



**JOUR 512: Advanced Interpretive Writing
2 Units**

Summer 2021 – Tuesdays and Thursdays – 2-4:05 p.m.

Section: 138-21195R

Instructor: Alan Mittelstaedt

Course Description:

You will research, write -- and rewrite -- timely opinion columns and first-person essays that capture our cataclysmic and constitution-threatening political era as well as pieces that indulge the joys of our existence on this planet. Your work will be published on our website at the media center.

You've made it this far in your budding journalism careers by keeping your opinions in check. You've done a pretty good job of limiting your stories to the thoughts and actions of others. All that is sound preparation for what we are about here. You will find and/or refine your voice as you dig more deeply into the meaning of events and politics. You will tap into your well of convictions and write passionately about matters of public concern and personal interest.

You will develop strategies for coming up with ideas for opinion-rich journalism as you connect your experiences and opinions to fast-paced news cycles. You will engage your critical thinking and communication skills and develop the art of persuasive writing.

All that may sound a bit detached and philosophical. American public life demands that we become engaged thinkers and communicators. We must immerse ourselves in politics and scrutinize the conduct of elected officials. Our democracy is in crisis, and our institutions and constitutional system of government remains threatened.

From the videotaped police murder of George Floyd on Memorial Day 2020, to a devastating pandemic, to ex-President Trump and his allies' denouncing the outcome of a fair election, the foundation of our country remains shaken. Trump's refusal to accept defeat caused millions to doubt the integrity of the electoral process. What happens politically, culturally and socially in coming months, in the 2022 midterm elections and in the 2024 presidential election will reveal whether or not democracy can rebound.

This is the serious backdrop that will propel our six-week summer journey exploring opinion writing and interpretive analysis.

We will pursue these heavy and important issues in a classroom/newsroom atmosphere that fosters inspiration and fun. In 30 years, when your friends, your children and your grandchildren ask you what you were doing in journalism school during the attempts to overthrow our government and suppress the vote, you can point to columns you wrote in the Summer of 2021. Let us produce memorable work!

Learning Outcomes:

You'll produce provocative work full of opinion supported by rigorous argument. You will tap into their inner muses and write with a variety of styles including humor, outrage, conviction. Your work will speak both to those who agree and oppose their viewpoints. The value of persuasion and civility in modern discourse will be emphasized.

Other outcomes include:

- Understanding the difference between opinion pieces and news stories and news analysis
- Acquiring research methods to bolster opinions about matters of public importance
- Engaging in critical and logical thinking about public policy
- Writing about complex matters in accessible ways for wide audiences
- Relating personal experiences in a compelling way
- Writing about issues facing underserved and diverse communities
- Summarizing pitches in one sentence
- Writing with strong verbs, varied sentence length, strong narrative elements, including scene and metaphor
- Producing work that follows the traditional structure of opinion pieces
- Producing work that breaks the rules of traditional opinion pieces
- Developing strategies for dealing with critics, including nasty comments anonymously made on their posts

A Special Urgency: Why we are here

We are in a unique moment in our nation's history. A CNN poll released in May shows that 30 percent of Americans do not believe Joe Biden won the presidential election; 70 percent of Republicans tell pollsters that the election was stolen from Donald Trump. Republicans in many states are using these false claims of election fraud to pass laws that will make it harder for people to vote. If these trends continue, and if Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court do not stop these GOP-led voter suppression efforts, the United States is headed toward authoritarian rule by a Trump-led Republican Party. That is fact and not opinion!

Course Culture: Newsroom vs. classroom

Our goal is to produce publishable, timely pieces full of fresh views and thinking about key news developments and trends. Our class meetings will resemble newsroom meetings. You'll pitch your column ideas. We'll critique drafts in workshop-style settings. Our weekly reading list will contain pieces now listed on the syllabus and also more timely pieces. Starting in Week 2, your reading list (2-4 pieces) will be emailed to you every Sunday by 6 p.m. Your written reflections on the readings will be due by 11:59 p.m. every Monday and posted on a Google doc.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Readings journal (10 points)

Starting in Week 2, you will be emailed an updated list of readings for the coming week by 6 p.m. every Sunday. The list will contain timely pieces published in the current news cycle along with the items now on the syllabus. You'll write 300-500 word reflections on the week's readings and post them in your journal. The journal will be a Google doc, created by you and shared with me. You'll add your most recent reflections at the top each week.

