

COMM 3302

Feature Writing

Fall 2026

Texas A&M University-San Antonio Department of Sociology and Communication Instructor:
Donna Pazdera
Email: dpazdera@tamusa.edu

Class meets: 2-3:15 pm Tuesday and Thursday

CAB 320F

Office: 320E CAB
Phone: 956-566-2823 (cell)

Office Hours: M: 2:15-3 pm
TR: 11:30-12:15 and 3:50-4:15 pm
Or by appointment

Materials (required!):

"The New New Journalism," by Robert S. Boynton

"The New Kings of Nonfiction," by Ira Glass

The Associated Press Stylebook. There is a FREE version online through our library's website

There will also be readings not in the books posted on Blackboard

Description:

Identifying and developing feature story ideas. This includes short-and-long-form storytelling, as well as opinion pieces. Build on news reporting skills and write factual, but less formal. Students will learn how to identify markets for nonfiction writing. Some of your assignments will be considered for publication in the student-run magazine, El Espejo. (I am the adviser.)

Core Writing & Reporting Skills

- Students will be able to conceive and pitch a compelling feature story idea, demonstrating an understanding of audience, publication, and news value.

- Students will be able to conduct thorough research for a feature story, utilizing a variety of sources including interviews, academic papers, government documents, and archival materials.
- Students will be able to conduct effective and ethical interviews, asking insightful questions, actively listening, and accurately quoting sources.
- Students will be able to construct a narrative arc for a feature story, including a strong lead (lede), a clear nut graf, a logical flow of information, and a powerful conclusion.
- Students will be able to employ a range of journalistic writing techniques, such as scene-setting, character development, and sensory details, to bring a story to life.
- Students will be able to revise and edit their own work for clarity, conciseness, grammar, and style, demonstrating an understanding of journalistic standards.

Journalistic & Ethical Principles

- Students will be able to apply the principles of accuracy, fairness, and objectivity in their reporting and writing.
- Students will be able to recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas that may arise in feature reporting, such as source confidentiality, conflict of interest, and representation of vulnerable communities.
- Students will be able to distinguish between news reporting and feature writing, demonstrating an understanding of the different purposes, structures, and stylistic conventions of each.
- Students will be able to identify and avoid plagiarism, demonstrating a commitment to academic and professional integrity.
- Students will be able to analyze and deconstruct professional feature stories from various publications to identify effective writing techniques and structural choices.

Professional & Career Development

- Students will be able to build a portfolio of polished feature stories that demonstrates their skills and readiness for entry-level journalism roles.
- Students will be able to critically evaluate their own work and the work of their peers, providing constructive feedback in a collaborative workshop environment.
- Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the business of journalism, including pitching stories and working with editors.

How this works:

Over the course of the semester, you will read a variety of feature stories, some short, some long. All are meant to inspire and inform you about what you are trying to accomplish. You need to actually READ the stories assigned because each of you will be required to lead a class discussion, as well as participate in the weekly discussions.

New for this semester: Because the class is so small, you will contribute a story related to an overarching topic, determined by the class members.

Assignments

Writing Prompt/Observation of the Week/Sentences with new words: You will be responsible for posting a weekly observation or short sample from a writing prompt. These will be reflections that include sensory and intuitive insights, which are intended to improve your detail-gathering skills.
(10 pts x 10 weeks)

You will post this to our Google Drive folder (see Bb for link.) I will keep this confidential between you and me after you create the folder. This is where your grade and comments will be found. Your grades will also be reflected on Bb, but comments will be in Drive.

Personal essay: This is a short piece where you can use yourself in the first person to describe a life event/lesson. 100 pts

Editorial: You will present an argument and defend it with facts and reliable sources. 100 pts

Profile on campus: Find a person who does something interesting and spend time with them over two weeks. Get more than one source, like three. This could be magazine-worthy. 150 points

Sports Feature: Lots of room for options, here. Find a person or a team with a compelling story/back story and write a story that culminates in a win or a loss. Doesn't matter. The human element and the lead-up are what matters.

Community Story Tell us about a part of San Antonio that is overlooked: a community, socio-economic group etc. This needs at least four sources, statistics and quotes. 200 pts.

Query Letter: Along with your Community Story, you will turn in a one-page letter to an actual editor whose publication you've targeted as a place for that story. You will write a short pitch and demonstrate how your story fits the publication's needs and audience.

Drafts are expected before turning in the profile, big topic and community story. If you want to submit a draft for any other assignment, you may. Just don't turn it in the night before it is due.
Deadlines will be announced in class and be on the Blackboard calendar.

Expectations/Grading

This is a professional-type class. Lots of reading, writing and critiques. It is also supposed to be FUN. Yes, there are rules about writing, but this is the class where you get to stretch your writing boundaries and try new approaches.

