-in-progress? How do they communicate their edits and feedback?

Readings:

Gerard, Chapter 10, "Revising – With and Without an Editor"

Other assignments:

None.

### **Study Day–November 21: No Class**

**B18–November 23:** Master class – revising. How is a revision different from a first draft? How do journalists approach revisions, informed by edits, in order to deliver a final draft that is better than the first? What kind of additional reporting might be needed? How do journalists fact-check?

Readings:

None.

Other assignments:

First draft of 3,000- to 6,000-word feature.

### **Shanghai, China – November 24-29**

**B19–December 1:** Workshop. In four 20-minute workshops, students will critique one another's features.

Readings:

None.

Other assignments:

Edits and 500- to 1,000-word feedback letters on classmates' first drafts.

### **Kobe, Japan – December 2-6**

**B20–December 8:** Workshop. In four 20-minute workshops, students will critique one another's features.

Readings:

None.

Other assignments:

Edits and 500- to 1,000-word feedback letters on classmates' first drafts.

**B21—December 10:** Workshop.

Readings:

None. In four 20-minute workshops, students will critique one another's features.

Other assignments:

Edits and 500- to 1,000-word feedback letters on classmates' first drafts.

**B22—December 12:** Workshop. In four 20-minute workshops, students will critique one another's features.

Readings:

None.

Other assignments:

Edits and 500- to 1,000-word feedback letters on classmates' first drafts.

**B23—December 14:** Master class — revision troubleshooting. We'll discuss the challenges students have encountered in the revision process and help one another consider possible approaches to addressing them.

Readings:

None.

Other assignments:

Submit a 300- to 500-word memo describing your ongoing revisions and the main challenges you're facing.

**Honolulu, Hawaii — December 16**

**B24—December 17:** Master class — making a career as a feature writer. How do journalists make a living writing features? How do freelancers find homes for their stories? How do staff writers make time to work on features?

Readings:

None.

Other assignments:

None.

### **Study Day—December 18: No Class**

**B25—December 20:** Debriefing. What did we learn about the process of reporting and writing a feature article? What are the lessons we'll bring to future reporting and writing? How might we pitch the stories we've written in this class to professional publications?

Readings:

None.

Other assignments:

Revision of 3,000- to 6,000-word feature.

### **Arrive San Diego, California — December 23**

#### **FIELD WORK**

Semester at Sea field experiences allow for an unparalleled opportunity to compare, contrast, and synthesize the different cultures and countries encountered over the course of the voyage. In addition to the one required field class, students will complete independent field assignments that span multiple countries.

#### **Field Class**

**The field class for this course is on Friday, October 12<sup>th</sup> in Cape Town, South Africa.**

Field class attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Do not book any individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field class.

Field Classes constitute at least 20% of the contact hours for each course, and are developed and led by the instructor.

#### **Field Class: Reporting in Practice**

Students will visit a newsroom in Cape Town and meet with a feature writer; they will also practice their interviewing and other skills while reporting on a Cape Town-based story that the class will together identify.

The learning objectives for this course are to: become familiar with the day-to-day work of feature writers and their editors; practice reporting skills such as interviewing, note-taking, and real-time synthesis and analysis; and explore the relationship between reporting and the final written product.

Students will be evaluated based on: participation during the field class itself, and an 800- to 1,000-word memo on their reporting during the field class, which will be due on October 14th.

### **Independent Field Assignments**

Students will spend most of the course working on a sophisticated, magazine-length feature article that is expected to be fit for publication. Much of the reporting for this piece will take place in one or more of the following ports: Cochin, Yangon, and Ho Chi Minh City.

### **METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING SCALE**

In-class participation & quizzes	30% (10% for field class participation)
Short reporting/writing assignments	35% (10% for field class memo)
First & final drafts of feature	35%

The following Grading Scale is utilized for student evaluation. Pass/Fail is not an option for Semester at Sea coursework. Note that C-, D+ and D- grades are also not assigned on Semester at Sea in accordance with the grading system at Colorado State University (the SAS partner institution).

Pluses and minuses are awarded as follows on a 100% scale:

<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Satisfactory/Poor</u>	<u>Failing</u>
97-100%: A+	87-89%: B+	77-79%: C+	Less than 60%: F
93-96%: A	83-86%: B	70-76%: C	
90-92%: A-	80-82%: B-	60-69%: D	

### **ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

Attendance in all class sessions, including the field class, is required.

Attendance in all Semester at Sea classes, including the Field Class, is mandatory. Students must inform their instructors prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. Instructors must make reasonable efforts to enable students to make up work which must be accomplished under the instructor's supervision (e.g., examinations, laboratories). In the event of a conflict in regard to this policy, individuals may appeal using established CSU procedures.

## LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

Semester at Sea provides academic accommodations for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, in accordance with ADA guidelines. Students who will need accommodations in a class, should contact ISE to discuss their individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation. A letter from the student's home institution verifying the accommodations received on their home campus (dated within the last three years) is required before any accommodation is provided on the ship. Students must submit this verification of accommodations to [academic@isevoyages.org](mailto:academic@isevoyages.org) as soon as possible, but no later than two months prior to the voyage.

## STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The foundation of a university is truth and knowledge, each of which relies in a fundamental manner upon academic integrity and is diminished significantly by academic misconduct. Academic integrity is conceptualized as doing and taking credit for one's own work. A pervasive attitude promoting academic integrity enhances the sense of community and adds value to the educational process. All within the University are affected by the cooperative commitment to academic integrity. All Semester at Sea courses adhere to this Academic Integrity Policy and Student Conduct Code.

## RESERVE BOOKS FOR THE LIBRARY

None.

## FILM REQUEST

None.

## ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS

Lizzie Presser, "Below Deck," *The California Sunday Magazine*  
Tom Bissell and Morgan Meis, "After the Fall," *Virginia Quarterly Review*  
Brian Goldstone, "A Prayer's Chance," *Harper's*  
Katherine Boo, "Opening Night," *The New Yorker*  
Justine van der Leun, "Portrait of a Township," *Harper's*  
Jennifer Percy, "I Have No Choice But to Keep Looking," *The New York Times Magazine*  
Claudia Rankine, "The Meaning of Serena Williams," *The New York Times Magazine*  
Graeme Wood, "A Countryside of Concentration Camps," *The New Republic*  
Vauhini Vara, "Bee-Brained," *Harper's*  
Hannah Beech, "Fallen Idol," *The New Yorker*  
John Hersey, "Hiroshima," *The New Yorker*

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Research material to inform the feature stories students will write, including but not limited to published articles, reports, and online information about individuals and organizations. The particular material will vary from student to student.