

Journalism 8900 – Special Topics Seminar
Biography Writing
Course No. 7525, 215 RTVC
Spring 2016-17, 10:30 to 11:50 a.m. Tuesday/Thursday
Marilyn Greenwald Ph.D, Professor

The history of the world is but the biography of great men.

-- Thomas Carlyle, 1840

Objectives and purposes of course: As the name indicates, this is a course in writing biography – in this case, biographies of writers, journalists and communicators. Specifically, the course will utilize qualitative methodology techniques and focus on 1) Developing an understanding of research techniques and resources sufficient to enable students to write a publishable research paper; 2) Selecting appropriate and interesting subjects for biographies; 3) Developing narrative strategies, using existing books and papers as models. In addition, this course is designed to help students understand the purpose of biographical writing – to construct a life and make that life representative of something else, such as a historical or cultural era or a specific group.

By the end of the semester, students will be expected to have an understanding of biography as a historical methodology; to have strengthened research skills, particularly in the use of primary sources; and to have strengthened their analytic and writing skills.

Readings: Class textbook is *Extraordinary Lives*, edited by William Zinsser. There are also many class and online handouts; these handouts and the book will form the basis for most class discussions.

Grading and assignments: Your grade will consist of the following (100 points):

60 points – Final research paper (20 to 25 pages, Chicago Style) due during the last week of classes. Part of the grade on this will consist of a brief oral presentation of that paper to the class.

15 points – Critique of existing research paper (details to be announced).

15 points – Research proposal outlining the subject of your final paper. This includes: a summary of resources available on the topic (primary and secondary); explanation of why the topic is worthy of examination; a description of the contribution the research will make to the field of communication or humanities; a listing of any similar studies; and research/writing timetable.

10 points – attendance and class participation.

Final research paper: This paper will consist of original research done by each student, focusing on a subject of his or her choice. (Instructor must approve the

topic). Paper should be of publishable quality and should employ qualitative/historical research methods. Each student will also present the paper to the class at the end of the semester.

Paper critique: Each student will offer a written and oral critique of a research paper. Class will do two group critiques as examples.

Class participation and attendance: This is a graduate seminar that is based on class discussion and student input. It is vital that each student participate in class regularly.

Students are expected to attend all classes. In case of an emergency, you must let the instructor know before the class by contacting her or by contacting the main journalism office. No work will be accepted late, and no Incompletes will be given for the course.

Academic honesty: The School of Journalism expects students to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of researchers and scholars. Acts of dishonesty in academic work constitute academic misconduct and may result in an F for the course and referral to Campus Judiciaries. When you put your name on a paper, you are certifying that it is your work. In addition, it is plagiarism to represent the words, ideas or data of another person as your own.

Reaching instructor: Office hours in Schoonover 237 are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 to 10:30 a.m. and Wednesdays, 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.; I am usually available outside of office hours and by appointment. E-mail: greenwal@ohio.edu.

J 8900 - Tentative schedule (first five weeks of semester)

Week One

Jan. 10 – Introduction. Why study biography? Historical method. Trends in biography. Handouts (Feldstein, Schiff, Menand handouts for class discussion on Thursday).

Jan. 12 – Discussion of handouts. Terms, issues, challenges, in writing biography. Research paper for first in-class critique handed out.

Week Two

Jan. 17 – Discussion of readings. Coming up with ideas for subjects.

Jan. 19 – Discussion/critique of research paper.

Week Three

Jan. 24 – Using archives and value of primary sources.

Jan. 28 – Students will tell class about their idea for final paper (details to be announced); More on using archives. Second paper handed out for in-class critique.

Week Four

Jan. 31 – In-class critique of second paper. Memoir. Research proposals due today.

Feb. 2 – Ethics and legal issues of biography. Zinsser chapters.

Week Five

Feb. 7–Papers handed out for individual critiques (due Feb.16 in class). Ethical issues of biography.

*Optional – Feb. 8 (Wednesday) – attend presentation by broadcast journalists Nick Creegan and Josh Walter, 7:30 p.m., 201 Morton Hall.

Feb. 9 –Introductory chapters of Zinsser discussed (details to be announced).