Syllabus

Comm 303-004 Writing Across the Media

Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30 p.m. to 2:45 p.m.
Northeast Module I - 107

Instructor:
Rodger Smith
Northeast Module I 130
rsmith6@gmu.edu
703-993-1090
Office Hours:
Mondays 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.

ABOUT WRITING ACROSS THE MEDIA...

This is a three-credit foundation course on writing for the mass media: mainstream and social, print and broadcast, internet and public relations. You will be able to demonstrate your creativity and individuality in line with current writing procedures and practices and adhering to The Associated Press (AP) Stylebook guidelines. At its heart, it is about the fundamentals of journalism: reporting, writing and ethics. We will engage in discussion and debate drawing from real experiences and current events. No matter the medium you choose, the road you take, what you learn in this class will serve you well throughout your career.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR YOU...

- Understanding and using writing as a primary component of professional communication—regardless of the media. You will emerge better writers and communicators.
- Critical thinking and observation, especially around news and media ethics, and using analytics and logic to assess them. You will emerge with better judgement of your own material and that of colleagues.
- Recognizing and using professional standards in mainstream, social and evolving media. You will emerge with enhanced professional engagement skills.
- Mastering the basic requirements of AP style and exploring others out there. You will be able to follow generally-accepted and expected style.

YOUR GOAL IS TO SUCCEED AND MAKE THE MOST OF THIS SEMESTER. My goal is to assist and guide you to get there. Journalists and public relations experts face very tight deadlines. Do not miss them. I expect all assignments delivered on time. Do not miss class and do not come late—it demonstrates disrespect for your colleagues. Your decision to remain enrolled in this course means you accept the policies and guidelines covered in this syllabus, schedule and GMU course policies.
**SOME COURSE GUIDELINES...**

- **You will need to bring your laptop computer to class.** You will need to complete online assignments in class. Please see me if you have concerns with this requirement.
- **You need access to the internet (on campus and/or at home) and should use Microsoft Word for your written assignments.**
- **FORMATTING FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS...**
  - Word format
  - Double spaced
  - 12-point Times New Roman
  - Paragraphs must be consistently indented by five spaces throughout.
  - Fifteen points minimum deducted on assignments not in the above-mentioned format.
  - Name, date, email address and assignment name at the top of the page.
- **All email correspondence should use the SUBJECT line, include the course number and name (Comm 303) and indicate what the message specifically concerns—such as: Comm 303-Reporting Project**
- **I use Blackboard Grade Center and will endeavor to keep your grades up-to-date. Please check for grades and any other pertinent information.**
- **I use your GMU email address for all communication, including additional reading assignments. Please check your GMU email inbox regularly.**
- **I am best reached through my GMU email. I am very willing to meet with you individually during my office hours listed above. Please contact me to set up an appointment. I look forward to it.**
  - I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

**REQUIRED TEXT...**

- **The Associated Press Stylebook**, current edition – Mandatory for a newsroom and for our classroom. Grab the spiral if you can get one (and the most recent edition available).

**OTHER REQUIRED READING...**

- **Reading several news publications every day is required.** Get your news from The New York Times ([free to GMU students](https://www.nytimes.com/section/index.html)), The Washington Post, online news sources like allsides.com, Politico and Real Clear Politics. Get contrary viewpoints. Follow a news blog. Listen to NPR news programs. Download podcasts ([The Newsworthy, The Daily](https://www.npr.org/podcasts)) (from The New York Times) and [Post Reports](https://postreports.org) (The Washington Post) are excellent. For interesting counterpoints, catch a Fox talk show and CNN telecasts—or watch online. Read the Economist and/or tune in the BBC, whether online, radio or TV, as strong sources of international news. Look at Columbia Journalism Review and other blogs.
- **Get different points of view—read and watch news out of your comfort zone.** Read, read, read—and pay attention to the news. Read articles/books on journalism, about journalism, by journalists and commentators. Share your insights with others. Consider joining the SPJ—Society for Professional Journalists. See professor Smith.
- **It’s essential for you to keep up with politics/international affairs/the world around you.**

**THE WRITING CENTER...**

- The Writing Center offers **FREE** writing support in the form of face-to-face tutoring and online tutoring to Mason students. They will help with all stages of the writing process, from
brainstorming and structuring to revising and polishing. B213 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; http://writingcenter.gmu.edu, wcenter@gmu.edu. Do not wait until you are having problems or the end of the semester to address your writing concerns.

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES...

• Need help researching a topic? Click “Ask a Librarian.”

HOW TO GET A ZERO...