Class participation (10 points)

This means showing up on time for our twice-weekly meetings, fully prepared and ready to engage in the discussions and critiques. In the Zoom era, it also means keeping your video on, good lighting and keeping distractions at bay as much as possible. Yes, extenuating circumstances such as unruly roommates or slow internet will occur and we all understand. Participation also means timely communication outside class. (See below.)

The Main Work: Four Columns (20 points each)

Over the next six weeks, you will write four, publishable columns that will be submitted to our point person at uscannenberghmedia.com. At least two of the columns must focus on political matters. Two may be personal essays or about non-political topics. You will pitch ideas for three of your columns. Your first column will be inspired by your First Assignment, which you received via email Friday, May 14.

Communication: Hey, we're in the publishing business. We want to see your work appear on uscannenberghmedia.com. That means filing drafts on deadline and making revisions in a timely way. Expect to hear from me within two hours of emailing or messaging me on Slack; I expect the same of you. Feel free to call or text me. Poor communication will cost you participation points.

First Assignment: Here's your first assignment, which was emailed to you Friday, May 14. It's due by 11 p.m. Wednesday, May 19.

Watch this [video of the Jan. 6 insurrection](#). This compilation was presented on Feb. 9 during Donald Trump's impeachment trial in the U.S. Senate.

Read this [story examining the national debate on voting rights laws](#) and efforts by many states to make it harder to vote.

Write 500-750 words on what you see as the major issue facing the United States, and how it can be addressed. Questions to provoke your thinking: What will it take for things to get better? How deep does racism run in our public institutions? How do we achieve a real democracy, one person, one vote? Have we hit our lowest point, or are we still falling? How close are we to a civil war, and what would it look like? What must change? OK, take it away!

File your piece in this folder. We'll review them as a group when we meet Thursday.

Grading Breakdown:

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Readings journal	10	10%
Four columns, 800-1000 words (20 points each)	80	80%
Class participation	10	10%
TOTAL	100	100%

Grading Scale

95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

Grading Standards

Journalism

All assignments will be edited on a professional basis and you will be judged on accuracy, timeliness, originality and whether you made deadline.

“A” columns are accurate, clear, comprehensive, well written and require only minor copyediting (i.e., they would be aired or published). Video work must also be shot and edited creatively, be well paced and include good sound bites and natural sound that add flavor, color or emotion to the story.

“B” columns require more than minor editing and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission. For video, there may be minor flaws in the composition of some shots or in the editing. Good use of available sound bites is required.

“C” columns need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors. Camera work and editing techniques in video stories are mediocre or unimaginative, but passable. Sound bites add little or no color - only information that could be better told in the reporter’s narration.

“D” columns require excessive rewriting, have numerous errors and should not have been submitted. Camera work is unsatisfactory or fails to show important elements.

“F” columns have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, are late, have numerous errors or both. Your copy should not contain any errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. The following are circumstances that would warrant a grade of “F” and potential USC/Annenberg disciplinary action:

- Fabricating a story or making up quotes or information.
- Plagiarizing a script/article, part of a script/article or information from any source.
- Staging video or telling interview subjects what to say.
- Using video shot by someone else and presenting it as original work.
- Shooting video in one location and presenting it as another location.
- Using the camcorder to intentionally intimidate, provoke or incite a person or a group of people to elicit more “dramatic” video.
- Promising, paying or giving someone something in exchange for doing an interview either on or off camera.

Grading/ Editing Timeline

Our goal is to publish your work in a timely manner. This means a piece may go through several rounds of revision. Drafts will be returned to you within 24 hours, often sooner, and you’ll be given a tight deadline to revise your work.

Assignment Submission Policy

A Google folder will be set up for each of your four writing assignments. Each one of you will post your pieces in the folder so that we can critique them during our sessions. You will set up your own Google doc to post your weekly reflections on our readings.

Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [Annenberg Digital Lounge](#) for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, please visit USC’s [Information Technology Services](#) website.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 138 (Six weeks: 5/17/2021 – 6/26/2021)

Tuesday, May 25: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Tuesday, May 25: Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund

Thursday, June 3: Last day to withdraw without a “W” on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade.

Friday, June 18: Last day to drop with a mark of “W.”

