

**Feature Writing
JRNL 4802/5802**

Prof. Christine Larson
1B90

Fall 2018

Office: Armory 1B06 (in the basement)

Class location: Visual Arts Complex

TTh 11:00-12:15 pm

Office Hours: T/TH 1-3 p.m. and by appointment

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*****PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS: SUBJECT TO CHANGE DEPENDING ON NEEDS OF THE CLASS*****

Course Overview

This course focuses on journalistic reporting and writing for a variety of media, including online and print newspapers and magazines, broadcast television and radio, as well as online-only and social media platforms. Newsgathering and writing will be taught with a strong awareness of multimedia and multi-platform storytelling. However, the focus of this course will be on text: news stories that range from breaking news to profiles and trend stories.

This course can be taken concurrently with, or as a precursor to, CMCI 1010 and 1020, as well as JRNL 2001. In all these courses, you'll be exposed to and practice various storytelling skills, from text writing to interviewing to video / audio. The purpose of JRNL 2000 is to provide a solid foundation in journalistic reporting and writing, which is critical not only to text-based stories, but also broadcast, audio, video, infographic / data visualization, documentary film.

Students work in an interactive, lab format to build skills such as clear writing, sentence structure, Associated Press Style, proper attribution, story structure, as well as reporting skills such as choosing and contacting sources, research, interviewing. In addition, they learn and are encouraged to discuss issues of ethics, business models, media literacy, as well as the current events pertaining to, and the landscape of, journalism today. As the course builds skills through a variety of story types, students are increasingly asked to package text stories with an infographic and social-media content, as well as to consider multimedia options.

About Instructor

Christine Larson. This is my second year at the University of Colorado, after five years pursuing my Ph.D. in Communication at Stanford. I research cultural work and the

creative industries, and practiced journalism for 20 years before returning to academia. My work has appeared frequently in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, US News & World Report, and I've worked on staff at newspapers, online outlets and major national magazines including Glamour, Cosmopolitan and Adweek. A freelance writer for more than a decade, I organized a national conference for freelancers as a John S. Knight Fellow at Stanford. I am also a senior leader of The OpEd Project, where I train underrepresented experts and activists to become public voices.

Course Learning Objectives

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Write polished, compelling features for print, online, broadcast and other media.
- Understand the conventions and formats of common feature stories, including news features, profiles, data-driven issue stories and longform narrative journalism
- Identify, contact and interview credible sources.
- Search efficiently for, and evaluate credible information, documents and statistics.
- Think across media to create and recommend multimedia packages.
- Apply news-media literacy and knowledge of today's journalism landscape to discussions about current events, news coverage and the news industry.

Learning Materials

- Telling True Stories (2007). Mark Kramer/Wendy Call. Plume.
- Associated Press (2017). *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. You can buy an online subscription (recommended) or a hard-copy Stylebook, but you must have one or the other for the duration of class.
- Other scanned or handout readings

Technology Policy: Laptops, tablets and phones will be used in class only when the instructor indicates they are permitted for in-class writing, a specific exercise, or Lab Days. At all other times, notes must be taken longhand, in a notebook, and all devices are to be stowed. Exceptions to this policy can be made with the instructor's prior consent or if you have a Disability Services accommodation provided at the start of class.

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

Students will produce four feature stories, plus a revised fifth story as a final. Students are encouraged to submit their work to the CU Independent or other publications.

1. **Reported Personal Essay.** 800 word essay incorporating personal experience and factual reporting/interviews. **DUE 9/13 at midnight.**
2. **Q&A.** This is a short assignment highlighting a trending person, place or product. **DUE 9/27 at midnight.**
3. **Explanatory piece.** This 100-1200 story takes a compelling and important issue, bringing it to life and making people care.
 - a. **Mini-profile section: DUE 10/18 at start of class.** Bring paper copy.
 - b. **Complete piece DUE: 11/1 at midnight**
4. **Human Interest Narrative.** This 1200-1500-word story describes a real adventure, experience, project, crisis or quest, following a person or small group of people.
 - a. **Interim deadline 1:** Scene recreation. **DUE 11/15 at start of class** (bring paper copy)
 - b. **Interim deadline 2:** Mini profile. **DUE 11/29 at start of class.** (bring paper copy)
 - c. **COMPLETE PIECE DUE 12/6, midnight**

FINAL REVISION & EDITOR PITCH: DUE ON SCHEDULED FINAL DATE.

