

## **J650 Magazine Writing--Advanced Media Spring 2019**

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### **Course goals**

You will work on *Chalk*, the University Daily Kansan's online magazine. For nine years, 2003 through 2012, the Kansan published a magazine called *Jayplay*. It was beloved by the KU community. When the Kansan ceased publication of *Jayplay* (a shortsighted decision, to my way of thinking), the magazine was sorely missed. People looked forward to getting this magazine every week. Magazine writing students in the school have lacked a consistent outlet for their work ever since.

Now, again, we have one. *Chalk* was launched last spring. This summer it won a honorable mention in the Association for Education on Journalism and Mass Communication Student Magazine Contest, so it's already on the map. A feature that appeared in *Chalk*, "[The Case for Sex Toys](#)," by Rebekah Swank, also won an honorable mention on the contest. This semester you will continue to pave the way for future semesters of magazine writing and of a magazine.

The semester will not go entirely smoothly, I promise you. I have created a schedule that will change. Still, I am *very* excited that we have a magazine.

In the process of making *Chalk*, you will learn about how magazines and magazine writing differ from newspaper writing. You will learn how to write departments and articles, and how to work with an editor.

The classroom portion of this course has these purposes:

- To teach you about different kinds of magazine articles and how to write them.
- To develop your research and interviewing skills.
- To develop your ability to conceive different, and appropriate, ways of telling stories.
- To develop and strengthen your writing and editing skills.
- To learn to write for a diverse audience
- To critique and learn from each issue of *Ruby*.

*Chalk* will offer you the opportunity to build a portfolio of departments and articles. You each will be assigned to a department and will write two department articles as well as shorts related to that department, and you will write one substantive magazine article and one first-person story. These will require initiative in generating ideas, and excellent reporting and writing.

### **How the course works**

The course will follow a workshop format. You will learn how to write for magazines by reading published magazine articles and each other's articles. You will spend a lot more time reading and discussing writing than listening to lectures. Each of you will meet with me to discuss your work and its progress.

### **Course requirements**

Writing assignments

1. Departments (2 longer plus at least four shorts)
2. Feature Article (including pitch)
3. First-person story
4. How It Feels article

Preparation and participation (Workshop critiques)

Professionalism (Ability to meet deadlines and work with *Chalk* editor)

## **Required texts**

*The Associated Press Stylebook*

## **Grading**

All of you come to this class with varying levels of knowledge and experience. Some of you already have worked for magazines; others have just had the intermediate reporting class. You don't have to know how to do everything at the start of the semester, but you do have to show early and consistent progress. When you make mistakes, learn from them. When you get edited heavily, learn from that. **Consistent improvement over time is the key to a good grade.**

I would like to try an experiment this semester: I will not put grades on any of your work. At the end of the semester, you will write a self-reflection and tell me what grade you think you earned. I will critique your stories, as an editor would. No one will grade your work when you graduate. You will have to be self-motivated and self-reliant. I will happily tell you whether you've done a great or average story. If you want to know what grade a story would get, I will tell you that, too. But what I hope is that you will learn and grow more, if you have to push yourself to do the best you can without a grade attached to your work.

## **Departments**

You will write two kinds of departments: two longer ones at *at least* four shorts related to your assigned departments. All shorts will fit sub-departments. For example, Health may have a sub-department like "You're Not Dying" (a short about things people freak out about but aren't anything to worry about). Your shorts will be no longer than 250 words. They can have one, but preferably two sources (a bit of research and a live source). You're required to do four, but more is better.

Each of you needs to keep a portfolio of all your published departments and shorts, which you will turn in twice during the semester, at midterm and the end. You should strive to have one long department and two shorts done by midterm. I will provide instructions for assembling the portfolio before each is due. Save PDFs of everything you write in this class.

## **First-person story**

You will write an essay about a personal experience. We will have a conference about it and we will workshop these in class.

## **Article**

Article due dates are staggered throughout the semester consistent with your *Chalk* deadlines, but ALL articles are due by. You will have a conference with me to go over your article. You will need to provide me with a **manuscript** (your original) of your major article. Email me a final copy of your story when you email it to the *Chalk* editor.

## **Readings summaries**

When we talk about different types of magazine articles, I will give you articles to read and ask you to write one-page summaries to help prepare you for class discussion.