I set the bar high and need you to reach for it.

You will be graded on the overall story (does it have enough/good sources, do you set the scene, are the quotes memorable/colorful?) You get an overall set of points that start at 100, but will be deducted if the sources, quotes, structure and background is weak.

From there, you will get 5 points off for grammar, style and punctuation errors (each).

If there is a spelling error, you get 10 points off. If there is a fact error, you will get between 25 and 45 points off.

What this looks like (just an example):

Content: 100

- 15 for quotes, structure, sources.

85 subtotal

-20 grammar, style

-10 spelling

55 total + 85 (content) = 140/200 final grade

If you are unable to attend class, you need to let me know, preferably beforehand, via email or text.

Don't wait until two weeks before the semester is over to explain why you've been missing for weeks. I can't help you very well at that point.

Course schedule will be announced in class and on the Blackboard calendar

No Use of Generative AI Permitted

COMM 3302 assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

Important Dates:

August 24	Monday	First class day
August 28	Friday	Last day to withdraw from all classes to receive an 80% refund of tuition and fees
August 31	Monday	Last day to register
September 4	Friday	Last day to withdraw from all classes to receive a 70% refund of tuition and fees
September 7	Monday	Labor Day Holiday - No Classes / University Closed

September 9	Wednesday	Census Date - Students not paid in full or enrolled in a payment plan by 4:59PM may be dropped for non-payment
September 11	Friday	Student enrolled will receive a billing statement
September 14	Monday	Last day to withdraw from all classes to receive a 50% refund of tuition and fees
September 21	Monday	Last day to withdraw from all classes to receive a 25% refund of tuition and fees
October 5 - October 16	Monday-Friday	Midterm grading period
November 13	Friday	Last day to drop with an automatic grade of "W"
November 25	Wednesday	Study day - No Classes
November 26 - November 28	Thursday - Saturday	Thanksgiving Holiday - No Classes / University Closed
November 30	Monday	Last day to withdraw from the university
December 4	Friday	Last day of scheduled classes for weekday classes
December 5 - December 11	Saturday - Friday	Final examinations

The complete [academic calendar](#) is available online

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES Academic Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, Disability Support Services is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us <https://www.tamusa.edu/DisabilitySupport-Services/index.html> or email us at dss@tamusa.edu. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the Tools section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing tutoring@tamusa.edu, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.

Counseling/Mental Health Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120. All mental health services provided by the SCC are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information on SCC services visit <http://tamusa.edu/studentcounseling> Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331. Additionally, the TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources to including support for in the moment distress, an anonymous peer-to-peer support network, mental health screenings, podcasts, and articles to improve your mental wellbeing.

Emergency Preparedness: JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com> More information about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found here: <https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/emergency-management/> Download the SafeZone App (<https://safezoneapp.com/>) for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. NonEmergency (210) 784-1900.

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include

class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended by the published Census Date (the first week of class). Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend prior to the published Census Date (the first week of class) will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://www.tamusa.edu/academics>.

Meeting Basic Needs: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to submit a CARE referral (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/StudentRights-and-Responsibilities/file-a-report.html>) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources.

Office Hours: All faculty with teaching assignments should include regularly scheduled office hours on each syllabus in addition to "by appointment." Please review your appointment letter for the number of weekly office hours you are expected to set. Regularly scheduled office hours should also be posted outside your office door (where applicable).

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any question involving federal or state VA Education Benefits. Visit the Patriots' Casa building, room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397. Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided with an opportunity to make up any

examination, study, or course work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

The Six-Drop Rule: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equal opportunity, and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual on our campus and within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees are to be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the University's Civil Rights Officer at 210-784-2061 or titleix@tamusa.edu. Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking based on sex, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other related sex-based misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator (titleix@tamusa.edu, 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students: Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's

major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide such reasonable modifications to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with temporary medical condition that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status (titleix@tamusa.edu; 210-784-2061; CAB 439K). Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources. Young Jaguars: can support parenting students with daycare who meet this criteria: Must be enrolled in classes at TAMUSA in the current semester. Must be Pell eligible or a single parent. They serve children ages 3 to 12-years-old. Children must be enrolled in Pre-K-3 through 6th grade. youngjaguars@tamusa.edu (210) 784-2636

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country. **Students' Rights** 1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution. 2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and pregnancy/parenting or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. 3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike. 4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university students' rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities 1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and administration. 2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, Student Code of Conduct, on our website, and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with federal, state, and local laws. 3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community. 4. A student has the

responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning. 5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notifications. We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or disability. Conduct that infringes on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the Student Code of Conduct (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-andresponsibilities/documents/Student-Handbook-2022-23.pdf>) or visit the resources available in the OSRR website (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academicintegrity.html>).