Course: COMM 269  
Term: Spring 2016  
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Course Description:

This course is about street-level China, as it is seen and as it happens. This course is a practicum, in which students, through a mix of lectures, briefings and discussions, will delve into nature of observation and engagement with and in China.

This course is intended to stimulate students to think about how one reports, writes, talks, and speaks about China, which means, fundamentally, how do we understand the China of today. Among other approaches, this means understanding what observing is here in China, how journalists, writers and documentary film makers decide what to convey, how observers based here decide what to write about and how to write about it, and how, ultimately, an image of China is reflected in a body of reportage.

There are a number of components in this course. For example, students are expected over the course of the semester to read every China story in the four major American newspapers: The New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and Wall Street Journal. We will examine how Western correspondents in China write about this country, interview several correspondents and engage in some reporting of our own. We will also examine how Chinese journalists write about their own country, and discuss the differences between journalism in China and Western journalism.

Observation only means anything in the telling, and for our purposes, in the writing. Students in this course are expected to write a reported piece of journalism (800 – 1,000 words) weekly. We will read each other's work and discuss it in class with the same verve we discuss the work of Western correspondents based here. While the emphasis will be on the print media, there will be guest lecturers who will discuss documentary film-making, television journalism, and other means of looking at and
Students will also take on one major project this semester. It should be either a major piece of reporting or feature writing (all subject to discussion), or a research paper on ways of observing China. Other work products are open to discussion, but all of your work must be original (not done for another course).

Readings in this course will be extensive. Students should count on approximately two hundred pages or so to read each week.

This course will be conducted in a seminar format, which means we will take turns leading the discussions of the readings. All students will be expected to participate in our exchanges. This course is intended to be challenging, immediate and fun. Come prepared to talk, to read, and to write.

Course Outcomes:
It is our intent that students will leave this course with a deeper understanding of contemporary China, and of how journalists and documentarians, both Chinese and foreign, observe and write (or film) about China. Over the course of the semester students will, through their original journalism and essay writing, grapple with some of the issues that emerge in our readings.

Through our reading, discussions and interviewing conducted for our own writing, we should develop a tactile sense of China (through the lens of Beijing primarily, but also through the two required class field trips) in a vivid and immediate fashion quite distinct from academic inquiry. It is hoped that the students in this seminar will bring to it, in some measure, the perspectives of political science, history, anthropology, and will see how these disciplines, to some extent, color the way journalism frames issues and writes about them. Success will be reflected in their own writing.

Course Requirements and Form of Assessment:
Grading will be based on your writing and your class participation. That said, the idea of this course is to do good work and not worry about grades. There will be a series of reported pieces required as well as a lengthier piece towards the end of the semester, either a reported piece or a research paper on some aspect of journalism in China, either to be decided on after conference. Roughly 40 percent of your grade will be based on the shorter written pieces and 50 percent on your longer project. Participation in our weekly discussions is extremely important as well and will constitute 10 percent of the final grade.
Attendance Policy:
If you don’t want show up for class, don’t sign up; if you do, it will be fun and you may actually learn something. Failure to attend class will, not suprisingly, have a somewhat deleterious effect on your final evaluation. Only valid medical or family emergencies qualify as an absence, and documentation of the same must be presented to the professor no later than the next class meeting.

Academic Honesty Statement:
Please refer to the following web link for policies on academic honesty: http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml

Required Texts:
Here are some books, most written by prominent journalists who have worked here for years, that we shall read; required:

2. Ian Johnson, Wild Grass: Three Portraits of Change in Modern China (Vintage, 2005)
4. Philip P. Pan, Out of Mao’s Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China (Simon & Schuster, 2008)
5. Chen Guidi & Wu Chuntao, Will the Boat Sink the Water: Life of China’s Peasants (PublicAffairs, 2006)
9. a semester-long subscription to The New York Times, i.e., www.nytimes.com

Very highly recommended reading (which means these books will be referred to in our explorations of contemporary China):

13. Rob Gifford, China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power
16. Lijia Zhang, “Socialism is Great”: A Worker’s Memoir of the New China (ANCHOR 2009)

and, for fun, and not inconsiderable insight:

Class Schedule:

Journalism does not come to us in neatly packaged modules, unlike your other courses in history or political science. Our goals over the coming twelve or so weeks are to read widely the China coverage from western newspapers and magazines, discuss with increasing knowledge the work of specific journalists, and write regular pieces based on your own efforts exploring China.

The rhythm of the semester will depend in some measure on my presentations of journalism's basic principles and approaches to reporting in China, and to some extent on your own interests and perspectives. This is intended to be a collaborative effort among us all. I will, each week, assign reading from our suggested texts, and encourage wider reading where appropriate. Every week, students will be expected to submit a short, perhaps 800-to-1,000-word, original piece of reporting that tells us something interesting about China. We will discuss everybody's reporting in class.

Broadly, however, the semester will be segmented as follows:

- An introduction to the practice of journalism, and to the practice of journalism in China.
- An exploration of Beijing, what goes on in this city of 17 million people and how journalists wrote about China's capital.
- A broad and deep look at the nature of Chinese society, how it is changing and how some of the best journalists report this staggering social transformation.
- A careful exploration of political repression and how, despite occasional dangers, journalists cover delicate and risky subjects.
- China’s rapid economic is reshaping not just itself but the world; we shall examine this profound reordering of economic life.

Students will also be required to read sections from the required books each week, and, from time to time, also delve into the recommended readings. The assigned readings are for the most part by journalists with a wide range of experience in China and each has a distinct perspective on China, and on reporting about China.

About mid-way through the semester I expect students to settle on an idea or
subject for a longer piece of reporting, or research paper, on which we jointly agree.

Over the course of the semester we will examine how correspondents cover breaking news and how they report and write longer feature and investigative pieces; we will invite several correspondents, as well as documentary film makers, to our class to discuss their work. We will also look briefly at how Chinese journalists report on their own country and how it differs from the work of western journalists.

Now, for those considering this course: if you are serious you'll be expected, in addition to what you write in Beijing, to write a piece from each of the two class excursions. I'd like you, during your trips, to find someone or something that strikes you as interesting – for example, a potter, a monk, a kite-maker, a musician, a polluted river, a shanty town, a boat-man, a fortune-teller, a tea shop, a pipa player, a calligrapher, a cricket fighter, a noodle maker – and spend an hour or so (or more, should you wish) doing interviews and taking notes, take another hour or so writing an 800-word piece based on your reporting and bring it to class after each trip.

We're off and running. It will be grand.