• Deadlines are integral to journalists, so due dates for writing assignments are nonnegotiable. Late assignments, unless previously arranged, are not accepted. Yes, missing a deadline costs you points toward your final grade. Don’t let this happen. This is a valuable lesson from “the real world.”
  o Read professor Smith’s Class Rules on the class website
• Please write in complete sentences using proper grammar. See the Writing Center if you need help. This is not English 101. Please avoid these pitfalls. We have fun in class, but we are in an academic setting and we are here to learn.

DO I HAVE TO COME TO CLASS?

• Um...Yes. You must come to class just like you will have to go to work. Attendance is expected at each class session. If you miss work and deadlines, you get fired. If you miss class and assignments, you... get the idea. Nearly every class will involve writing/reporting exercises designed to teach course material. If you miss class, you’ll miss the necessary instruction and practice to grade high on assignments and tests. In-class assignments cannot be made up.

ABSENCES

• There are no excused or unexcused absences. There are simply absences. The decision to attend class is the student’s, not the professor’s.
• DO NOT request in any form to be excused from class. Students should not inform the professor if they are going to be absent.

ASSIGNMENTS (DUE DATES LISTED ON THE CLASS WEBSITE) ...

• Midterm Exam (20 percent of overall grade): Covers notes collected in class.
• Final Exam (20 percent): Covers notes collected in class after the midterm exam.
• AP Test (15 percent): Covers The Associated Press Style Manual and notes collected in class.
• Blog (12 percent): You will write analysis of weekly news events in blog form. Four weeks of blogging, 3 points for each week of blogging.
• Feature Stories (18 percent): You will write three news feature stories on the guest speakers in this class this semester. Each story is worth 6 percent of your overall grade.
• In Class Assignments (15 percent): These assignments will be only announced in class or assigned through the class website. These are assignments related to class lectures.

PLEASE NOTE:

• THE COURSE SCHEDULE IS AVAILABLE ON THE CLASS WEBSITE. THE SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE DUE TO WEATHER AND OTHER FACTORS.
• The student is responsible for the accuracy of her or his own schedule. Check PatriotWeb regularly to verify that you are registered for the classes that you think you are.
A course in the University carries with it an expectation of a significant time commitment. A full load of five courses, or 15 credit hours, will require 37 hours per week. The specific rigor of the course as well as the academic and organizational skill set of the student will determine the exact number of hours needed to find success in each class.

- This course should be allotted seven to eight hours per week in the student's personal schedule. This time is typically comprised of 2.5 hours of lecture and five to six hours of research, writing and study and assessment work each week.

Important dates:

- Last Day to Add a class: Tuesday, Jan. 29, 2019
- Last day to Drop a class with no tuition penalty (Full-Semester Course): Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2019
- Drop period with no tuition refund begins Feb. 6, 2019
- Final Drop Deadline (with no tuition refund): Feb. 12, 2019
- Student Self-Withdrawal: Feb. 13-25, 2019
- Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduate students only - Full-Semester Course – 100 percent tuition liability): Feb. 26-Mar 25, 2019
- The midterm exam will be administered at 1:30 p.m. Eastern time on a date to be announced in class and on the class website. The final exam will be administered at 1:30 p.m. Eastern time Wednesday, May 8, 2019.

- Both dates subject to change due to length of lectures, weather related closings and other factors.
- A makeup for an exam due to illness will be arranged upon presentation of a note from a suitable medical authority. If you do get sick on a test day, contact or email me. There are few excuses for non-communication.

Special needs & equitable learning. This university and this instructor are committed to providing an equitable learning environment for every student. If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act, please notify me immediately. I will readily adjust for students with special needs, but you must work through the Office of Disability Resources (703-993-2474) to arrange accommodations. The Office of Disability Resources will provide you with a letter to give to me and/or you may request to have them contact me directly. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. It is the student's responsibility to contact the faculty member to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

The GMU Honor Code applies to all students. The University Honor Code is upheld and supported by the Office for Academic Integrity. The principle of academic integrity is taken seriously, and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives and traditions. If you have questions or concerns of any kind, please ask for guidance. I will refer all suspected violations of the Honor Code to the Office of Academic Integrity for adjudication. This process is designed to protect your due process rights. The OAI will review your case and determine next steps. More information is available here.

- Plagiarism. Let’s keep this simple: Don’t plagiarize. Don’t claim someone else’s work as your own; don’t use someone else’s work or idea without giving them credit. Also, don’t make up quotes or sources. Don’t fabricate any information in a story. You will get caught – maybe not by me, but it will catch up with you. Reputation is everything in this
business – don’t spoil yours. If I suspect you’ve plagiarized, I will refer the case to the Office of Academic Integrity for adjudication. This process is designed to protect your due process rights. The OAI will review your case and determine next steps.

