

Topics in Journalism: Sports Journalism
Allegheny College
ENG 402, Spring 2012

Day/Time: T/Th 1:30-2:45 p.m.
Classroom: Murray 120

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Office hours: Tuesdays from 3-5 p.m., Wednesdays from 12-4 p.m., and by appointment

Course Outline, Responsibilities and Policies

About this course. In the most basic sense, this course will teach you how to write a sports story. But we will address these basics while examining issues from race to gender to commodification to convergence. We will pick apart the ethics of sports journalists. We will dismantle sports writing (both excellent and poor, but mostly excellent) and put it back together again. When you finish this course, you should understand how to research, report, write, edit and talk about sports journalism.

Course Materials. We will be using “Best American Sports Writing 2011” edited by Jane Leavy to dissect excellent writing. Gisondi’s “Field Guide to Covering Sports” will be your handbook for practical issues as you report and write. You will also need the “Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law” (2010 or 2011 editions are acceptable). In addition to these traditional textbooks, you will also need to keep up with the sports section of *The Campus* every week and the sports section of at least one major metropolitan newspaper every day (*The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Denver Post*, *The Washington Post*, ect). Newspapers are available online, in the library, or in dorm or building racks. Some other non-textbook readings will be delivered through Sakai. It is required to have a laptop in this course and to bring it to a few designated class meetings. If you do not have access to one for class times, please approach the professor on the first day of class for directions on how to attain a loaned laptop. You may find it helpful to have a notepad, a reliable pen and a voice recorder on hand for reporting assignments. You will also need to purchase one ticket (about \$11) to an Erie Otters hockey game, which we will be covering on 2/24 at 7 p.m.

Availability of the Professor. Due to the nature of my appointment at the College, I am usually shuttling between Murray, Vukovich, Odd fellows and the Campus Center on any given day, but I am usually somewhere on campus from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and am easily available with a prior appointment. To make an appointment with me, you may contact me using any of the information above, but the easiest way to reach me is via email. Office hours are open for drop-in. Please feel free to talk to me about any issues relating to the course and don’t hesitate to ask for my assistance. I truly care about your learning and I hope that office hours aren’t simply a time to talk about problems, but also a space to brainstorm or develop academic and professional interests.

Deadlines. Journalism is a deadline-oriented business. As a professional, if you miss a deadline, you should expect to clear out your desk sooner rather than later. As a student in this course, I will hold you to a similar standard. Meeting deadlines in this course is mandatory. If you don’t turn in an assignment on time (that means not a minute after the deadline listed), you will NOT receive credit. Zero. Nada. Zilch. By meeting this course standard you will inevitably grow not only as a journalist, but also as a person.

Attendance and Lateness. Please come to class on time every scheduled class day. If there is a circumstance that may force you to miss class, please email or see me so we can discuss your alternatives. If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to get notes from classmates. *Please do not contact the instructor for notes or lecture outlines unless you have exhausted all other options.* I will only allow late papers or makeup work in the case of extenuating circumstances, which can include death of a family member or a significant illness or injury that requires immediate bed rest, immobilization or treatment. All of these circumstances still require documentation for an excused absence. Sorry, headaches don’t count. Students that plan to miss class due to a college-related activity

or religious holiday should provide advance notice of the absence and you accept full responsibility for completing any work ahead of time.

Electronic Devices. Texting during class isn't the best idea. You will quickly discover that cell phones and unapproved computer use in class are my biggest pet peeves. If I see you fiddling with your phone or on the web while we're having a class discussion or lecture, I will ask you to leave the classroom. You will find this course to be infinitely more rewarding if you are present both physically and mentally.

Sakai. Course materials and announcements will be distributed to you via Sakai. Check it (and/or your email) on a regular basis.

Participation and In-Class Conduct. Successful people, especially journalists, know how to ask questions – lots of questions. Those who refuse to be a part of the discussion will see that reflected in a lower final grade. Please note that there is a difference between quality of participation and quantity of participation. All discussions and interactions between class members during class time or team project situations should be respectful, professional and conducted with sensitivity. Any other type of behavior will not be tolerated.

Course Writing Guidelines. All assignments in this course will be printed, double-spaced, stapled and will adhere to style, spelling, grammar and punctuation rules.

Accuracy and Integrity. Please refer to your Honor Code pledge and behave accordingly in this class. Plagiarism in any form -- including not properly attributing information or quotes -- will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade. In an attempt to encourage accuracy and an attention to detail, any factual error, including misspelling of names of any kind, will result in an automatic half credit off on the assignment, exam or quiz.

Disabilities. Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at (814) 332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please do this as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Course Grading

Grades: Your course grade is calculated out of 400 total points and will be decided as follows:

250 pts Reported stories

75 pts Blog contribution

75 pts Participation

Reported stories: This will be the graded writing you do in the course. The grade is comprised of six journalistic articles (five of them worth 35 pts each, your last enterprise story will be worth 75 pts). These will be sports stories of your choice, reported and written for a real publication. They may be assigned by an editor at the paper or you can use your own reporting. Each of your regular stories will run 350-800 words. Your final story will be 800-1,500 words and will demonstrate enterprise reporting on a heftier story.

