

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY Madrid Campus  
College of Arts and Sciences  
CMM 3110 JOURNALISM: FEATURE WRITING  
Term: SPRING 2018

Prerequisite: CMM 2100 or permission of instructor  
12:30 – 1:45 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday  
3 Credits

Professor: Dale Fuchs  
Office hours: Thursdays, 11.30-12.30 and 1:45 to 2:45 p.m.  
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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is a hands-on feature writing course in which students become foreign correspondents for the semester with the Madrid campus, and the Spanish capital itself, as their beat. A previous course in journalism, or demonstrated interest in the craft of writing, is required. Over the course of the semester, we will develop the skills needed to report and write various genres of feature stories, such as profile and travel pieces, for print and digital media. We will create a workshop environment in which students feel safe to unleash their creativity and find their own writing voice while offering gentle, constructive criticism to their peers. In writing exercises and out-of-class feature article assignments, we will brainstorm ideas, toy with words and entertain our readers with the juiciest tidbits gathered in our research and reporting. Although this is a journalism course, the abilities developed here will help in any profession that requires creativity, critical thinking, clear presentation, people skills and integrity.

### **COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Above all, this course aims to help you find enjoyment in the act of writing. By the end of this course, you should gain a greater understanding of the underlying mechanics of professional writing and begin to apply those techniques to your own writing. This will make your writing clearer, more powerful and more convincing – whether to a mass media audience or new business client. You should also understand the ways in which feature writers humanize the news with concrete details involving real people rather than relying solely on abstract concepts – an effective strategy for all

communication, from speech to marketing. As you approach strangers for interviews and devise questions, you will also become more confident in your interpersonal skills. Through your reporting assignments, you will heighten your awareness of the diversity on campus and Madrid and gain sensitivity to potential stereotypes and misconceptions when writing about foreign cultures.

Finally, by the end of this class, you will have developed a portfolio of professional-level writing samples that demonstrate not only your communication skills but also your expertise in Spain-related issues. This portfolio can act as a calling card for future opportunities.

### **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

The specific objectives of this course fall into three categories, which will be used in the grading of take-home assignments: the craft of writing, the quality of research (i.e. reporting) and organization. They represent the main elements in the creation process of any written work, and involve critical thinking skills necessary for graduate work in any field. Each category emphasizes the importance of ethical decision making.

1) **Language.** In this course we will strive to make your writing tighter and more descriptive (but not in a Hallmark Greeting Card way). By the end of this course, you should learn to do the following:

- Create professional-level content appropriate for mass media use employing:
  - Vigorous verbs
  - Concrete sensory images
  - Voice
  - Economy of words
  - Techniques such as anecdotes, scenes, suspense and humor
- Recognize editorializing, unsubstantiated generalizations and jargon
- Revise your own writing with an eye to economy, concrete detail and fairness
- Analyze techniques of professional writers with awareness of the decision-making process.

2) **Reporting.** The best writing is supported by concrete facts, detailed observation and respectful interviews – with good-faith attempts at balance and fairness. By the end of this course, you should learn to do the following:

- Employ brainstorming techniques to aid creativity, open-mindedness and fairness in reporting
- Assess the relative credibility and appropriateness of sources in conducting research on Spain-related topics.
- Tune your senses to gather sensory detail through direct observation
- Conduct interviews with preparation, rapport and respect
- Articulate ethical issues that arise in your reporting

3) **Organization.** By the end of this course, you should be able to do the following:

- Analyze the organizational scheme in professional writing and that of your peers
- Write a feature story lede following the magazine-writing/WSJ formula (Anecdote, Quote, Nutgraf)
- Write a feature story with attention to organization, including background sections, transitions and kicker.
- Analyze texts with a view to the writer's decision-making process
- Detect and eliminate repetition of points from your own writing and that of your peers

## **READINGS AND REQUIRED MATERIALS**

*On Writing Well* by William K. Zinsser

*Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer* by Roy Peter Clark

Examples of professional writing, extracts from supplemental texts and student work

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **1. Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory. It forms part of your participation score and is essential for the workshops to be productive. It is your responsibility to make up work missed. More than TWO unexcused absences will lower your final grade by one grade step per absence. More than five unexcused absences could result in a failing grade for the course.

Class trips will be excused, but you are still responsible for meeting story deadlines and finding out what you missed in class and completing any in-class exercises.