## **Portfolio Review**

Because this is a capstone course, you will submit a portfolio of your work at the end of the semester, which will be reviewed by a professional magazine editor. Your reviewer will rate your work on its professional quality and will provide brief comments.

## **DEADLINES/PENALTIES**

### **Attendance**

You must attend class each week. You will be allowed one unexcused absence from class. More than one unexcused absence will lower your grade.

### **Inclement weather and disabilities**

In the event of inclement weather, the decision to cancel classes is made by KU officials. To determine whether snow or icy conditions have canceled classes, call 864-7669 (864-SNOW). The staff of Services for Students with

Disabilities (SSD), 135 Strong, coordinates accommodations and services for KU courses. If you have a disability for which you may request accommodations in KU classes and have not contacted SSD, please do so as soon as possible.

### **Additional journalism school policies**

No student may add a journalism class after the 20th day of a semester.

Students must attend their classes and laboratory periods. Instructors may take attendance into account in assessing a student's performance and may require a certain level of attendance for passing a course. Instructors may choose to drop students from a course, based on attendance, without the student's consent.

The School of Journalism reserves the right to cancel the enrollment of students who fail to attend the first class or laboratory meeting.

The KU Office of Student Financial Aid is required by federal law to determine whether students who receive aid are attending each class in which they are enrolled. Instructors are required to report to that office absences of students who have stopped attending and names of those who have enrolled but never have attended. Students who do not attend classes may be required to repay federal and/or state aid. Students who receive any form of Financial Aid should learn all requirements including minimum hours and grades to qualify for and retain that aid.

### **Policy on Plagiarism and Fabrication/Falsification**

The William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications does not tolerate plagiarism, fabrication of evidence and falsification of evidence.

Penalties for plagiarism, fabrication or falsification can include a failing grade for this course and expulsion from the School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, please consult the teacher of this course.

*The following definitions are from Article II, Section 6, of the University Senate Rules and Regulations, revised FY98.*

#### **Plagiarism**

Knowingly presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgement of the source). The sole exception to the requirement of acknowledging sources is when the information or ideas are common knowledge.

#### **Fabrication and Falsification**

Unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

## How Articles are Graded

### Reporting:

Your departments and articles need to have multiple, sources, experts and participants. Because your audience is diverse, your sources also need to be diverse—in racial and ethnic background, age, gender, political and religious beliefs, majors, geography. You will need to consult many more sources than you actually will cite in your stories. *Kansan* policy is that you cannot use friends or relatives as sources.

**You will have to interview live sources for your stories, preferably in person or over the phone. You cannot use e-mail interviews unless a source is overseas. You may source Internet research/studies for use in your stories, but you cannot quote people from Internet stories in other publications.**

### Writing:

In magazine writing, you want to tell stories, not push information. Don't just string together quotes from various sources. There has to be both logic and grace to the organization; as a rule, it is a good idea to place similar information together. Your leads need to compel your reader. There should be a sense of character, complication and resolution (an effective ending). Also there should be good transitions throughout. I appreciate interesting and original style, but never at the expense of clarity. Good writing makes efficient use of words. Use every word that is needed, not one more. Good grammar is essential.

### Editing:

Magazines hire editors as well as writers. The quality of your copyediting will affect your grade. All articles must follow AP and *Kansan* Style. Every story you write must include a headline.

### Professionalism:

All articles must be submitted on time, with all required components. If you get in trouble with a story (for example, a source backs out or you discover there is no story), talk to me as soon as possible.

### Grading criteria:

#### 90 to 100%

Outstanding. This grade is for work of clearly professional caliber. The focus is clear and relatable to *Chalk* readers. The reporting is complete (at least five cited live sources for your major article; three cited live sources for longer departments, two for shorts) and leaves no significant questions unanswered. It shows depth of understanding of the topic and a grasp of storytelling. The writing is clear and well organized and follows proper grammar and style. It requires only minor editing.

#### 80% to 89%

Good. This grade is for work that could be raised to professional standards without radical editing. Writing is grammatically correct but may lack the sparkle and fine organization of "A" work. The reporting answers the main questions but may miss the proper emphasis or the best sources. Work needs minor revisions such as reorganizing, rewriting, reformatting, or providing more or better sources. "B" work doesn't necessarily have anything wrong, but it could be better, often with a stronger topic or subject, a more artistic presentation, better information, or improved writing.

#### 70% to 79%

Adequate. Work needs significant revision in at least one major area. Does not measure up to professional quality but could be salvaged with considerable rewriting. Writing has rough spots, and grammar and style errors are present in significant numbers. Reporting may be incomplete, or timid, or factually flawed. These papers and presentations have weak ideas, concepts or presentation problems. They draw attention because they don't do the job.

#### 69% and below

Unacceptable performance. The writing is confused and ungrammatical. The reporting is flawed and may contain major factual errors and/or omissions or may show poor judgment about what's appropriate for a magazine

## Workshops

This class follows a workshop format, one that demands as much class participation from you as it does from me. It's vital that at this stage of your college career, on the verge of becoming professional writers and editors, that you learn how to talk about your work and the work of others openly. So we will talk in this class to help you develop skills in analytical thinking and discussion.

In this class, critical discussion falls into two categories: discussing published magazine articles, which I will provide you, and discussing the articles written by your classmates. Next to the practice of writing itself, reading articles is the best way to learn to become a magazine writer.

Read each article at least twice. The first time, treat it uncritically; read it as you would for information or entertainment, and respond to it the same way, from the gut. How did the article make you feel? Did you like the article, hate it, feel ambivalent about it? Were you left with the strange sense that something's missing, or that you don't know exactly what the article's about? Then read the article again, this time critically. Imagine that you have to teach yourself to write for magazines only by reading magazine articles. What would you want to explore? Consider the following questions:

1. What is the article about? What point is it trying to make? Is there a nut graph or topic statement? If not, is it clearly implied early in the article?
2. Does the article flow smoothly from point to point? Are there problems with organization? A good organizational test is to see if you can map out the article in outline format.
3. Does the lead get your attention? Does it fit the story? What kind of lead does the story use?
4. Does the article end satisfactorily or does it just come to a dead stop?
5. Are there adequate examples, anecdotes and description to make the story interesting?
6. Are the quotes clever, authoritative? How many quotes does the story have?
7. Are there enough apparent sources in the article to give it credibility? Who are the sources? Why did the writer choose them?

As you read through articles critically, make notes on them to highlight specific trouble spots. Also—and this is equally important—make notes about what you like: effective turns of phrase, for example, or good imagery.

For each set of published articles assigned for discussion, you will turn in a one-page summary of your observations at the end of the workshop class. These summaries will be recorded as part of the preparation and participation part of your grade.

**J650 Magazine Writing—Capstone  
Course Schedule Fall 2019**

**Week 2 | Sept. 2**  
Labor Day

| Sept. 4  
Department groups meet

**Week 3 | Sept. 9**  
Discussion: How It Feels articles  
For next class: READ Essays

| Sept. 11  
Discussion: Essays  
Brainstorm essay ideas  
For next class: READ department articles  
Schedule Essay conferences (group 1)

**Week 4 | Sept. 16**  
Discussion: Department articles  
For next class: READ features  
How It Feels articles DUE

| Sept. 18  
Discussion: Features  
Schedule Essay conferences (group 2)

**Week 5 | Sept. 23**  
Essay conferences (group 1)

| Sept. 25  
Research and reporting

**Week 6 | Sept. 30**  
Pitch features  
Essays DUE (group 1)

| Oct. 2  
Essay conferences (group 2)

**Week 7 | Oct. 7**  
Workshop: Departments

| Oct. 9  
Workshop: Departments  
Essays DUE (group 2)

**Week 8 | Oct 14**  
Fall Break

| Oct. 16  
Writing the Q&A  
Midterm portfolio DUE: Must include one  
department and 2 shorts

**Week 9 | Oct. 21**  
Feature progress / questions

| Oct. 23  
Revision: The soul of good writing  
For next week: Read profiles

**Week 10 | Oct. 28 – 30**  
Discussion: Profiles

**Week 11 | Nov. 4 – 6**  
Feature conferences

**Week 12 | Nov. 11 – 13**  
Feature conferences

**Week 13 | Nov. 18**  
Guest speaker

| Nov. 20  
How to Get a Job Part 1:  
Resumes and Cover Letter

**Week 14 | Nov. 25**  
Features DUE

| Nov. 27  
Thanksgiving

**Week 15 | Dec. 2**  
How to Get a Job Part 2: interviewing  
Portfolio DUE

| Dec. 4

**Week 16 | Dec. 9**  
Course wrap-up and evaluations

