

## Writing 100: *This American Life* Spring 2006

Dr. Hilde Binford

Mondays and Wednesdays, 8:50-10:00 (Brethren's House, Room 203)

Office Hours (Brethren's House, Room 302):

Mondays, Wednesdays 8:20-8:50; Mondays, Wednesdays 12:45-2:15

By appointment on Thursday or Friday

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- I. **Course Description:** Based on the NPR show *This American Life*, we will focus on issues in contemporary society. Writing assignments will relate to the themes explored on the show, including Hurricane Katrina, Separation of Church and State, Family Secrets, Prison Life and Choices, Mistaken Communication, and Acts of Random Kindness. For a final project, students will work together in teams to produce a series of audio essays on *This Bethlehem Life*.
- II. **Instructional Materials:** Bedford Handbook and materials available through [www.thisamericanlife.org](http://www.thisamericanlife.org).
- III. **Teaching Strategies:** The course will be conducted with a series of lectures and class exercises based on the reading assignments, audio-visual materials, and other supplemental materials presented by the instructor.
- IV. **Course Requirements:** Attendance is mandatory. For each unexcused absence, the overall grade for the class will be lowered by .25 (using a 4.0 scale). Excused absences include illness (doctor's note required) and family funeral (note from home or Student Services required). All other absences will be evaluated at the discretion of the instructor. Chronic lateness will not be tolerated, and will be reflected in the overall grade. Assignments must be turned in by 4 p.m. on the day they are due in order to receive a letter grade. Assignments not turned in by that time will receive a "zero." Assignments which receive a grade of C+ or lower may be rewritten for a higher grade; students must submit the original paper along with the rewritten one. Rewrites will be accepted at any time up to and including the start of the final exam for this course. The instructor reserves the right to make qualitative judgments in determining grades for an assignment or for the course.
- V. **Essays, Written Assignments, and Class Participation:**

**Essays (45%):** Students will complete three short essays (4-6 pages, approximately 1500 words), focusing on the topics presented in *This American Life*. These papers will be due before the topics are aired.

**Audio Segment of "This Bethlehem Life" (20%):** In teams of 4, students will produce a pre-taped program, similar to those on *This American Life*. Each program will have a narrator, appropriate music and a theme. Students will take individual responsibility for writing the essays that are taped.

**Short Papers and Writing Assignments (25%):** Students will write several short pieces. These will include summaries and critiques of *This American Life* programs and letters to the producers.

**Class Participation (10%):** Students will be expected to participate fully in class. (10%) Some homework will be collaborative; peer editing will be part of the classroom experience.

### VI. Important Dates to Remember

Jan 25:	Reeves Library: General Research
Jan 31:	7 p.m. lecture
Feb 8:	Reeves Library: Evaluating web sources
Feb 15:	Reeves Library: International News and Alternative Media
Feb 20:	No Class -- field research
Feb 21:	(date tentative), 7 p.m. lecture
Mar 6, 8	No Class: Spring Break
Apr 17	No Class: Easter Break

- VII. **Academic Honesty:** Students are expected to uphold the standards of academic honesty, as they are spelled out in the Student Handbook.
- VIII. Students can expect to work a minimum of four to six hours per week outside of class preparing for this class, which includes the time necessary to listen to *This American Life* online.
- IX. Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Learning Services Office as soon as possible to enhance the likelihood that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.
- X. **Please note that the syllabus and calendar of class assignments are subject to change.**

In-Class Activities and Assignment Schedule (note that assignment numbers refer to separate list)

1/16	Introduction to NPR and <i>This American Life</i>
1/18	Assn. 1 due; discuss
1/23	Assn. 2 peer review/Discuss
1/25	LIBRARY: General Research
1/30	Assn. 2 due
2/1	Assn. 5 due/discuss
2/6	Assn. 6 peer review/discus
2/8	LIBRARY: International News and Alternative Media
2/13	Assn. 6 due; bibliography citations (print)
2/15	LIBRARY: Evaluating Web Sources
2/20	NO CLASS (in lieu of field research)
2/22	bibliography citations (web)
2/27	writing for business
3/1	Assn 7 due
3/6	NO CLASS (Spring Recess)
3/8	NO CLASS (Spring Recess)
3/13	Assn 8 due
3/15	Meet with Media Center
3/20	Assn. 9 peer review; Discuss Assn. 12
3/22	Assn 9 due/discuss
3/37	Assn 10 peer review
3/29	Assn 10 due/discuss
4/3	Assn 11 peer review
4/5	Assn 11 due/discuss
4/10	Teams work on Assn 12 (consult with Dr. Binford)
4/12	Teams work on Assn 12 (consult with Dr. Binford)
4/17	NO CLASS (Easter Recess)
4/19	Assn. 12 due; A/V practice
4/23	Audio Presentations
4/25	Audio Presentations
4/30	Audio Presentations/Course Evaluation

## Writing 100: This American Life

Writing Assignment #1: Summary (350 wds – include word count on all assignments after heading)

Begin by exploring the website for *This American Life* ([www.thisamericanlife.org](http://www.thisamericanlife.org)). Under “program archive,” pick a show and listen to it. After you have listened to the program (using Real Audio), you need to write a brief (350 word) summary of the program’s content. Include any musical examples.

Writing Assignment #2: Summary (350 wds.)

Under “program archive,” pick a show and listen to it. After you have listened to the program (using Real Audio), you need to write a brief (350 word) summary of the program’s content. Include any musical examples.

Writing Assignment #3: Review of Lecture (350 wds)

Tuesday, January 31. 7:00 p.m. "Justice, Morality and the Death Penalty"

Lloyd Steffen, Ph.D. Chair, Dept. of Religion Studies and Chaplain, Lehigh University Author of "Executing Justice: the Moral Meaning of the Death Penalty"

Writing Assignment #4: Review of Lecture (350 wds)

Tuesday, February 21?? (Tentative Date. Definitely the week of Feb 20) "Life on and After Death Row" Ray Krone, Former Death Row Inmate

Mr. Krone was wrongly convicted twice (1992 and 1996) for a brutal murder he did not commit. After serving ten years in prison, Mr. Krone was freed on the basis of DNA evidence. Ray became the 100th former death row inmate freed because of innocence since the reinstatement of the death penalty in the U.S. in 1976. For further information check [www.innocenceproject.org](http://www.innocenceproject.org) or Google Ray Krone.

Writing Assignment #5: Analysis (350 wds.)

Listen to the episodes 287 (interview with Joe Amrine), 143, and 119, all relating to prison life and sentencing. Identify issues that could be explored with further research.

Writing Assignment #6: Argument (500 wds.)

Using additional research, write a position paper on one of the topics or issues that you identified in Assignment #5.

Writing Assignment #7: Letter to Producer

Listen to one of the recent *This American Life* shows of your choice, and then write a letter to the producer. You may offer criticism, praise, or both.

Writing Assignment #8: Letter to Producer

By now, you have listened to several shows. Write a letter to the producer suggesting a topic for a new show, and provide rationale.

Writing Assignment #9, #10, #11: Short Research Papers (1200 words, 4-6 pages)

Each of these three short research papers will be based on a topic suggested by a *This American Life* program. You must identify the program which provided the inspiration for your topic. You are expected to utilize outside sources and document fully.

Writing Assignment #12: Audio Presentations on *This Bethlehem Life*

During the last two weeks of class, teams of four will produce their own segment of “*This Bethlehem Life*.” Each student will take primary responsibility for one essay. Each “show” must have a narrator, appropriate song, and a theme.