The final project is your opportunity to spend more time exploring and deepening your reporting on the topic you found most interesting. You will develop the topic into a more richly reported issue story through broader reporting. You will also consider how to expand your audience through social media. The project includes three components:

1. You will **revise and polish** one of your stories. This revision will incorporate all comments from instructor, and may require additional interviews, factual reporting, etc.
2. **You will write a 500-word pitch** e-mail to an editor.

In addition to these assignments, you will lead a Student-Led Discussion and Complete a “Story Behind the Story” assignment:

STUDENT-LED DISCUSSIONS

These are pair-led discussions deconstructing a feature with the class. Student-Led Discussions teaches you to dissect a story, by understanding how a it was put together, why the reporter made certain choices and whether and why you might make choose differently. We will have 8 Student-Led Discussions, with 7 led by student groups.

The first half of your Student-Led Discussion grade will be made up of your role in selecting a story and leading one of the discussions, and facilitating an in-class discussion about them. You will be able to sign up for a date in class.

The second half of your grade will be made up of your participation in your peers' Student-Led Discussions, both by a required tweet prior to the start of class on the day of the talk, as well as by engaging in lively discussion.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY

You will **research and interview one of your favorite writers** to understand the story behind the story. You'll interview the author, write a 500-word overview of the conversation, and lead a 10-minute discussion on takeaways that could apply to this class. We will devote four days in September and October for this; you will have an opportunity to sign up for a date of your choice.

Proposals, Drafts and Workshops

- Every story will require a 1-2 paragraph pitch, some of which we will workshop in class. We will workshop drafts on lab days.
- On the Tuesday before an assignment is due, we have Workshop Days. You must bring a paper draft of your work in progress (regardless of how rough) for peer critique.
- For every assignment, you are encouraged to meet with me during my office hours or by appointment. If you bring a draft to office hours, I will look at it and offer in-person feedback. If you would then like to e-mail me a revision of that draft, I will look at it with a 48-hour turnaround time.

GRADES

This class is graded on a 1000-point scale, with assignments worth points as follows:

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS: 600 points

- Reported Essay: 100 points
- Q&A: 100 points
- Explanatory Piece: Mini-profile element: 50 points
- Explanatory Piece: Final Draft: 100 points
- Narrative: Scene Re-creation element: 50 points
- Narrative: Mini-profile element: 50 points
- Narrative piece: Final Draft: 150 points

FINAL ASSIGNMENT: 100 points**STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION: 100 points**

- 50 for your part in leading discussion
- 50 for your Tweets (due before class) and participation

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: 100 points

- Write-up of interview (500 words): 50 points

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (100 points)

- Each student is permitted two absences for any reason during the course of the semester. Any absence above and beyond two will result in a 20-point deduction per missed class.
- Absences due to university-recognized religious holidays are not counted in this total. Please let me know ahead of time if you will be absent for a religious holiday (see policy under Important Information).
- Missing five or more classes for any reason other than religious observance will result in automatic failure of the course. If you have a medical or other issue that arises during the semester, please see the next item.
- This course is an advanced writing course that relies heavily on in-class time and interaction with the class and professor. If you suspect that any issues, including illness, mental health, family, or other challenges, may cause you to miss more than two classes and / or hamper your ability to finish the classwork or assignments, please see me ASAP. There are far fewer options to address the situation once you have already missed several classes, and not acting sooner may lead to needing to withdraw or a failing grade.
- **Participation:** Workshop days occur the Tuesday before assignments are due. You are required to bring a print out of your work-in-progress that day, for peer critique. Some stories will be read and critiqued as a group by the entire class, so it's important to have at least something printed out for classmates to respond to. Bringing a draft and engaging helpfully in critique is an important part of participation.
- **Participation:** When we have guest speakers in class, either in person or by Skype, you must read the selection, and submit three questions to me before class that show you did the reading and researched the speaker. I expect everyone to ask at least one question.

