

# JMC 4100 Advanced Topics in Writing/Storytelling POLITICAL REPORTING

This is a capstone course on political reporting, built around coverage of the presidential campaign leading up to Iowa Caucuses.

The goal is for you to *achieve proficiency* in writing campaign news stories in the following genres:

- news
- policy
- fact-check
- political money / accountability
- polling
- profile

Over the course of the semester you will write six daily news stories and one each of the other five. That's a total of 11 stories, slightly fewer than one each week.

You will have your choice of which week to write which story, but will work as a group to ensure the class is pursuing a balanced news diet. (This is what you will eventually do in a newsroom.)

You have your choice of which weeks to skip, but need to tell me in advance.

## CLASS SESSIONS

As a capstone, we'll run the course much like a real newsroom. We'll discuss each others recent and upcoming work, make story assignments and have time to work.

We will from time to time have sessions devoted to learning about a specific topic or type of story. This will be handled flexibly, and you'll be given plenty of advance notice.

## Daniel Lathrop

Assistant Professor  
daniel-lathrop@uiowa.edu  
Office: W337 AJB

Drop-in / office hours:

- Tues. 1 - 2:30 p.m.
- Thurs. 9:30 - 11 a.m.

## Department info

School of Journalism  
Director: Dr. David Ryfe  
david-ryfe@uiowa.edu  
Office: 305 AJB  
Phone (319) 335-3486

## Grading

News stories	25%
Other stories	50%
Attendance / participation	25%

## Attendance

You are expected to attend and be prepared to participate in every class session. It's my experience that attendance correlates almost perfectly with final grades.

However, you can miss any class session as long as you email me *in advance* that you are taking a "PTO day." When you have a job, you'll need to do this.

Missing classes without taking PTO will result in a 2 point penalty to your participation grade. Being unprepared in class will result in a 1 point penalty to your participation grade.

Unprofessional behavior or missing an exceptional number of sessions without taking PTO or will result in a penalty of up to a full letter grade (at the professor's sole discretion).

Examples of unprofessional behavior are disrespecting your colleagues, disruptiveness or use of offensive language.

No retroactive excused absences will be given except in extraordinary circumstances.

## Readings, etc.

### Textbook

No textbook required in this course. I will assign a variety of things as the semester progresses. I'll typically give you the assignment on Thursday for the following work.

### The Wall Street Journal

You will be expected to follow the presidential campaign coverage in the news and editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal*. I need some standard on which to measure, and this is it. You should be prepared to discuss the stories at the beginning of each class.

### Podcasts

You need to listen to one of the following political podcasts.

- The Bulwark (right)
- KCRW Left, Right and Center (center)
- FiveThirtyEight Politics (neutral)
- National Review's The Editors (right)

## Grading

This class is graded on a +/- basis without A+. Grades are rounded to the nearest 0.1 percent.

A	94% - 100%
A-	90% - 93.9%
B+	87% - 89.9%
B	84% - 86.9%
B-	80% - 83.9%
C+	77% - 79.9%
C	74% - 76.9%
C-	70% - 73.9%
D+	67% - 69.9%
D	64% - 66.9%
D-	60% - 63.9%
F	less than 60%

- NPR Politics (neutral)
- NYT The Daily (neutral)
- Pantsuit Politics (center)
- Pod Save America (left)
- Slate Political Gabfest (center)
- Vox The Weeds (left)

Let me know which one you're following. You can change over the course of the semester, but you'll be asked to brief your colleagues from time to time. Feel free to suggest another one, as well.

## Story assignments

Each week you will generally write one (or more) stories to fulfill your requirements. You can submit a "replacement" for an earlier assignment, but it doesn't count against your story quota.

If you skip a week without letting me know in advance, you get 0 on it that cannot be made up.

The week begins with stories turned in at 12:01 a.m. Monday.

### Grading

Your writing will be graded against the standards of professional publication: clear writing, adherence to AP style, correct spelling, inclusion of the 5 W's, etc. That's an "A." Deviations from that will be graded appropriately.

### News stories

You are expected to report five daily news stories about campaign stops, political developments, etc. These must be written for publication.

For students who report for The DI/DITV or KRUI, your work should appear there the day following the news. You can choose any story you like, but must turn in your unedited story/script.

For those who don't, you should plan to report for [IowaWatch.org](http://IowaWatch.org) and/or the IowaWatch Connection weekly radio show. You file your pieces on the [IowaWatch.org](http://IowaWatch.org) web site and I will edit them.

Reporters at The DI, DITV, KRUI and IowaWatch are expected to abide by the norms strict political neutrality and avoidance of conflicts of interest.

Any need for specific special arrangements should be discussed during the first week of class.

## Fact-checking, policy, polling, money and profile stories

Like the news pieces, you will write these for publication. However, as longer pieces you will have the opportunity to make revisions if the first version isn't quite up to scratch.

## More about the Fact-check

Your fact-check will be published by PolitiFact Iowa, a partnership of IowaWatch and The Daily Iowan. It will follow the style and norms established by the Politifact Network. Each week we will spend some time in class adding items to the Politifact "buffet."

There will be a specific training from Politifact outside class which you will be required to attend.

## Ethics

You are expected to follow the SPJ Code of Ethics in addition to any code of ethics in use by the publication you are writing for.

Additionally:

- You must identify yourself by name and publication before beginning an interview.
- You should avoid going "off the record" (although "not for attribution" is often acceptable).
- I encourage you to tape your interviews, and you should generally let your interview subjects know they are being taped over the phone.

