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## JOUR 494.01: Pollner Seminar in Narrative Non-Fiction

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## **SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM, UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA**

### **POLLNER SEMINAR IN NARRATIVE NON-FICTION**

**JOURNALISM 494**

**Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:10 – 1:30**

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The purpose of this course is to teach students how to write publishable magazine-length narrative non-fiction: In other words, my aim is to help you learn how to write good, long, true stories. The course outline will mirror a typical writer's progress through the birth of an idea to a finished, polished piece, including reporting, writing, editing, and fact-checking. In addition to classroom discussion, course readings will help students understand the difference between good and bad work. My hope is that by the end of the semester, you will have written the Best Story of Your Life So Far (BSOYLSF) and it will help you reach your future potential as an award-winning literary journalist.

#### **Required Text**

*The Best American Magazine Writing 2008* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2009)

The course text is available at the UM bookstore. It's good and it's cheap.

#### **The Deal**

I want this to be one of the most beneficial and enjoyable classes you will take. To better my chances of hearing you say (and even mean) that, I will be readily available for all of your questions and concerns, whether they pertain to this course, to journalism in general, or to the universe and our place in it. I won't post regular office hours, but I will be in my office or the *Kaimin* newsroom most weekdays between ten and four o'clock, and my door will be open. If you have a specific, time-sensitive problem to discuss, please make an appointment with me just to make sure I'm there.

In exchange, I expect that you will put as much effort into this course as I will. Please understand that I'm a one-chance kind of guy. Students who miss appointments, don't actively participate in class, or blow deadlines will be knocked to a lower place in my mental masthead. But if I see that you care about your work and your future, you will not find a better ally than me. That's the deal.

## **Email Policy**

Email sucks. Talk to me in person.

## **Evaluation**

Seminar participation	20%
Best Story of Your Life So Far*	80% (10% for your idea, 30% for your reporting, and 40% for your writing.)

\*Students will write one piece of magazine-quality non-fiction between 3,000 and 6,000 words in length. It should be worthy of publishing on glossy paper. Periodic deadlines are scattered throughout the semester, as outlined in the Calendar of Topics (see: BSOYLSF), with the final work due on December 7.

## **Deadlines**

Deadlines are firm unless exceptional circumstances intervene. Any work handed in after the due date will be marked down by ten percent per 24 hour period.

## **Academic Honesty**

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by me and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. That's the formal language. Informally, I will take an extremely dim view of anything that even faintly resembles plagiarism. (File under The Deal.)

## **Same Work for Multiple Classes**

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class, unless you receive prior approval from me. To do so without permission will result in an F for the assignment and an F for the course.

## **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

This course is accessible to and usable by otherwise qualified students with disabilities. Please see me to request reasonable program modifications. Disability Services for Students will assist both of us in the accommodation process.

## Calendar of Topics

August 31:	Orientation
September 2:	What Kind of Writer Do You Want to Be?
September 7:	No Class – Labor Day
September 9:	Your Favorite Stories ( <i>Please come to class with a copy of your favorite piece of journalism and be prepared to explain why it's your favorite.</i> )
September 14:	The Foundations of a Great Story
September 16:	The Birth of an Idea
September 21:	Your Ideas ( <i>Please come to class with three or four ideas for the BSOYLSF. The class will discuss the merits of each.</i> )
September 23:	<b>BSOYLSF idea due.</b> ( <i>After this class, you should have your idea set and be prepared to get to work.</i> )
September 28:	Reporting: Where to Begin?
September 30:	An Eye for Detail
October 5:	Cultivating Sources
October 7:	The Art of the Interview
October 12:	<b>BSOYLSF Reporting Progress Reports</b> ( <i>During this class, we'll discuss how each of you is progressing with your reporting and where you might need to focus more of your attention.</i> )
October 14:	Capote (Part 1)
October 19:	Capote (Part 2)
October 21:	<b>BSOYLSF Reporting Finished</b> ( <i>Please come to class with all of your reporting for your story, including transcripts. After this class, you should be able to begin writing in earnest.</i> )
October 26:	Now What? Panning for Gold.
October 28:	The Elements of Style

November 2:	The First Words
November 4:	Making a Scene
November 9:	<b>BSOYLSF Writing Progress Reports</b> ( <i>During this class, we'll discuss the shape of your stories and how you feel they're coming along.</i> )
November 11:	Off (Veterans Day)
November 16:	The Last Words
November 18:	<b>BSOYLSF First Drafts Due</b> ( <i>During this class, you will submit a first draft of your story to me and exchange a second copy with a fellow student for peer review.</i> )
November 23:	Big Picture Edits
November 25:	Off (Thanksgiving)
November 30:	<b>BSOYLSF Rewrites Due</b> ( <i>Again, bring one copy for me and a second copy for a fellow student.</i> )
December 2:	Line Editing and Fact Checking
December 7:	<b>BSOYLSF Final Edit Due</b>
December 9:	Now Let's Get Them Published

## Readings

For –

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|---------------|--|
| September 14: | Pat Dollard's War on Hollywood by Evan Wright ( <i>Vanity Fair</i> )   |
| September 16: | Underworld by Jeanne Marie Laskas ( <i>GQ</i> )  |
| September 28: | China's Instant Cities by Peter Hessler ( <i>National Geographic</i> )   |
| September 30: | City of Fear by William Langewiesche ( <i>Vanity Fair</i> )  |
| October 5:    | The Black Sites by Jane Mayer ( <i>The New Yorker</i> )  |
| October 7:    | Casualties of War by Steve Oney ( <i>Los Angeles</i> )   |
| October 28:   | Obama's Moment by Matt Taibbi ( <i>Rolling Stone</i> ) and Brouhaha by Hendrik Hertzberg ( <i>The New Yorker</i> ) |
| November 2:   | "You Have Thousands of Angels Around You" by Paige Williams ( <i>Atlanta</i> )                                     |
| November 4:   | Betrayed by George Packer ( <i>The New Yorker</i> )  |
| November 16   | I Am Joe's Prostate by Thomas E. Kennedy ( <i>New Letters</i> )  |