

# Opinion Writing

Spring 2009

MCPM 3413-01 – 3 credit hours

10-10:50 a.m. MWF

Walker Center, Room 122

## Instructor:

Kenna Griffin

kgriffin@okcu.edu

Office: Walker Center, Room 117

Office hours: Posted

Office phone: 208-5043

## Required Texts:

Goldstein, Norm. Ed. *The Associated Press Stylebook*. Perseus Publishing: Massachusetts, 2009.

## Recommended Texts:

You should read *The Oklahoman* and *The Campus* (mediaocu.com) every day. Good journalists are well-informed news consumers. I recommend that you get into the habit of reading at least one additional daily metropolitan newspaper and a weekly news magazine. I also recommend that you watch at least one televised newscast each day. In addition, I would recommend that you participate in discussions on my journalism blog, *profkrg.com*. The site acts as a resource for student journalists and an open forum for discussion of trends in our profession. You also can follow the site on Twitter @*thekrg*. Good reporters and responsible citizens are avid news consumers. Information is the key to a democratic society. Develop the habit of daily news consumption now if you haven't already.

## Course Description:

In this course you will use the basic foundations of news gathering and writing to learn and practice the fundamentals of writing opinion for print and electronic media. You will learn how to write a variety of opinion pieces including personal columns, editorials and reviews. You will be trained to use legitimate sources to justify personal opinions and present them in a credible and newsworthy manner. You will learn these aspects of journalism through participating in classroom lectures, practical writing assignments, posting to a blog, and by participating in Q&A with industry leaders. As part of this course your work may be published in the student newspaper, *The Campus*, or on the newspaper's Web site, *MediaOCU.com*. Upon completion of this course you will understand the basics of opinion writing.

## **Attendance:**

Journalists must be reliable. Missing deadlines can cost you your job. If you miss a class you are likely to miss a graded assignment, which will be reflected in your final grade. Course attendance and participation are required and will be counted as 10 percent of your final grade. You are expected to arrive to class on time and leave when class is complete. If you cannot avoid missing class you must notify me as soon as possible. I will give excused absences on a case-by-case basis.

## **Participation:**

You are required to participate in class. Participation could include commenting on articles and interactive lecture. Asking questions always is encouraged. Discussion of things unrelated to class is discouraged. You are not allowed to be disruptive in any way that takes class value away from your classmates. Participation is especially important in this course because of the number of guest speakers we will have during the semester. It is important for you to research the speakers and be prepared to ask them questions. This will help you get the most from the guest speaker opportunity.

## **Technology:**

You are allowed to use a laptop to take notes during the class. You are not allowed to be online during class. Students found using a laptop inappropriately during class will be asked to leave and will not receive attendance or participation points for that class session. Cell phones also are not allowed to be on during class. Writing assignments must be completed outside of class. All assignments must be typed. You will not be excused from class to print assignments. Do not come to class to discuss printing with me. It is up to you to determine if you should be late to class to print. If you do not have access to a computer and/or printer, you are welcome to use the mass comm computer lab at the front of our department. Malfunctions of the lab printer will not be accepted as an excuse for tardiness or late work.

## **Assignments/exams:**

I will give you a handout for each assignment due in class. I encourage you to keep these handouts and follow them carefully. In addition, you should check your OCU e-mail daily for class updates. Missed assignments cannot be made up without my approval. Again, if you have to miss class you must notify me prior to the class session. Do not assume that I know you will not be present. Communicate with me regarding every necessary absence. Do not send word of your absence via another classmate. I will not accept assignments sent to class with peers. Notification of an absence from anyone but yourself will not be

considered adequate. It is your responsibility to come to me and find out what you missed in class. I will give you guidance, but I will not relecture, save handouts or print notes for absent students. If you miss an assignment and are allowed to make it up you must do so at the scheduled time or you will not receive credit.