### **2. Participation**

Participation is tied to attendance, but it's not enough to simply show up. You will earn a score reflecting your degree of 1) demonstrated preparation for classes in which we workshop our feature articles, **which means bringing in work in progress** (quote, drafts, sources) and 2) participation in class analysis of professional articles, assigned readings or the work of your peers. Many of our class sessions will include providing feedback to classmates.

### **3. Class Preparation**

You must do the reporting on your feature stories so that you have raw material to work with during class time. Please refer to class schedule posted on blackboard.

### **4. Use of smart phones and other electronic devices**

When you are in class, please mute your cell phones and other devices. You are not permitted to send text messages, email, surf the web or use social media during class – except when specifically asked to do so for class business. You will be asked to leave the class if you engage in these activities, and, therefore, lose all the points that may be associated with the day's activities.

**5. Respect & responsibility:** We will treat each other with respect, especially during class discussions on topics in which there may be a variety of opinions.

- Racism, sexism, and otherwise offensive remarks, behaviors, or language will not be tolerated in class or assignments.

- Each member of this class is expected to treat everyone in an ethical manner with respect and professionalism. Any student whose behavior prevents other students from learning or feeling comfortable in class may be dropped from the class
- In providing feedback, everyone is expected to avoid simplistic value judgments such as “I love it” or “I hate it.” Instead, in offering constructive criticism, strive to specify concrete aspects of content and style and their effect on you and the project as a whole. Treat each other’s work as you would like yours to be treated.

**5. Deadlines.** Assignments are clearly noted on the syllabus and are due at the stated times. Regularly check the class plan on the syllabus, which is posted on Blackboard.

- If you do not come to class when one of the assignments is due, it will progressively lose points until handed in.
- If, at any point in the semester, you lose material, you will not be excused from submitting an assignment. Failure to turn in an assignment, for any reason, will result in a zero for the assignment. Be cautious with your digital material. Back-up frequently.

## **ACADEMIC ACCOMODATION**

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

1. Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.

2. University-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services, Disability Services) by visiting the Academic Dean's Office (San Ignacio Hall) or by going to:

[http://spain.slu.edu/academics/learning\\_resources.html](http://spain.slu.edu/academics/learning_resources.html).

Students who believe that, due to a disability, they could benefit from academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services at +34 915 54 58 58, ext. 204, send an e-mail to [counselingcenter-](#)

[madrid@slu.edu](mailto:madrid@slu.edu), or to visit the Counseling Office (San Ignacio Hall). Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Course instructors support student accommodation requests when an approved letter from Disability Services has been received and when students discuss these accommodations with the instructor after receipt of the approved letter

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY**

The University is a community of learning, whose effectiveness requires an environment of mutual trust and integrity, such as would be expected at a Jesuit, Catholic institution. As members of this community, students, faculty, and staff members share the responsibility to maintain this environment. Academic dishonesty violates it. Although not all forms of academic dishonesty can be listed here, it can be said in general that soliciting, receiving, or providing any unauthorized assistance in the completion of any work submitted toward academic credit is dishonest. It not only violates the mutual trust necessary between faculty and students but also undermines the validity of the University's evaluation of students and takes unfair advantage of fellow students. Further, it is the responsibility of any student who observes such dishonest conduct to call it to the attention of a faculty member or administrator.

Examples of academic dishonesty would be copying from another student, copying from a book or class notes during a closed-book exam, submitting materials authored by or editorially revised by another person but presented as the student's own work, copying a passage or text directly from a published source without appropriately citing or recognizing that source, taking a test or doing an assignment or other academic work for another student, tampering with another student's work, securing or supplying in advance a copy of an examination without the knowledge or consent of the instructor, and colluding with another student or students to engage in an act of academic dishonesty.

Where there is clear indication of such dishonesty, a faculty member or administrator has the responsibility to apply appropriate sanctions. Investigations of violations will be conducted in accord with standards and procedures of the school or college through which the course or research is offered. Recommendations of sanctions to be imposed will be made to the dean of the school or college in which the student is enrolled. Possible sanctions for a violation of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, disciplinary probation, suspension, and dismissal from the University. The

complete SLU Academic Honesty Policy can be found at the following link: [http://spain.slu.edu/academics/academic\\_advising/docs/Academic\\_integrity.pdf](http://spain.slu.edu/academics/academic_advising/docs/Academic_integrity.pdf)

In this class, **it is also prohibited to fabricate quotes or include fictitious (made-up) material of any sort in written assignments. The use of any such fabricated material will result in an automatic F for the course.** Professional journalists are not board-certified and only have their reputation to stand on. In the professional world, any reporter caught plagiarizing or making up information would lose his or her job and never find work at a reputable media outlet again.