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note: This syllabus is subject to change

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings/Preparation for that day’s class	Writing homework/Due Dates
Week 1 Thursday, May 20	<p>Introductions What you may have missed in the news since starting grad school. Where ideas come from? Review first assignment (You received it in an email Friday, May 14.) 10 columnists to follow on Twitter</p>	<p>https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/26/opinion/nyt-opinion-oped-redesign.html</p> <p>Fatigue is not a luxury you can afford; https://nyti.ms/3w3eu5w</p> <p>https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/11/opinion/liz-cheney-gop.html?searchResultPosition=3</p>	Final drafts--Column 1-- Due by 10 p.m., Monday, May 24.
Week 2 Tuesday, May 25	<p>Structure of opinion pieces Where ideas come from?</p> <p>Discuss news Review pitches</p> <p>10 more columnists to file on Twitter</p>	<p>https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-05-09/op-ed-freedom-riders-60th-anniversary</p> <p>https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/05/11/america-is-having-black-renaissance-we-should-learn-it/</p> <p>https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/04/opinion/gop-trump-2020-election.html?searchResultPosition=7</p>	Pitches--Column 2— due Thursday, May 27. File pitches, drafts in this folder.
Thursday, May 27	<p>Review pieces What is your voice? Developing voice</p>	<p>https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/interactive/2021/reimagining-safety/?itid=sf-the-opinions-essay</p>	Drafts—Column 2-- due by 9 a.m. Tuesday, June 1

Week 3 Tuesday, June 1	Elements of first-person essays Who cares what happened to you?	https://thegrapevine.theroot.com/red-table-talk-exclusive-clip-dressie-mcmillan-cot-1846876984 https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/wesley-lowery-george-floyd-minneapolis-black-lives/612391/	Final drafts—Column 2—due Thursday, June 3.
Thursday, June 3	Part One: Reforming police and criminal justice Writing about systemic racism	https://www.theroot.com/oklahoma-city-school-board-rejects-new-anti-critical-ra-1846880509	Pitches—Column 3—due by 10 p.m., Monday, June 7. File pitches, drafts in this folder.
Week 4 Tuesday, June 8	Part Two: Reforming police and criminal justice Writing about systemic racism	The Case for Letting People Work From Home Forever https://bit.ly/3hnGuwW	Drafts—Column 3--due Thursday, June 9.
Thursday, June 10	Organizing our pieces and projects	https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-12-30/sentence-enhancements-gascon https://www.npr.org/2020/11/26/938425725/newly-elected-das-vow-to-continue-reforms-end-policies-deemed-unfair https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/11/us/police-reform-legislation-national-california/index.html https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2020/08/the-abolition-movement	Final drafts –Column 3—due by 10 p.m., Monday, June 14.
Week 5 Tuesday, June 15	History lesson: Leading columnists of the past century and	https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/11/12/stephen-millers-affinity-white-nationalism-revealed-leaked-emails	Pitches—Column 4--due Thursday, June 17. File pitches, drafts in this folder.

	what made them memorable.	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/28/stephen-miller-trump-second-term-immigration-blitz	
Thursday, June 17	Covering inequity Developing characters	https://story.californiasunday.com/moms-4-housing-oakland https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-education/what-do-colleges-owe-their-most-vulnerable-students https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/07/20/how-trump-is-helping-tycoons-exploit-the-pandemic?src=longreads	Drafts—Column 4—due by 10 p.m. Monday, June 21.
Week 6 Tuesday, June 22	What to watch for in 2022 midterm elections.	https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/cnn-opinionated-emotional-zucker/2021/05/11/5f32eb38-7f92-11eb-81db-b02f0398f49a_story.html	Final drafts—Column 4—due Thursday.
Thursday, June 24	Unfinished business: Saving our democracy		

Policies and Procedures

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 that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism or public relations class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“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 plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

b. Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplcity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710
campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101
diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

About Your Instructor

Alan Mittelstaedt started as an adjunct instructor in 2003 and joined the full-time faculty in Fall 2009 to help manage Annenberg Digital News, which produced Neon Tommy, the forerunner of uscannenbergmedia.com, where he now is a faculty advisor. For much of the previous decade, he was news editor at Los Angeles' alt-weeklies, including seven years at the L.A. Weekly, where he wrote a political column and oversaw a staff of six hard-nosed reporters. He's worked at mainstream newspapers. He was city editor at the Portland (Maine) Press Herald and at the Pasadena Star-News and was an investigative reporter and an editor at the San Bernardino County Sun, where he was surprised to be named Employee of the Year despite questioning many decisions of his Gannett bosses. When he was 15, he published his first article called "Deschooling Society: The Evils of Compulsory Education," and handed out 1,000 copies at his rural Virginia high school over the protests of his principal, who threatened to suspend him.