

**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM  
USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION**

**J446 ENTERTAINMENT REPORTING  
SPRING 2008**

**INSTRUCTOR:** CHARLES FLEMING

**CLASS TIMES:** Monday, 6:00pm – 8:40pm

**CLASSROOM:** ASC225

**COURSE OVERVIEW:**

The entertainment industry is a colorful, complicated world of art and artists, actors and malefactors, lawyers and liars, business people and show business people. But the glitz, the glamour and the Hollywood publicity machinery combine to make intelligent, independent reporting difficult. The purpose of this class is to introduce the student to the complexities of the industry, and to familiarize the student with specific techniques for covering film, television and music.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Students will attend all class sessions and complete all class assignments, on time, except by previous agreement with the instructor. Students will complete outside reading, reporting and writing assignments prior to class sessions and by stated deadlines. Class will always start on time. Tardiness and missed deadlines will not be tolerated. Late papers will not be accepted.

**COURSE GOALS:**

The course will help students learn to research, report and write stories covering all disciplines within the entertainment world – business stories, feature stories, trend stories, breaking news stories and personality profiles – in a manner appropriate to newspapers, trade papers, broadcast, weekly and monthly magazines and the Internet.

**GRADING:**

Excellence and effort will be rewarded, as will enthusiasm, energy and attention to detail. Class participation is important. Work that improves from week to week will be prized. There will be no midterm examination. The final examination will be a written assignment, due the day of the final – in this case, Monday, May 12. Grades for the course will be computed along these lines: written assignments (50%), in-class work (20%) and final papers (30%).

### **STYLEBOOK FOR J446:**

All written assignments must contain the student's name, the date and a story slug. All homework assignments must be submitted as email attachments, preferably in Microsoft Word. Please adhere in matters of grammar and punctuation to The AP Stylebook.

### **WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:**

Homework assignments, except where otherwise indicated, will be submitted by e-mail to [misterfleming@aol.com](mailto:misterfleming@aol.com). All homework assignments made during the Wednesday class are due by 11:59 pm Sunday night. Most assignments will include a stipulation on length. Pay close attention. Do not exceed or fall short of the word length. A 500-word story means 500 words – maybe 510, maybe 475, but never 750 and never 250.

Special emphasis will be placed on writing and clarity. Spelling counts. Grammar counts. Factual errors will be fatal to high grades. The AP Stylebook says, "There is no alternative to correct punctuation." Familiarize yourself with the AP's basic rules. When in doubt, refer to the text. Whenever possible, write short, clear, simple sentences. "The Elements of Style," by E.B. White and William Strunk Jr., says, "Clarity, clarity, clarity. When you become hopelessly enmired in a sentence, it is best to start fresh; do not try to fight your way through against terrible odds of syntax. Usually what is wrong is that the construction has become too involved at some point; the sentence needs to be broken apart and replaced by two or more shorter sentences." Because we are going to be writing about subjective, complex subjects, this call for clarity will be particularly important.

### **USC POLICY ON PLAGIARISM:**

The USC "Trojan Integrity" handbook describes plagiarism as "the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another individual." The University Student Conduct Code says that plagiarism includes, "The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student's own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near verbatim form; the submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style; and improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers." The "Trojan Integrity" handbook says the sanctions against plagiarism may include an "F" grade or suspension from the university.

### **SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM POLICY ON PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own; in journalism, this includes appropriating the reporting of another without clear attribution. The following is the Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the university catalogue: "Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to the school's policy."

## **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS**

Any students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. The office is located in the Student Union room 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776.

## **INTERNSHIPS**

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the total available semester points for this course.

## **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES (Approximate)**

**WEEK ONE: 1/14:** Introduction to instructor, course requirements and course concepts. What is and isn't entertainment news. Why it's fun, and why it's hard. Focus on awards show reporting. In-class reading of past awards show coverage.  
Written assignment 1: Cover a live entertainment event as a news story.

### **WEEK TWO: 1/21: NO CLASS**

Written assignment 2 : Coverage of Academy Awards nominations, 1/22

**WEEK THREE: 1/28:** The entertainment news landscape: the trades, the dailies, the TV show, the websites, the blogs. What's news and what's gossip, and why it isn't reporting. Homework assignment: Bring in two different versions of the same story, from two different news or information sources, ready to show why one is superior to the other.