Letter-grade Equivalents

Your final grade will be a percentage of your score out of 1000, placed in the following scale. Grading rubrics for each assignment will be distributed and reviewed before it is due.

A	940-1000
A-	900-939
B+	870-899
B	830-869
B-	800-829
C+	770-799
C	730-769
C-	700-729
D+	670-699
D	630-669
D-	600-629
F	599 or fewer points

LATE WORK POLICY: Meeting deadlines is a crucial journalistic skill. If work comes in late, it will be marked down $\frac{1}{3}$ of a grade per 24 hours after the deadline, for up to three days. No work will be accepted 72 hours after deadline. (So, if an A paper comes in 1-24 hours late, it becomes an A-; if it comes in 25-48 hours late, it becomes a B+; if it comes in 49-72 hours late, it becomes a B. After 72 hours, it will not be accepted).

OFFICE HOURS BONUS: If you make my office hours, or schedule an appointment with me, before the midpoint of the class (before or on Oct. 19), you will automatically get an additional **10 points** on your participation grade. Coming to office hours to catch up on a missed class or classwork is strongly encouraged, but does not count for the extra credit point.

Conflict of Interest:

Journalists must avoid conflict of interest, or the perception of conflict of interest, by avoiding stories or sources to which they have direct personal ties.

That means no sources from, or stories about, your own family, friends, roommates / housemates, fraternity / sororities or fellow members, or other student organizations.

We will discuss the standards for conflict of interest in class throughout the semester, and arrive at more concrete definitions of “friends,” or address ways students can cover topics of interest (student groups, issues of interest to particular groups of students, such as race relations or Greek life) while avoiding conflict of interest. If in doubt, ask before committing time and energy to an interview or submitting an assignment.

BASIC RULES FOR ALL STORIES:

- **A one-source story is not a story!** All assignments must have at least two, preferably more, *human* sources.
- **First person** is only acceptable in Assignment 1 (and possibly the Final if you chose to expand Assignment 1)
- **No anonymous sources:** You must include a complete and correctly spelled first and last name for all your human sources. If your source has a legitimate reason to remain anonymous (unlikely in this course, but scenarios may be an undocumented immigrant who is at tangible risk, or source in an investigative story who fears retaliation), you must clear this with the instructor first.
- **Provide a source list for each person you interviewed:** At the end of your story text, include a list of human sources with some means of contacting them, whether email or phone, or both. I may contact sources to make sure you’ve quoted them correctly and spelled their names right, etc.
- **PROOFREAD and double, triple-check:** Careless errors, like grammar and style problems, misspelled proper names, incorrect facts or numbers, will be penalized harshly, especially if these mistakes show up repeatedly over the course of the semester. Get into the habit of checking over everything before you submit a story.

Tentative Course Schedule (Syllabus is subject to change)

Homework listed is due the following class unless otherwise noted.

UNIT 1:

Week 1; INTRODUCTION TO FEATURES

Tuesday, Aug. 28

- **Introduction:** What’s a Feature?
- What Do You Want to Write?
- Syllabus groups

Thursday, Aug. 30

The Power of I: First Person Essays

- Class Discussion on: [Imaging a Black Wonder Woman](#) by Maya Rupert. (The Atlantic)
- [Writing Wrongs](#), by Beth Kargman
- Brainstorm essay topics
- Sign up for Student-Led Discussion and Story Behind the Story Dates

Week 2

Tuesday, Sep. 4

- Read: [Channeling Passions—Just Not My Own](#). By Christine Larson (New York Times)
- [I Taught at the Worst School in Texas](#) by John Savage (Salon)

Thursday, Sept. 6

- Read: [The View from the Sitting Room](#) by Angie Chuang
- **GUEST SPEAKER: Prof. Angie Chuang**
- Turn in three questions for Prof. Chuang via Canvas, and ask at least one in class: This counts for participation

Week 3

Tuesday, Sep. 11

- Story Workshop
- DUE: Rough Draft, Reported Essay. Bring 2 printed copies for workshop

Thursday, Sep. 13

- Student-Led Discussion 2: Q&As and Interviews
- **DUE: REPORTED PERSONAL ESSAY, 12 a.m. Friday (midnight Thursday)**