### **REPORTING OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX deputy coordinator, Marta Maruri, whose office is located on the ground floor of Padre Rubio Hall, Avenida del Valle, 28 ([mmaruri@slu.edu](mailto:mmaruri@slu.edu); 915-54-5858 ext. 213) and share the basic fact of your experience with her. The Title IX deputy coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the SLU-Madrid's Counseling Services on the third floor of San Ignacio Hall ([counselingcenter-madrid@slu.edu](mailto:counselingcenter-madrid@slu.edu); 915-54-5858 ext. 230) or Sinews Multiplestherapy Institute, the off-campus provider of counseling services for SLU-Madrid ([www.sinews.es](http://www.sinews.es); 91-700-1979) To view SLU-Madrid's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web address: [http://spain.slu.edu/student\\_life/docs/SLUMadridSexualMisconductPolicy.pdf](http://spain.slu.edu/student_life/docs/SLUMadridSexualMisconductPolicy.pdf).

### **COLLECTION OF STUDENT WORK FOR ASSESSMENT**

Saint Louis University - Madrid Campus is committed to excellent and innovative educational practices. In order to maintain quality academic offerings and to conform to relevant accreditation requirements, we regularly assess our teaching, services, and programs for evidence of student learning outcomes achievement. For this purpose we keep on file anonymized representative examples of student work from all courses and programs such as: assignments, papers, exams, portfolios, and results from student surveys, focus groups, and reflective exercises. Thus, copies of your work for this course, including any exams, articles or written exercises may be kept on file for institutional research, assessment and accreditation purposes. **If you prefer that Saint Louis University-Madrid Campus does not keep your work on file, you will need to communicate your decision in writing to me.**

### **FINAL EXAM POLICY**

We are required to hold class on the scheduled date of the final exam – even if we have a take-home exam or an alternate activity. Attendance is mandatory. No final exam can be given outside of the assigned date to any student without the permission of the Academic Dean’s Office.

### **DEADLINES**

Deadlines must be strictly adhered to. In the world of professional journalism (and in many other fields), missing a deadline can mean losing your job. In class, missing a deadline will result in a progressively **lower grade** until the story is turned in – at the rate of five points per day. Points lost for missing a deadline **cannot** be made up in the revision grade.

### **REVISIONS POLICY**

Revisions are an essential part of the writing process – and a very real part of the professional editing process. In that spirit, you are **required to submit a revision of at least two** of your three story assignments. I will boost your original grade in accordance with the effort demonstrated in addressing my comments in the revision. (That means you must *read* those comments to earn the points). Your revision effort will also count toward your Final Portfolio grade.

## GRADING

Grades will be weighted as follows:

Story assignments: 55%

Foreign Journal: 20%

Profile: 20%

Personal Essay 15%

Observation/Description Exercises for Travel Writing: 15%

Participation in writing workshops, peer editing and short presentations:  
15%

Final Portfolio and Oral Presentation of Portfolio: 15%

### Writing Center

You may seek help at the Writing Center before turning in any of your written work. I may also assign in-class editors and reporting helpers.

Grading for written story assignments will be based on the following three categories:

1. **Language:** clarity, brevity, grammar, use of sensory images, voice (if used appropriately). For an A in this category, a story should be written clearly and succinctly, with vivid sensory images, and few grammatical mistakes. A strong voice is not necessary for an A, but could elevate a paper that has some other weaknesses.
2. **Organization.** An A paper will be easy to follow, and contain a “nut graph” or several paragraphs that states the theme of the feature story, gives the reader an idea of its scope and answers our question, “Why do we care?” Throughout the paper, transitions are clean and quick. Points follow a logical order.
3. **Reporting.** For an A, sources should be diverse, and quotes used correctly as per class hand-outs. The student should also show an understanding of what is appropriate material for direct quotation, as

opposed to paraphrasing. The story contains the required number of quotes from different sources as per the story assignment. Correct quote punctuation and format conventions are observed.