- **Religious holidays.** It is the policy of GMU and this instructor to make every reasonable effort to allow members of our diverse university community to observe their religious holidays without academic penalty. It is your responsibility to provide me with *advance written notice* of the dates of any major religious holidays on which you will be absent.

- **Ethics & diversity.** As part of this course, we will discuss issues of professional ethics and their contribution to the pursuit of truth, accuracy and fairness in journalism. This discussion will include issues of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, and the responsibility of journalists to accurately reflect the diversity of global society.
  
  - In all discussions, this course will emphasize the importance of shunning identifications and descriptions that may serve to perpetuate stereotypes about gender, age, dialect, disability, national origin, race, religious affiliation and sexual orientation.
  
  - It is expected that discussions will be open and honest, but abusive language or behavior will not be tolerated. Similarly, in the interest of academic rigor as well as just plain good manners, no food will be allowed in the classroom.

- You are expected to be on time for class. Since late arrivals create a disruption, they are unacceptable. If you leave early, you are responsible for any information or assignments you missed.

- **Contact with Classmates:** Make sure you obtain an email address and phone number from one or two classmates, so that you can consult with a classmate if you would like to do so.

- **Advising.** I strongly recommend that you see the undergraduate academic adviser for your major every semester as well as advisors for minors. You should also include instructors as part of your advising team.

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**Technology Etiquette and Expectations...**

- Technology can be a wonderful learning tool, and can immensely speed communications and information retrieval, but must be used wisely with awareness of limitations. Technology should not be used during class time (unless for note taking or contributing to classroom dialog), especially if use is disrupting learning for others. By remaining in this course, students are expected to adhere to these ground rules.
  
  - **Cell Phones.** During class time, all cell phones must be turned off or set to silent mode and should not disrupt the learning environment in the classroom. Cell phones cannot be answered or used in the classroom except for emergency alerts.
  
  - **Email Address and Expectations.** Students must use their GMU email address or forward email from this address to an address they check regularly. The instructor tries to review email regularly (usually within 48 hours) but is not as consistent over the weekend (expect longer delays during breaks, weekends or conference travel).
  
  - **Text messaging Communications.** There will be no text messaging or tweeting during class time.
  
  - **No personal web surfing is allowed during class time.**
    
    - If you bring a laptop or tablet to class for note-taking, do not surf, text or check email during class. The classroom has computers you can use for in-class assignments and note-taking. If you use your own device, I expect it to be for class work. I expect your participation and engagement, with me and your classmates. I will notice the difference.
- **Recording and Laptop Use.** Students may use laptops or note taking and recording devices during class, but solely for note taking purposes, and should be aware of possibly disrupting other students and adjust their use accordingly. No e-mailing during class time. No recording of class lectures or interactions may be posted online or used for any profit-generating activity.

- **Media Use.** Any use of video clips, audio clips, graphics, files or texts for class assignments must meet copyright requirements and give full and proper attribution.

- **Emergency Procedures**
  - **Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence and stalking:**
    - As a faculty member and designated “Responsible Employee,” I am required to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence and stalking to Mason’s [Title IX Coordinator](mailto:titleix@gmu.edu) per [university policy 1412](mailto:universitypolicy1412@gmu.edu). If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the [Student Support and Advocacy Center](mailto:studentsupportandadvocacycenter@gmu.edu) (703-380-1434), [Counseling and Psychological Services](mailto:counselingandpsychologicalservices@gmu.edu) (703-993-2380), [Student Health Services](mailto:studenthealthservices@gmu.edu), or [Mason’s Title IX Coordinator](mailto:titleix@gmu.edu) (703-993-8730; cde@gmu.edu).

- **George Mason University is dedicated to preparing staff and students in the event of an emergency.** All students in this class are encouraged to register for Mason Alert, a system that allows university officials to contact the community during an emergency by sending a text message to cell phones, emails or PDAs. In addition, we all need to take a minute to view the emergency procedures poster in our classroom. This poster explains what to do in the event of medical emergency, fire, tornado, violence, power outage or another bad event. Please let me know if you would like to discuss these procedures or any information on emergencies. If you are not currently registered for Mason Alert, please visit [this website](https://www.masonalert.gmu.edu).

- **Questions on Graded Assignments**
  - You have a restricted period after assignments are handed back in class to discuss with your Instructor the grade you earned on the assignment. To discuss the grade, you must schedule an appointment, outside of class time, with the Instructor.
  - For all assignments, you have up to seven calendar days.
  - After the restricted period for each assignment, questions on assignments can be entertained through securing an appointment with the Instructor; however, grade changes on said assignments will not be available.