Course Name: Medical Journalism
Institution: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Instructor: Tom Linden, M.D., distinguished professor; director, medical and science journalism program
Course level: Doctoral and master's-level students and upper-division undergraduates
Audience: Students interested in the craft and art of medical journalism
Semester: Fall 2012
Class schedule: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10-11:15 a.m.
Office hours: Wednesdays, 2-3 p.m. or whenever office door is open
Typical Enrolment: 8-10

Course overview
The purpose of this course is to teach an appreciation of medical journalism and provide you with skills to report on medical and health news for a variety of media, principally print and online, but also broadcast (radio/TV).

As a participant in this course, you'll learn the following:
- How to find news value in medical research reports.
- How to integrate medical statistics from source materials into news reports.
- How to research and write medical and health news stories for popular media.

Required texts and reading
Readings for the course include a text about medical statistics, a classic book on writing well, a case study by a master of medical journalism, a best-selling book about the science behind habits and an anthology and primer about medical and health news writing. Please complete the reading assignments before the appropriate classroom discussions. In addition to the list below, I'll supply additional source materials and articles from various publications. The following books are all available at the UNC student store (and on Amazon) and copies of all the books (except A Field Guide for Science Writers will be on reserve in the Park Library (second floor) in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication. (Please note the reserve books may not be available until the second or third week of classes.) Students should also consult the AP Stylebook for proper style and usage for all written assignments.


4) Linden, Tom & the Writers of The New York Times, The New York Times Reader:
Participation
A working medical journalist typically talks and discusses relevant issues with colleagues and others before preparing his or her report. This class will be no different. I'll expect you to share your thoughts with your peers and with me. Classroom discussion will help clarify your ideas and sharpen your focus. You'll also be posting all written assignments on Sakai where your classmates will critique your work.

Each student will be responsible for at least two 15- to 20-minute presentations on assigned reading. I'll assign the presentations at the beginning of the second class meeting. As critical thinking and discussion with peers are so integral to the work of journalism, I'll count your presentation(s) as 15% of your final grade, with an additional 10% of your final grade based on your classroom participation throughout the semester. I'll base your grades on the quality (not necessarily the quantity) of your discussion. I'll judge quality on principally the following two criteria:

1) Whether it's clear that you've read and thought about the readings.

2) Your ability to integrate ideas gleaned from both readings and from contributions of your classmates.

After one unexcused absence, each absence will result in a drop of one letter grade. This is a mostly graduate-level seminar, and your presence and contribution are essential. You cannot pass the course with more than two unexcused absences.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment deadlines
To succeed in medical journalism, you must write well. Good writing requires an
understanding of the material and the ability to communicate ideas simply and clearly. To sharpen your writing skills, you'll write a series of stories in various journalistic genres. The writing assignments will count for 75% of your final grade.

All assignments are due at the start of class on the dates indicated. Late papers will not be accepted without prior permission. Even with prior permission, submission of late papers will result in a 10-point deduction per day. Not turning in a paper within two days of the due date will result in a zero grade. Misspelling of proper names will result in a 10-point deduction per misspelling. Misspelling of other words will result in a two-point deduction for each word misspelled. We'll follow the print style guidelines of the AP Stylebook. If you intend to pursue journalism as a career, I strongly encourage you to purchase a copy of the stylebook. As per the usual practice in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, a major factual error will result in a failing grade for that particular assignment. Fabricating sources or quotations or engaging in plagiarism will constitute a violation of the Honor Code (for more information about the UNC Honor Code, go to http://instrument.unc.edu).

Exams

There will be no midterm or final exam.

Grading Scale (for undergraduates)

98 - 100 A+
94 - 97 A
91 - 93 A-
88 - 90 B+
84 - 87 B
81 - 83 B-
78 - 80 C+
74 - 77 C
71 - 73 C-
68 - 70 D+
64 - 67 D
61 - 63 D-
60 and below F

Grading Scale (for graduate students)

93 - 100 Honors
74 - 92 Pass
61 - 73 Low Pass
60 and below F

How To Succeed in This Course
• Attend classes consistently.
• Complete readings before the appropriate classroom discussions.
• Participate actively in class.
• Ask the Professor questions either during class or during office hours if you're unclear about any aspect of the course.
• Turn in stories on time.
• Check online syllabus frequently throughout the semester (preferably before each class) as assignments and topics may change without e-mail notice.

Class schedule

WEEK 1:

AUG. 22: INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL JOURNALISM

Reading:


WEEK 2:

Aug. 27: A GUIDE TO WRITING NON-FICTION; also, for first 30 minutes of class, guest speaker Karl Bates, director of research communications, Duke University News Service, will talk about the New Horizons in Science 2012 Program in Raleigh, Oct. 28-29

* Learn the basics of writing non-fiction.

Reading:

Zinsser, William, On Writing Well, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Browse website of New Horizons in Science 2012 Program to be held in Raleigh, Oct. 28-29 (held in conjunction with the National Association of Science Writers annual conference)

Aug. 29: ETHICS OF MEDICAL JOURNALISM (Kelly)


SPJ Code of Ethics: http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp?


Zinsser, William, On Writing Well, Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

**WEEK 3:**

SEPT. 3: **No class (Labor Day)**

SEPT. 5: **INTERPRETATION OF MEDICAL STATISTICS (Courtni)**

Reading:


Oransky, Ivan, "How to avoid 'he said-she said' science journalism," Not Exactly Rocket Science guest blog, February 18, 2010.

Browse the web sites of the World Health Organization's International Clinical Trials Registry Platform (ICTRP) and the National Institutes of Health's clinicaltrials.gov.