## Policies

### Deadlines

In journalism, deadlines count. Blowing deadline or failing to cover an assigned news story will result in a significant grade penalty and/or a 0 that cannot be made up.

### Technology policy

*There is ample evidence that the use of laptops, phones and other devices in class leads to poorer learning outcomes and poorer grades for students. That's true even when devices are used for notetaking or other in-class purposes.*

*Technology should be used appropriately. Please use common sense.*

### Email policy

Any email you send to me should be considered a professional communication. That means it should be:

- addressed **Dear Professor Lathrop:**
- written in complete sentences
- written in a work-appropriate tone
- signed with your full name

(These are good guidelines to follow with your other professors.)

I typically reply to email by the end of the next business day.

In addition, university policy dictates that all email communication with instructors must come from your @uiowa.edu email address to be official.

## Changes in grades

*If you believe a specific grade has been given in error or otherwise should be changed, you need to notify me by email within 48 hours of the grade being posted and schedule a meeting within the following week to discuss it in person. Those meetings should happen during office hours unless you have class or other academic obligations during those times.*

*No changes or discussions of changes will be handled in email. (I will check to make sure there has not been data entry or similar error immediately.)*

*If you believe your semester grade has been given in error or otherwise should be changed, you need to notify me within one week of grades being posted and schedule a time to meet with me in person before the beginning of the next semester. =*

*No changes or discussions of changes will be handled in email. (I will check to make sure there has not been data entry or similar error immediately.)*

## Resources

There will be copies of course materials and out software at the SJMC Student Center, Adler Journalism Building room E350. <https://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/facilities/resource-center>

Students may find the Speaking Center very useful, especially for the presentation. <https://speakingcenter.uiowa.edu>

The Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.uiowa.edu>) and the Tutor Iowa site (<https://tutor.uiowa.edu>) can also be valuable for students seeking extra help.

For help writing in your journalism classes, you can also get help from the Writing Assistance program at the SJMC Resource Center E350

Adler. <https://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/facilities/resource-center#guidelines>

## CLAS Teaching Policies & Resources

### Absences and Attendance

Students are responsible for attending class and for contributing to the learning environment of a course. Students are also responsible for knowing their course absence policies, which will vary by instructor. All absence policies, however, must uphold the UI policy related to student illness, mandatory religious obligations, including Holy Day obligations, unavoidable circumstances, or University authorized activities (<https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/attendance-absences>). Students may use this absence form to aid communication; the instructor will decide if the absence is excused or unexcused (<https://clas.uiowa.edu/sites/default/files/ABSENCE%20EXPLANATION%20FORM2019.pdf>).

### Academic Integrity

All undergraduates enrolled in courses offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty. Misconduct is reported to the College, resulting in suspension or other sanctions, with sanctions communicated with the student through the UI email address (<https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code>).

### Accommodations for Disabilities

UI is committed to an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (such as mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related condition) by registering with Student Disability Services (SDS). The student is then responsible for discussing specific accommodations with the instructor. More information is at <https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/>.

### Administrative Home of the Course

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the administrative home of this course and governs its add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and related policies. Other colleges may have different policies. CLAS policies may be found here: <https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook>.

## Communication and the Required Use of UI Email

Students are responsible for official correspondences sent to the UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for all communication within UI (Operations Manual, III.15.2).

## Complaints

Students with a complaint about an academic issue should first visit with the instructor or course supervisor and then with the Chair of the department or program offering the course; students may next bring the issue to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. For more information, see <https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities>.

## Final Examination Policies

The final exam schedule is announced around the fifth week of classes; students are responsible for knowing the date, time, and place of a final exam. Students should not make travel plans until knowing this information. No exams of any kind are allowed the week before finals. Visit <https://registrar.uiowa.edu/final-examination-scheduling-policies>.

## Nondiscrimination in the Classroom

UI is committed to making the classroom a respectful and inclusive space for all people irrespective of their gender, sexual, racial, religious or other identities. Toward this goal, students are invited to optionally share their preferred names and pronouns with their instructors and classmates. The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination and harassment against individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, and other identity categories set forth in the University's Human Rights policy. For more information, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity ([diversity.uiowa.edu](http://diversity.uiowa.edu)).

### Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community must uphold the UI mission and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment must be reported immediately. For assistance, please see <https://osmrc.uiowa.edu/>.

# School of Journalism and Mass Communication Learning Goals

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication is committed to your academic and professional success. In line with this commitment, we have identified particular learning outcomes that every student should obtain by the time they earn their degree. You can find more information about these learning outcomes here: <https://clas.uiowa.edu/sjmc/undergraduate-programs/sjmc-assessment-plan>.

We regularly assess the curriculum to determine whether students are achieving these outcomes. This course contributes to these learning outcomes by **achieve proficiency** elements of the storytelling, media literacy and multiculturalism goals. Achieving these outcomes means students will:

- demonstrate the ability to gather factual story elements, and to evaluate and express them in logical, narrative forms for multiple media and audiences. (Storytelling Learning Objective No. 1)
- display the ability to access and analyze data, report facts accurately, research and edit information responsibly and in a manner commensurate with professional standards. (Storytelling Learning Objective No. 2)
- Students will demonstrate the ability to apply above concepts in a manner that is sensitive to audiences across all media. (Storytelling Learning Objective No. 3)
- demonstrate an ability to produce media that serve the needs and interests of diverse communities and reflect their voices and experiences. (Multiculturalism Learning Objective Number 1)