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR STORY ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Include the word count at the bottom of each story.
2. **Spell check before turning in.**
3. Check punctuation before turning in, especially **quote format**.
4. Send completed articles to my email address, [dale.fuchs@slu.edu](mailto:dale.fuchs@slu.edu).

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR OPTIONAL REVISIONS**

1. Please include the original version.
2. Please write a paragraph explaining what specific changes you made to the original.
3. Highlight major additions in the text.

**See Class Schedule posted on blackboard**

### **Important dates:**

Sunday, January 21. Last day to drop the class without a grade of “W”

Last day to choose audit (AU) or pass/no pass (P/NP) options

Thursday-Friday, Feb. 22-23: School closed for Winter Break

Tuesday, Feb. 27. Professors’ deadline to submit mid-term grades

Friday, March 9. Last day to drop the class and receive a grade of “W”

Thurs., March 15. Last day to submit transfer application for Fall Semester

Wednesday, March 29. Registration for Fall semester open

Monday-Friday, March 26-30. University Closed for Holy Week

Monday, April 2. Classes resume

**Tuesday, May 10 12.00-15.00: Final exam**

## **OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS**

*You will receive detailed specifications for each as the course progresses.*

### **1. FOREIGN JOURNAL (LETTER FROM MADRID) (1200-1400 words)**

You are based in Spain as a foreign correspondent for your hometown newspaper, and the editor has asked you for a colorful dispatch about Madrid. Go to an event or place in Madrid that your hometown readers will recognize – the bullring, a tapas bar or the Real Madrid soccer stadium– and interview at least six people (on site and elsewhere) about how these institutions have changed in the last 10 or 15 years. You can also choose an issue in the news related to Spain but you must set the story in a concrete location. You should include recent developments to make it timely. The story should include at least one expert source, such as a sociology professor.

### **2. PROFILE (1200-1400 words)**

You are writing for the school newspaper and the editor has asked you to profile interesting personalities on the campus. Chose a teacher, fellow student or administrator who stands out in some way on campus – or seems to be a permanent fixture everyone sees each day but knows nothing about -- and ask them permission to conduct an interview. Examples could be a campus leader, the librarian, an ESL teacher, a dance teacher, a spiritual leader, a student with an interesting background or experience. When you find someone to agree, try to arrange for the interview in their usual surroundings if possible, an office, dance studio or if a student, maybe their

favorite hang-out or café. Preparation is the key to this assignment so you must interview at other people on campus about your subject before conducting the interview. You must also include quotes from three people interviewed. Prepare a list of questions before conducting the interview and please turn them in typed with your story.

If you prefer, you may also choose a non-campus profile subject, perhaps someone who exemplifies a trend or cultural phenomenon here that would be interesting to an audience abroad, such as someone who sews bullfighting suits, or a chef involved in the creative cuisine wave.

3. PERSONAL ESSAY (1000-1500). Chose a personal experience that you think your peers or people in general might identify with. Describe this experience using description and dialogue of “characters” – that is, **people – other than yourself**. Try to turn yourself into a character in the story, within the boundaries of non-fiction, of course.

### **Observation / Description Exercises**

Over the course of the semester, you will complete five exercises (**400-500 words**) designed to hone your ability to observe concrete sensory detail and convey those observations with succinct and vigorous prose. The subject of these exercises will be related to travel, and written as though to form a part of the **travel story genre** in which journalists find ways to write about people and places that go beyond the highlights and common tips of travel guides.

These exercises are also a place to try out the suggestions in the text *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*. The requirements for each exercise are as follows:

- Apply one “**writing tool**” of your choice from the assigned tools in the text. Describe the tool and highlight, or underline, the point in the text where you have tried it
- Observe a **different location** -- it could be different spots around Madrid -- for each exercise handed in. For instance, if you describe a scene at a café in Plaza Santa Ana for one exercise, describe a metro ride or a scene at a park for another.

- Don't write from memory. You must **take notes** on the spot.
- Include a **description of a person or group** of people, and when possible, something they say. It can be overheard.
- **Don't put yourself in** the piece UNLESS you specifically interact with one of the people you are describing or you are doing some concrete action relevant to the scene. Simply observing and writing in your notebook doesn't count.
- Please **proof-read**. Spell and grammar check often miss major errors.