**WEEK 4:**

SEPT. 10: **INTERPRETATION OF MEDICAL STATISTICS (cont.) (Jaya)**

Reading:

Kolata, Gina, online at "Forty Years' War -- Advances Elusive in the Drive to Cure Cancer," also in New York Times Reader, pp. 156-162.


SEPT. 12: NEWS STORIES (Patrick); Guest speaker at 10:45 a.m.: Stephanie Brown, Director, Park Library

Reading:
Browse online resources from the JOMC Park Library.

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 1, pp. 7-24.

Blum et al., editors. A Field Guide for Science Writers, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6.

Assignment #1: News story due Wednesday, Sept. 19.

WEEK 5: SEPT. 17: NEWS STORIES (cont.) (Dan)

Reading: Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 2 & 3.

SEPT. 19: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #1

Assignment #1 due today.

WEEK 6:

SEPT. 24: MEDICAL CASE HISTORY AS NARRATIVE

Reading: Sacks, Awakenings, pp. 3-115.

Assignment #2: Rewrite of Assignment #1 due Wednesday, Oct. 3.
SEPT. 26: INVESTIGATIVE & PERSPECTIVE STORIES View "Awakenings" documentary.

Reading:

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 4 & Chapter 8, pp. 162-182.

WEEK 7:

OCT. 1: EXPLANATORY STORIES

Reading:
Blum, Deborah & Mary Knudson, editors. A Field Guide for Science Writers, Ch. 17 (pp. 111-117), Ch. 20 (pp. 132-137).

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 7, pp. 120-155.

OCT. 3: PROFILES - REPORTING FROM THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT - Medical Journalism Program Guest Lecturer: Judith E. Tintinalli, MD, MS, Professor, Dept. of Emergency Medicine, UNC-CH. Please meet at Starbucks Cafe located in the lobby of the UNC Cancer Hospital.

Assignment #2 (Rewrite of Assignment #1) due today.

Reading:
Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 5 & 6, pp. 92-119.

Assignment #3: 900-word profile from the UNC Emergency Department due Wednesday, Oct. 24.

WEEK 8:

OCT. 8: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #2

OCT. 10: OBITUARIES, PROFILES, HISTORICAL STORIES & NARRATIVES
(Nancy)


Also, review Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapters 5 & 6, pp. 92-119.
WEEK 9:

OCT. 15: COMMENTARY: COLUMNS & ESSAYS

Reading:


OCT. 17: NARRATIVE NON-FICTION (Karen)

Reading:


"Science Times" section from Tuesday, Oct. 16, New York Times

WEEK 10:

OCT. 22: BLOGS - guest speaker: Bora Zivkovic, blog editor, Scientific American

Reading:

Linden, New York Times Reader, Chapter 14.


Zivkovic, Bora, "The line between science and journalism is getting blurry... again," Observations, Dec. 20,2010: Scientific American.
OCT. 24: IN-CLASS CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #3

Assignment #3 due today.

Assignment #4: Rewrite of assignment #3 due Monday, Nov. 5.

WEEK 11:

OCT. 29: **No class** -- Students are encouraged to attend the annual meeting of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing at the Raleigh Convention Center. (Registration is required and closes on Oct. 10.)

OCT. 31: NARRATIVE NON-FICTION (cont.) (Elizabeth)

Reading:


WEEK 12:

NOV. 5: CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #4 - guest critique: Dr. Judith Tintinalli, professor and chair emeritus, Department of Emergency Medicine, U. of North Carolina School of Medicine

NOV. 7: MEDICAL COMMUNICATIONS AS A CAREER - guest speaker: Anton Zuiker, co-founder of ScienceOnline and director of communications, Duke University Department of Medicine

Reading:

Take 15-20 minutes to browse [http://news.medicine.duke.edu/](http://news.medicine.duke.edu/), the site that Anton has developed to reflect the activities of the Duke Department of Medicine. Think about the opportunities and challenges faced by a department with 700 faculty physicians and 1000 staff members.

Read two of Anton's blog posts:


[http://mistersugar.com/article/4611/thinking-places-or-i-am-before-i-am](http://mistersugar.com/article/4611/thinking-places-or-i-am-before-i-am)

Read Atul Gawande's commencement speech:

WEEK 13:

NOV. 12: REPORTING FOR THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Reading:


Assignment #5: Next story assignment due Wednesday, Nov. 28.

NOV. 14: WRITING THE TELEVISION SCRIPT (Natalie - "Science Times")

Reading:


WEEK 14:

NOV. 19: WRITING THE TELEVISION SCRIPT (cont.)

Reading:

Handout on television script writing tips (in Resources folder of Sakai)


NOV. 21: No Class (Happy Thanksgiving)

WEEK 15:

NOV. 26: RADIO DOCUMENTARY Listen to "My Lobotomy."

Reading:

NOV. 28: IN-CLASS CRITIQUE OF ASSIGNMENT #5

Assignment #5 due today.

WEEK 16:
Dec. 3: CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN SCIENCE COMMUNICATION -- guest speaker: David Kroll, Ph.D., director of science communications, Nature Research Center, North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences

Reading:

Browse David Kroll's Terra Sigillata blog.

Browse David Kroll's other blog, Take As Directed on Forbes website.


Kroll, David, "Trine Tsouderos on This Week in Virology: When do you fact-check article content with sources?" post on Take As Directed, Sept. 19, 2011, PLoS blogs.

Dec. 5: Class wrap-up and evaluation

The Honor Code

The Honor Code is in effect in this class and all others at the University. I am committed to treating Honor Code violations seriously and urge all students to become familiar with its terms set out at http://instrument.unc.edu. If you have questions, it's your responsibility to ask me about the Code's application. All work for this class must be submitted with a statement that you have complied with the requirements of the Honor Code.

-----syllabus revised November 6, 2012