**WEEK FOUR: 2/4:** Writing the basic entertainment news stories – the box office story, the celebrity obit story, the studio, network or music label business story. In-class construction of examples of the Hollywood news briefs. Review awards show coverage. Reading assignment: "I Was A Virgin Junket Whore," "Pierced Brosnan."  
Written assignment 3: Coverage of Grammy Awards, 2/10.

**WEEK FIVE: 2/11:** Writing the basic entertainment news story, continued. Reporting techniques. Research protocols. Introduction to the Hollywood publicity machinery. Survey of on-line databases. In-class screening "Junket Whores."  
Reading assignment: "This Is Going To Be Big," from The New Yorker  
Written assignment 4: Oscar nominee obituary

### **WEEK SIX: 2/18: NO CLASS**

Written assignment 5: Coverage of Academy Awards, 2/24 – OR – Coverage of Independent Spirit Awards, 2/23

**WEEK SEVEN: 2/25:** Reporting on the film industry. Writing the short celebrity profile. "Jeffrey Katzenberg's Road," "Lunch with Tommy Lee" – from The New Yorker  
Reading assignment: "My Name Is Joaquin," from The New York Times  
Written assignment 6: New Yorker style short profile off of TV talk show.

**WEEK EIGHT: 3/3:** Reporting on the film industry, continued. Reporting the enterprise story, working around the studios, publicists, agents. In-class film screening, film TBA.  
Reading assignment: "Waterworld," from Vanity Fair

**WEEK NINE: 3/10:** Reporting on the TV industry. Survey of networks. Survey of coverage. In-class filmmaker interview, filmmaker TBA.  
Written assignment 7: Filmmaker profile.

**WEEK TEN: 3/17: NO CLASS**

**WEEK ELEVEN: 3/24:** Reporting on the music industry. Survey of labels. Survey of coverage. In-class reading: “A Paler Shade of White,” from The New Yorker  
Written assignment 8: Cover a live music event.

**WEEK TWELVE: 3/31:** Freelance work. Learning the market. Writing the pitch letter.  
Reading assignment: “The Blog Whisperers,” from Los Angeles Magazine.  
Written assignment 9: Compose a pitch letter.

**WEEK THIRTEEN: 4/7:** The websites, the reporter as print paparazzo, the blog as entertainment news: TMZ, Defamer, Hollywood Elsewhere, etc. In-class speaker TBA.  
Reading assignment: “Hollywood Confidential,” from Los Angeles Magazine

**WEEK FOURTEEN: 4/14:** The feature or trend story. How to outline, build source lists, work publicists, work sources, compose feature stories. In-class speaker TBA.  
Reading assignment: “The Misfit,” “Constant Sorrow” -- from The New Yorker  
Written assignment 10: Submit pitch letter for final paper.

**WEEK FIFTEEN: 4/21:** Instructor conferences. By appointment. Discuss final papers.  
Reading assignment: “Frank Sinatra Has A Cold,” from Esquire  
Written assignment 11: Submit outline of final paper.

**WEEK SIXTEEN: 4/28: NO CLASS**

Written assignment 12: Submit first draft of final paper for instructor comment (optional)

**WEEK SEVENTEEN: 5/12: FINAL PAPERS DUE**

## **SUGGESTED READING / COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

There is no text book for this course. The following are suggested texts for students serious about understanding the entertainment industry.

Bagdikian, Ben H., "The Media Monopoly," Beacon Press, 1990

Barnouw, Eric, "Tube of Plenty," Oxford Univ. Press, 1990

Brouwer, Alexandra and Wright, Thomas Lee, "Working in Hollywood," Crown Publishers, 1990

Dunne, John Gregory, "Monster," Random House, 1997

Fleming, Charles, "High Concept," Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1998

Freeman, David, "A Hollywood Education," Dell, 1987

Gabler, Neal, "An Empire Of Their Own," Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1988

Goldman, William, "Adventures in the Screen Trade," Warner Books, 1983

Griffin, Nancy and Masters, Kim, "Hit and Run," Simon & Shuster, 1996

Hayes, Dade and Bing, Jonathan, "Open Wide," Miramax Books, 2004

Knoedelseder, William, "Stiffed," Harper Collins, 1993

McClintick, David, "Indecent Exposure," Dell Publishing, 1982

Pierson, John, "Spike, Mike, Slackers & Dykes," Hyperion, 1995

Queenan, Joe, "If You're Talking To Me, Your Career Must Be In Trouble," Hyperion, 1994

Richardson, John H., "The Vipers' Club," William Morrow, 1996

Wilson, John Morgan, "Inside Hollywood," Writer's Digest Books, 1998