### **Grading:**

I will attempt to grade all class assignments and return them to you within a week of their submission. You are welcome to visit my office to discuss any questions or concerns you have about your grades on individual assignments or in the course as a whole. Your grade for the course will consist of grades in three categories:

Weekly blog – 60 %  
Chats/assignments – 30 %  
Class attendance/participation – 10 %

### **Griffin's grades:**

It is important to me that you understand that my grading of writing is not arbitrary. This is especially important in this course where the writing you will do is based on your opinion. I will never grade you down as a result of your opinion. I will strongly consider how well you support your opinion with facts and how well you adhere to common journalistic writing principles. I award writing grades based on the following standards:

- **A** – Copy is publishable with little editing.
- **B** – Copy is publishable with minor editing and revisions.
- **C** – Portions of the copy would need to be rewritten and closely edited before the piece could be published.
- **D** – Copy contains major factual, structural, writing, and usage flaws. It is doubtful whether it could be published. It definitely could not be published without major work.
- **F** – Copy does not meet even minimal standards for the assignment. This grade also is received if a name is misspelled in the writing. Remember that if you don't correctly name sources it's pointless to have written the piece at all.

*NOTE: The AP Stylebook should be used for all writing assignments. You are responsible for using correct spelling, grammar and AP Style usage from the start of the semester.*

### **Blog:**

More than half of your grade in this class will be based on posting a weekly opinion piece on a blog. The topic of your blog is up to you. I would like you to

choose a blog theme that is different from your classmates. You will design your blog on wordpress.com. It will be linked to MediaOCU.com. Your blog entries are expected to apply all journalistic writing, ethical and legal standards. You are required to update your blog at least once a week, although you may choose to update more. You will receive a weekly grade for updating.

### **#blogchat:**

A portion of your grade in this course will be based on discussion posts as a result of your participation in #blogchat. #blogchat is a Twitter-based discussion about blogging, founded by Mack Collier, a social media consultant from Alabama. The chat is based on a different topic each week. It averages more than 3,500 tweets and nearly 650 contributors. These contributors include some of the top full-time bloggers in the industry. It is at 8 p.m. Sundays. For more information about #blogchat, visit Mack's blog at <http://mackcollier.com/social-media-library/what-is-blogchat/>. If you cannot participate in #blogchat during any of the following Sundays, you can read a transcript of the chat after it is complete. You will have a discussion post due each Wednesday following #blogchat. More information will be provided on an assignment sheet before the first chat.

#blogchat dates during the semester:

- Jan. 16 (not required)
- Jan. 23
- Jan. 30
- Feb. 6
- Feb. 13
- Feb. 20
- Feb. 27
- March 6
- March 13 (not required)
- March 20 (not required)
- March 27
- April 3
- April 10
- April 17
- April 24 (not required)
- May 2 (not required)

### **Course schedule:**

*This course schedule is tentative and subject to change.*

#### **WEEK 1:**

- Monday, Jan. 10 – *Course introduction*
- Wednesday, Jan. 12 – *Why write opinion?*
- Friday, Jan. 14 – *Conceptualizing your blog*

#### **WEEK 2:**

- Monday, Jan. 17 – No class. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- Wednesday, Jan. 19 – No class. Lab day.
- Friday, Jan. 21 – *Naming your blog*

WEEK 3:

- Monday, Jan. 24 – *Developing your blog*
- Wednesday, Jan. 26 – *Developing your blog*
- Friday, Jan. 28 – *Developing your blog*

WEEK 4:

- Monday, Jan. 31 – *Blog Content*
- Wednesday, Feb. 2 – *Blog Content*
- Friday, Feb. 4 – *Blog Content*

WEEK 5:

- Monday, Feb. 7 – *Blog Promotion*
- Wednesday, Feb. 9 – *Blog Promotion*
- Friday, Feb. 11 – *Blog Promotion*

WEEK 6:

- Monday, Feb. 14 – *Writing editorials*
- Wednesday, Feb. 16 – *Writing editorials*
- Friday, Feb. 18 – *Guest speaker*

WEEK 7:

- Monday, Feb. 21 – *Writing political commentary*
- Wednesday, Feb. 23 – *Writing political commentary*
- Friday, Feb. 25 – *Guest speaker*

WEEK 8:

- Monday, Feb. 28 – *Writing sports columns*
- Wednesday, March 2 – *Writing sports columns*
- Friday, March 4 – *Guest speaker*

WEEK 9:

- Monday, March 7 – *Writing personal/specialty columns*
- Wednesday, March 9 – *Writing personal/specialty columns*
- Friday, March 10 – *Guest speaker*

March 14–18 – No class. Spring Break.

WEEK 10:

- Monday, March 21 – *Writing reviews and entertainment columns*
- Wednesday, March 23 – *Writing reviews and entertainment columns*
- Friday, March 25 – *Guest speaker*

WEEK 11:

- Monday, March 28 – *Writing about food*
- Wednesday, March 30 – *Writing about food*

- Friday, April 1 – *Guest speaker*

WEEK 12:

- Monday, April 4 – *Blog updates*
- Wednesday, April 6 – No class. President’s Inauguration.
- Friday, April 8 – No class. SPJ Region 8 Conference.