**EXTRA CREDIT:** Turn your observation/description exercises into a blog with each exercise as a separate post and illustrate with photos for each post.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

This is a tentative schedule. We may alter it as the semester progresses. Readings should be done before the start of class.

**NB: For all workshop dates, please bring pen, paper and a laptop/tablet to write with.**

Date	Topics covered	Due at start of class
Th Jan 11	Introduction	
Tu Jan 16	Overview: Humanizing the News	<b>Read:</b> Zinsser, chapters 13, 21
Th Jan 18	Structure and Genres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Bring:</b> one feature article</li><li>• <b>Read:</b> Foreign Journal folder</li></ul>
Tu Jan 23	<b>Workshop:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brainstorm Story 1</li><li>• Travel exercise</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Bring</b> pitch for Story 1</li><li>• <b>Bring</b> notes for Travel Exercise 1</li></ul>
Th Jan 25	Foreign Journal Analysis	<b>Present</b> article to class
Tu Jan 30	<b>Workshop:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Write anecdotes</li><li>• Online reporting</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Bring</b> statistics from two sources</li><li>• <b>Due: Travel Exercise 1</b></li></ul>

Thrs Feb 1	Interviewing techniques	<b>Read:</b> Interview folder and Zinsser, Chapter 12
Tu Feb 6	<b>Workshop:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What to quote</li> <li>• How to attribute</li> <li>• Follow-up Qs</li> </ul>	<b>Bring</b> best quotes for Story 1
Th Feb 8	The Nut	<b>Due: Travel Exercise 2</b>
Tu Feb 13	<b>Workshop:</b> Devil in the Details	<b>Bring</b> Draft of Story 1
Th Feb 15	The Profile	<b>Due: Story 1</b>
Tu Feb 20	<b>Workshop:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline profile</li> <li>• Peer Edit Travel Exercises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Read</b> Profile folder</li> <li>• <b>Bring</b> profile pitch</li> </ul>
Th Feb 22	WINTER BREAK	WINTER BREAK
Tu Feb 27 (mid-term grades entered)	<b>Workshop:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concrete details</li> <li>• Peer edit Story 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bring</b> four copies of Story 1</li> <li>• <b>Due: Travel Exercise 3</b></li> </ul>
Th Mar 1	Profile analysis	<b>Present</b> one Profile
Tu Mar 6	<b>Workshop:</b> recreating scenes	<b>Bring:</b> raw material for Profile
Th Mar 8	Eliminating Clutter	<b>Read:</b> Zinsser (Chapters 2-4, 7, 10)

Tu Mar 13	<b>Workshop:</b> Deadline Edit	<b>Bring:</b> Draft of profile
Th Mar 15	The Personal Essay	<b>Read:</b> Personal Essay Folder <b>Due:</b> Story 2
Tu Mar 20	<b>Workshop:</b> Turning yourself into a character	<b>Bring:</b> notes for personal essay <b>Read:</b> Zinsser, Chapter 14
Th Mar 22	Class analysis of personal essays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Present</b> analysis of one essay</li> </ul>
Tu Mar 27	<b>HOLIDAY</b>	<b>HOLIDAY</b>
Th Mar 29	<b>HOLIDAY</b>	<b>HOLIDAY</b>
Tu April 3	Personal Travel Writing	<b>Read:</b> Travel folder
Th April 5	<b>Workshop: Travel Narration Exercise</b>	<b>Bring:</b> travel notes
Tu April 10	Journalism Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due:</b> Travel exercise 4</li> <li>• <b>Read:</b> Ethics folder</li> </ul>
Th April 12	<b>Off-Campus reporting</b>	TBA
Tu April 17	<b>Workshop:</b> Peer edit Personal Essay	<b>Due:</b> personal essay bring four copies
Th April 19	Investigative Journalism	<b>Read:</b> Investigative Journalism folder
Tu April 24	<b>Off-campus reporting</b> Sorolla Museum	TBA

Th April 26	<b>Workshop</b> Deadline writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bring:</b> notes from off-campus reporting</li> </ul> <b>Due:</b> Travel Exercise 5
Tu May 1	<b>HOLIDAY</b>	<b>HOLIDAY</b>
Th May 3	<b>Wrap Up</b>	<b>Due:</b> Revision of Journal and Profile
Wed May 9, 12-3pm	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	<b>Oral presentation of portfolio</b>  <b>Due:</b> Revision of Personal Essay