Fall 2014
CRWR412
Advanced Nonfiction Workshop: Magazine Writing
Tuesday/Thursday 5:10-6:30pm LA 105

Professor Amanda Fortini
Email: amanda.fortini@gmail.com
Phone: 917.553.1165 (cell)
Office Hours: Thursdays 2-4pm or by appointment

Course description:
This is an advanced course in the art and craft of the non-fiction magazine piece. We will examine the various nonfiction forms published in contemporary magazines and literary journals, with particular emphasis on narrative, or what is currently called “long-form” journalism: the profile, the reported feature, and various incarnations of the essay. We will also study criticism (the book, movie, or art review) the travel piece, and the humor piece. Through reading assignments, class discussions, and a series of written exercises, students will learn to distinguish between, how to analyze—and, above all, how to write—each kind of piece. We will focus on reporting, researching, and interviewing techniques, how to spot a story, and how to establish and reveal character, as well as the basics of structure and tone. We will also learn a bit about the history of the magazine piece as we go. Students will learn how to report as a storyteller and write as an authority. Although we will focus heavily on craft, we will also discuss various aspects of publication, including how to pitch a story to an editor. Students will leave class with at least one piece ready (or nearly ready) for magazine submission.

Required texts:
The Journalist and the Murderer
Author: Janet Malcolm
Publisher: Vintage, Paperback (October 31, 1990)
***Please get the edition with the Afterword in it (or let me know if you don't have it so I can photocopy it for you)

Picture
Author: Lillian Ross
Publisher: Da Capo Press; revised edition (June 2002)
***This edition has an introduction by Angelica Huston

Lost in the Meritocracy
Author: Walter Kirn
Publisher: Anchor (June 19, 2009)
***Author will be visiting class during the semester

Pulphead: Essays
In addition, we will read numerous photocopied essays and articles by a wide variety of authors, including but not limited to: Joan Didion, Pauline Kael, Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Hunter Thompson, Jeff Dietz, Katherine Boo, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, C.J. Chivers, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Leslie Jamison, David Foster Wallace, Zadie Smith, Ariel Levy, Nora Ephron, Elaine Blair, David Grann, Luke Mogelson, William Finnegan, Laura Hillenbrand, Susan Sontag, Elizabeth Hardwick, Lee Siegel, James Woods, David Sedaris, Elif Batuman, Kennedy Fraser, Mary HK Choi, etc. I will provide these handouts during class or via email.

Course requirements:
**Attendance:** Attendance is of paramount importance. We will be moving quickly and covering a lot of ground. Each week, we will discuss a handful of published pieces and critique in-progress student work. There is no satisfactory way to make up a missed class. I understand that life sometimes happens, but if you have more than two unexcused absences, you may be asked to drop the course. If you know you will need to be absent, please tell me in advance. If you are sick, stay home and notify me. But make attendance a priority. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the thread of our ongoing in-class discussion if you aren't present. Three absences total will equal one drop in letter grade.

**Writing assignments:**
In this class, you will produce short weekly writing assignments (a scene from a profile and/or narrative feature, a report on an event, a write-up of an interview). These exercises are the building blocks of feature-length journalism. They will teach you how to report and write a non-fiction piece accurately, vividly, and stylishly. They will also help you work toward your final article, which will be a reported feature-length profile, narrative feature, or essay. Other mini-assignments (a review, a humor piece) will let you try your hand at the shorter forms we will study. Students will also learn to write a “pitch” or “memo,” and will produce one that proposes their final article (see below) to me. These assignments will be due each Monday, so we all have a day to read them. We will workshop/discuss selected short pieces in class, with each student getting a turn throughout the semester. There will be a break from writing exercises on the weeks your longer pieces are due.

In addition, each student will write three longer pieces:

- A proposal/pitch for your final article or essay, approximately 1000-1200 (roughly 4-5 double-spaced pages) words. Due Monday October 26th. I will comment and offer some thoughts that will help you expand and revise for the deadline at the end of the semester. This is to get you thinking about and working toward your end-of-semester deadline.
- One essay (either a personal essay or a reported essay or a dispatch or narrative “scene” piece, your preference) of approximately 1,500 to 2,500 words (roughly 6 to 10 pages). **Due Tuesday November 11th.** We will workshop these essays in class.
- A final, reported article or essay of at least 3,000 but no more than 5,000 words (roughly 12-20 pages): a profile, a narrative feature, or an essay that is *not* a purely personal essay, on a topic of your choosing. **Due Monday December 8th.**
  The model for this final article or essay should be the type of long-form piece you would read in *The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Harper’s, Esquire, The New York Times Magazine, The Believer, Oxford American,* etc.

Note: The above pieces will be submitted as a portfolio at the end of the semester. Please submit all your work in a single-sided format with page numbers. Please spellcheck, proofread, and edit all work before you turn it in.

**Other requirements:**

- One meeting with me outside of class, between October 26th-November 7th, after you have turned in your pitches for your final article. During this meeting, we will discuss your idea for your final papers.
- I also ask that you get and keep a good old-fashioned notebook for reporting, observations, class notes, names of articles mentioned during class discussion, etc.

**Grades:**
Twenty percent of your grade will come from attendance and class participation, including in-class critiques of assigned readings, interactions with any writer or editor visitors, and insightful contributions to workshop discussion. Be engaged.

Thirty percent of your grade will come from your weekly short writing assignments, most of which we will workshop in class. **Deadlines are for real.**

Fifty percent of your grade will come from the three longer writing assignments that make up your portfolio, with the final article you have worked on throughout the semester carrying the most weight. These three assignments will receive a letter grade, and the first two can be revised once for a better grade. The first assignment will be discussed in a conference with me. The second we will workshop in class. Your final paper will be read only by me.

Grades are based on writing skills, improvement of one’s skills over the semester, effort, attitude, reporting enterprise and resourcefulness, the following of editorial advice, classroom/workshop participation, and the meeting of deadlines.
Violation of journalistic or academic standards (plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, etc.) will obviate all other considerations.

**Plagiarism:** The UM Student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as representing another person’s words, ideas, data, or materials as one’s own. Consequences include failing an assignment or failing a course.

**Disabilities Info:** Qualified Students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please come and see me. Be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

**Please Note:** This syllabus is subject to change throughout the semester.