WEEK 13:

- Monday, April 11 – *Writing humor columns*
- Wednesday, April 13 – *Writing humor columns*
- Friday, April 15 – *Guest speaker*

WEEK 14:

- Monday, April 18 – *Vlogging for attention*
- Wednesday, April 20 – *Vlogging for attention*
- Friday, April 22 – *Guest speaker*

WEEK 15:

- Monday, April 25 – *Your blog’s future*
- Wednesday, April 27– *Your blog’s future*
- Friday, April 29 – *Your blog’s future*

Mass Communications Departmental Policies

LATE WORK:

- No late work will be accepted for full credit without prior arrangement with the instructor.
- Work is due at the beginning of the class session.

EXAMINATIONS:

- No makeup examinations will be given unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor.
- NO FINAL EXAMS WILL BE GIVEN EARLIER THAN ANNOUNCED BY THE INSTRUCTOR. NO EXCEPTIONS. Students who make travel plans without confirming the scheduled finals date for this class do so at their own risk. Students who travel prior to the scheduled final exam will be unable to take the examination and must accept a zero test score.

INCOMPLETE:

Incomplete grades are not a student option except under extreme circumstances. Students seeking an incomplete must submit a written request supported by documentation verifying the need for this extension. Incompletes are given for a limited period of time.

TARDINESS/ATTENDANCE:

Students are expected to be in class on time. Entering the classroom late is unprofessional and disruptive. Repeated tardiness is unacceptable. Students should be punctual and prepared, since these are the qualities expected by the business community. Attendance will be taken at each class session. Students are expected to attend all class sessions.

GRADING SCALE:

93.0 - 100	=	A
90.0 - 92.99	=	A-
87.5 - 89.99	=	B+
82.5 - 87.49	=	B
80.0 - 82.49	=	B-
77.5 - 79.99	=	C+
72.5 - 77.49	=	C
70.0 - 72.49	=	C-
67.5 - 69.99	=	D+
62.5 - 67.49	=	D
60.0 - 62.49	=	D-
Below 60.0	=	F Not I or W

CHEATING/PLAGIARISM:

STANDARD OF RESPONSIBILITY

Oklahoma City University was founded upon strong values and high standards. Honesty in academics is a priority. Students should be advised that cheating and plagiarism are not tolerated. The Academic Honesty Policy can be found online at <http://starport.okcu.edu/ad/aa>

Cheating is defined as using, or supplying information that is not authorized by the instructor in taking an examination or completing any other assignment. Cheating also includes turning in another's work and representing it as being your own.

Plagiarism is defined as a unique form of cheating where persons turn in another's work and represent it as being their own. This would include: 1) purchasing term papers and turning them in as if they are original work; 2) using a paper that has previously been turned in; 3) copying passages verbatim from books, articles, etc.; 4) submitting material for grades in which the student has not done the work required; 5) collusion – the unauthorized collaboration with another person; 6) misrepresentation of actions and 7) falsifying information.

Every student is expected to observe the highest standards of conduct, both on and off the campus. The University cannot accept the responsibility for the education of any student who is not in sympathy with the purposes and the regulations of the University.

Mass Communications students should be aware that this department considers the above-described conduct to be dishonorable and dishonest. Students found cheating or plagiarizing will receive a grade of “0”, which is an “F”, on the involved examination, project or paper and, at the professor's discretion, may receive a failing grade for the entire course.

#### EXAMINATION EQUIPMENT:

Students are not permitted to use or access the following items during an examination:

- Dictionaries
- Electronic spellers, translators, dictionaries or calculators
- Computers
- Class notes, books

Once any examination has begun, if a student wishes to leave the room they must be prepared to turn in their examination paper and/or blue book. And, it will not be returned to them for additional work.

#### DISABILITY STATEMENT:

If you need an accommodation due to a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact Student Health and Disability Service Office immediately at 208-5991 or 208-5090. Advance notice is required for many accommodations.

POLICY STATEMENT

I have read the policies for the academic year 2010-2011 for the Mass Communications Department.

I understand the policies and agree to abide by them.

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Name

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Student ID# or SSN#

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Date

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Course Name and Number