Blog: You will sign up for Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>) and contribute to our class blog at <http://bloggingchompers.tumblr.com>. This blog will act as our class notepad for thoughts, reactions, critical analysis and curation of sports journalism and commentary on sports journalism. You should contribute no fewer than two entries or responses per week, although an entry could be a simple comment reply to a link someone posted, a sports photo with a caption, or a video you reblogged from a different source. Students who interact critically and constructively with others' blog work will receive a higher grade at the end of the semester. Each story you turn in for this class should be posted to this blog and you should endeavor to respond to each of your classmates' articles after they are posted. You may also find it helpful to blog about your own work and the process of your reporting before, during and after you turn in a graded piece. This blog should give you a good chance to think critically about class concepts in a more informal atmosphere before bringing your ideas to class for discussion. Think of the blog as a nursery for your ideas, a place where they are nurtured, grown and tested. You can either submit text, photos, audio or video to the blog via email at 402hozinn@tumblr.com or you can go to the "submit" or "ask" links to join in on the conversation. Don't be shy.

Participation: This grade is based on your class discussion, your participation and your engagement with your in-class assignments, homework, professor and classmates. Note that you cannot participate if you're not in class. This grade will also include a class field trip to the Erie Otters game at 7 p.m. on 2/24. We'll carpool to Erie, watch the game, interview players and write a post-game piece. Please mark your calendars.

*Extra credit: A maximum of 15 points of extra credit is available for each article you publish in *The Campus* up to 50 total points. Editors are under no obligation to publish your work, so you must pitch, report and write the story well to be accepted.

Grading scale.

A 100-93 *Publishable without any changes.*

A- 92-90

B+ 89-87

B 86-83 *With some editing changes, your work could run somewhere.*

B- 82-80

C+ 79-77

C 76-73 *Your writing is average for college-level work.*

C- 72-70

D 69-60 *Fundamental issues with the work.*

F 59 or less *Lacks basic skills, wasn't submitted on deadline, or included basic factual error.*

Course Schedule.

This schedule may change over the course of the semester. All changes will be announced.

DAY	TOPIC	DUE
1/19	Class introduction; Syllabus review; What is sports journalism?	Leavy, Introduction; Gisondi, Ch. 1
1/24	Writing the game story	Gisondi, Ch. 2, Primer C; Morning sports sections (NYT, DP, LAT)*
1/26	Writing the game story; James Kramer class visit	Morning sports sections (NYT, DP, LAT)*
1/31	Interviewing	Gisondi, Ch. 3; Chris Jones "Breathless"; Bret Anthony Johnston "Danny Way and the Gift of Fear"
2/2	Interviewing	Article #1 due; Gisondi, Primer A; Sterry Butcher "Gentling Cheatgrass"
2/7	Blogging sports	Gisondi, Ch. 6; John Branch, "Punched Out"*
2/9	Covering high school & college sports	Gisondi, Ch. 4; Taylor Branch "The Shame of College Sports"*
2/14	Covering high school & college sports; Sports Illustrated class visit	Gisondi p. 109-124, 143-155, 167-196
2/16	Covering high school & college sports	Article #2 due; Chris Ballard "The Courage of Jill Costello"

2/21	Feature stories	Gisondi, Ch. 5, Primer B; Paul Solotaroff "The Surfing Savant"
2/23	Feature stories	Gisondi, Primer B; Robert Sanchez "The Crash"; Erie Otters game visit 2/24 at 7 p.m.
2/28	Covering a beat	Gisondi p. 205-214, 225-264; Craig Vetter "Icarus 2010"
3/1	NO CLASS DUE TO PROFESSOR CONFERENCE	Article #3 due; Gisondi p. 57-68, 99-108
3/6	Covering hockey	Gisondi p. 156-166; Jake Bogoch "School of Fight"; Michael Farber "Eight Seconds"
3/8	Covering swimming and diving	Gisondi p. 215-224; Megan Chuchmach and Avni Patel "USA Swimming Coaches Molested, Secretly Tapes Dozens of Teen Swimmers"
3/13	Covering soccer	Gisondi p. 197-204; Wells Tower "Own Goal"; Wright Thompson "Above and Beyond"
3/15	Covering baseball	Article #4 due; Gisondi p. 69-82; Bill Shaikin "If You Think It, They Will Win"; Howard Bryant "Dusty Baker a Symbol of Perseverance"
3/20	NO CLASS DURING SPRING BREAK	
3/22	NO CLASS DURING SPRING BREAK	
3/27	Covering football and basketball	Gisondi p. 125-142, p. 83-98; Jason Fagone "The Dirtiest Player"; Tom Friend "Old College Try"
3/29	Writing in the first person	P.J. O'Rourke "Fetch Daddy a Drink"; John McPhee "The Patch"; Mark Pearson "The Short History of an Ear"
4/3	Profiling	The Scott Hall Story*; David Foster Wallace "The String Theory"*
4/5	Finding the angle	Article #5 due; Mark Kram Jr. "Life Goes On"; Yoni Brenner "Trick Plays"; David Dobbs "The Tight Collar"
4/10	Gender and sports journalism	Sally Jenkins "Culture of Silence Gives Free Rein to Male Athletes"; Nancy Hass "New Mike, Old Christine"
4/12	Gender and sports journalism	Selena Roberts "High School Dissonance"
4/17	Ethics of sports journalism	Gisondi, Primer D; Andrew Cohen "Inside Baseball: The Boston Red Sox and Sports Journalism"*

4/19	Commodification of sports	Patrick Hruby "The Franchise"
4/24	Ritual representations in sports journalism	Bill Plaschke "A Gift That Opens Him Up"; S.L. Price "Pride of a Nation"; John Powers "Risks, Danger Always in Play"
4/26	Future of sports journalism	Article #6 due
5/1	Course wrap-up	Blogging completed

* These readings will be distributed via Sakai.