Week 4; INTERVIEWING FOR FEATURES

Tuesday, Sep. 18

- Q&As and Interview stories: introduce assignment
- Idea brainstorm
- Interviewing for Features workshop

Thursday, Sep. 20

- Story Behind the Story 1: Presentations

Week 5**Tuesday, Sep. 25**

- Story Workshop (bring two printouts of Q&A draft)

Thursday, Sep. 27

- DUE: Q&A Assignment
- Student-Led Discussion 3: Explanatory Features

Week 6: INTRODUCTION TO EXPLAINERS**Tuesday, Oct. 2**

- Story Behind the Story 2

Thursday, Oct. 4

- TBD

Week 7**Tuesday, Oct. 9**

- Story Behind the Story 3

Thursday, Oct. 11

- Student-Led Discussion 4: Profiles and mini-profiles

Week 8**Tuesday, Oct. 16**

- Story workshop (bring two printouts)
- Story Behind the Story 4
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Thursday, Oct. 18

- Mini-Profile due BEFORE CLASS STARTS
- Critique profiles

Week 9**Tuesday, Oct. 23**

- TBD

Thursday, Oct. 25

- Student-Led Discussion 5: Science Features

Week 10**Tuesday, Oct. 30**

- Story Workshop (bring two printouts)

Thursday, Nov. 1

- Student-Led Discussion 6: Narrative nonfiction

Week 11**Tuesday, Nov. 6**

- TBD

Thursday, Nov. 8

- Student-Led Discussion 7: Scene recreations

Week 12**Tuesday, Nov. 13**

- Story workshop (bring two printouts of scene recreation)

Thursday, Nov. 15

- Scene Recreation due BEFORE CLASS STARTS

Week 13**FALL BREAK: No classes Nov. 19-23****Week 14****Tuesday, Nov. 27****Thursday, Nov. 29**

- Character sketch due BEFORE CLASS STARTS
- Bring two copies

Week 15**Tuesday, Dec. 4**

- Story workshop (bring 2 copies of Narrative NF draft)

Thursday, Dec. 6

- Narrative Feature Due at midnight

Week 16**Tuesday, Dec. 11**

- Student-Led Discussion 8: Longer form narrative/memoir
- Story meetings regarding revisions

Thursday, Dec. 13

- Proposals and pitching

Final Revision and Proposal is due on Day/Time of University Designated Final**IMPORTANT INFORMATION****Accommodation for Disabilities**

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website.

Classroom Behavior

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Honor Code

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic

materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu); 303-492-5550). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, exploitation, harassment, dating or domestic violence, and stalking), discrimination, and harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

Religious Holidays

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, inform the instructor of any expected absences or issues with completing assignments due to religious observances well in advance. One week in advance is the minimum, but at the start of the semester is strongly encouraged. If proper notice is given, arrangements will be made to make up and reschedule work without penalty. See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Definition and Discussion of Plagiarism

Any instance of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment.

Plagiarism will be reported as an honor code violation and pursued according to the academic integrity policy. This may include a hearing before a student panel, with sanctions that can range from attending a mandatory class in ethics to expulsion from the campus.

Therefore, be sure to familiarize yourself not only with the honor code, but specifically with the definition of plagiarism, and the longer discussion of plagiarism in the academic integrity policy, excerpted below.

In journalistic writing, plagiarism also includes misrepresenting or fabricating interviews with human sources, as well as citing material or quotes from secondary sources (online or print) as if the student gathered them via interview.

From the Honor Code:

“Plagiarism is defined as the use of another’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgment. Examples of plagiarism include: failing to use quotation marks when directly quoting from a source; failing to document distinctive ideas from a source; fabricating or inventing sources; and copying information from computer-based sources, i.e., the Internet.”

From CU’s Academic Integrity Policy:

Individual ownership of ideas. Academic rules and copyright laws support an individual’s ownership of his/her ideas. Therefore, whenever you mention someone else’s ideas or research, **you must carefully document the quote - who stated it and where the information was found** - in order to avoid plagiarism. This expectation applies equally to homework and informal class work as well as more formal research... Plagiarism is a concern in any format – written papers, blogs, etc.