Writing Trouble Syllabus
JOUR-GA 1023.001
Eliza Griswold

This course will take us through more than a century of literary reportage concerning the world’s troubles and issues of social justice both in the United States and internationally. Since you are already graduate students of journalism, we will assume a certain fluency in both the basic tools of reporting, as well as standards of reporting and avoidance of plagiarism.

Ethics are an essential and omnipresent issue in all journalism, but none more so than writing about the disenfranchised and survivors of injustice and disaster. We will take a week specifically to discuss ethical issues, but they will also be present in every discussion.

Assignments: The goal of this course is NOT to finish a polished piece of reportage. It is to lay the groundwork and practice the skills that lead toward a successful long-term project. You will be completing this class with a pitch and the necessary elements for an excellent piece of reportage. Those of you who have projects in mind requiring travel may use the pitch as a proposal for grants, or other means, to fund reporting trips.

Each week, we will continue to build our individual projects. The assignments are intended to help you deepen your work and your skills in regard to not only reporting, but also excellent writing. As such, there will be short writing assignments that arise organically out of our discussions. Your grade will be equally divided into class participation and written work, 50%/50%.

You are expected to attend every class and missing more than one will affect your grade. There will be no extensions, as meeting deadlines is essential to professionalism.

Your final portfolio due Week 14 will include: Fellow Student Profile (500 words), Oral History (no more than 2500 words), Narrative account of your Spine (1500 words), Reconstructed Scene (500 words) and Final Pitch (750 words or less).

Week One: America 150 years ago and today
Reading in preparation for first class:
Ida B. Wells Southern Horrors
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm,
Ta-Nahesi Coates The Case for Reparations
https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/

Writing/Reporting: You'll be paired with a classmate to conduct an interview in class in order to write/present this person in Week Two.
**Week Two: Fascism, Freedom Fighting and Foreign Wars**
Reading: George Orwell *Homage to Catalonia*

Writing/Reporting: You will read your profile of your classmate in order to introduce them to the class

Class Discussion: We will begin to discuss and select our semester-long reporting project

**Week Three: War, Memoir and Reportage**
Reading: Basharat Peer *Curfewed Night* (first 150 pages)

Writing/Reporting: We will finish our introductory profiles as needed and conduct and incorporate follow-ups. You will write a revised profile of your classmate, no more than 500 words, due in Week Four.

Class Discussion: We will finalize our subjects, and discuss how to build a spine—the files required for a form of long-form reportage, whether book or magazine-length

**Week Four: Witnessing Disaster through Oral History**
Reading: Svetlana Alexievich *Voices from Chernobyl* (first 150 pages)
Also, students are to bring in an unconventional—or in some way remarkable—piece of reportage that raises ethical issues for classmates to read for next week’s discussion. Bring enough copies for everyone!

Writing: Hand in your revised profiles.

Class Discussion: We will discuss oral history and how to select subjects of our own. In some cases it may be appropriate to use this assignment as an interview for one of the subjects of your long-form project.

**Week Five: Ethics**
Reading: Work Selected By Your Classmates and Handed Out in Week Four and finish *Voices*.

Writing/Reporting: Conduct an hour-long interview for oral history and transcribe.

Class Discussion: We will discuss character and the basics required for long-form reportage and share our oral histories

**Week Six: Covering Disaster and its Aftermath through Character**
Reading: John Hirshey *Hiroshima*

Writing/Reporting: Finish Oral Histories and Revise
Class Discussion: Reading Oral Histories

**Week Seven: The Role of the First Person**
Reading: Joan Didion *Salvador*

Writing/Reporting: Hand in Oral Histories

Class discussion: In class writing assignment on role of first person

**Week Eight: Chronicling Contemporary America: Domestic Reportage**

Reading: George Packer *The Unwinding* (first 150 pages) and students are to bring in a short piece of their own choosing to hand out for others to read for Week Nine.

Writing/Reporting/Discussion: By now, we will have discussed how to build a spine for your work. Students will present their projects over the next several weeks so we can troubleshoot in class together—essentially a weekly editorial meeting.

**Week Nine: Domestic Reportage We Assign Ourselves**

Reading: Finish *Unwinding* and read pieces your fellow students brought to class in Week Eight

Writing/Reporting/Discussion: Continue individual work on spines. Presentations of projects continues.

**Week Ten: Collateral Damage: Covering War at Home**

Reading David Finkel: *Thank You for Your Service* *(first 150 pages)*

Writing/Reporting: Continue individual work on spines. Weekly editorial meeting continues.

Class Discussion: How to write a pitch

**Week Eleven: Defining Social Problems—How To Find and Follow Stories**

Reading: Finish Finkel

Writing/Reporting/Discussion: Weekly editorial meeting, individual work on Spines and Pitches. Begin Practice Pitches in class

**Week Twelve: Packing your Go-Bag: How-To on Foreign Reportage**
Reading: Kate Boo *The Marriage Cure*
http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/08/18/the-marriage-cure

Writing/Reporting: In class writing on beginnings and reconstructed scene

Class Discussion: Practice Pitches

**Week Thirteen: Personal Narrative as Social Justice**

Mohamedou Ould Slahi: *Guantanamo Diary* (first 150 pages)

Class Discussion: Present Final Pitches and Spines

**Week Fourteen: Writing about Refugees in America**

Reading: Anne Fadiman: *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (first half)

Class Discussion: Present Final Pitches and Spines

**FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE**