

Portfolio Journalism

The Master of Arts Degree in Journalism

Portfolio helps journalists and those seeking to enter the field learn how to harness their passions and ideas to develop a cohesive, thematically related body of work. Portfolio is both conservative and revolutionary: conservative in that we emphasize knowledge of various journalistic traditions, basic literary skills, and practical outcomes; and revolutionary in that we pursue these goals without primary emphasis on the “boot-camp” model that has dominated journalism education for the last half century. Most journalists cover beats. We create them.

SUMMARY OF ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

To apply to Portfolio you must first be accepted into one of the master's programs, concentrations, or joint programs in journalism. For options, see courses of study on the main department page: journalism.nyu.edu/prospectivestudents/coursesofstudy/index.html. Once admitted to the graduate program, those candidates considered qualified will be invited to complete the Portfolio questionnaire in a second round. From that pool, the Portfolio class will be selected.

HOW TO APPLY

With your application to the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at NYU (or by e-mail), please include a note indicating your general interest in Portfolio with a brief two-sentence abstract of the idea you would like to pursue. At the time of acceptance, those with projects that appear to meet the criteria will be invited to submit a more comprehensive formal proposal and an application with a separate, later deadline.

If invited to apply, you will need to supply a brief description of the kind of work you would like to pursue in a portfolio. Ideally, you should have educational, avocational, or professional background that complements the subject area you choose as well as something resembling a body of work (even if it is only a few articles or proposals) that you would like to expand and extend. We need some idea of what you might have to show in terms of work ready for publication by the start of your second term and subsequently.

FACULTY

Robert Boynton is director of the graduate magazine journalism program and codirector of Portfolio. He has written about culture and ideas for the *New Yorker* (as a contributing editor) and *Harper's* (as a senior editor). He is currently finishing a book on contemporary literary nonfiction.

Brooke Kroeger is codirector of Portfolio. She has worked for *Newsday* and with United Press International had postings in Brussels, London, and Tel Aviv. She is the author of *Passing: When People Can't Be Who They Are* (2003) and two biographies: *Fannie: The Talent for Success of Writer Fannie Hurst* (1999) and *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist* (1994).

FAQs

What are the strengths of Portfolio?

Two elements are particular to this experiment: (1) the way it will direct a good part of your time at NYU to gaining knowledge and expertise in the specific subject you stake out within your concentration and (2) the emphasis it places on writing about that subject. It will direct the reading you do, the mentors we hope to connect you to in your area of inquiry, and the editors we hope to introduce you to at publications that could be interested in printing your portfolio work. In some instances, the department itself may act as your publisher.

What special resources offer students an enriched experience?

How does Portfolio work? Because it is a new approach, Portfolio is something of an experiment that is being judged—and revised—depending on the work, enthusiasm, and ideas of the students who participate. The experiences of each successive graduating class are central to what happens in the semesters and years that follow. Here's a snapshot of what defines Portfolio now:

- **The Portfolios, the “Beats”:** Each Portfolio student proposes a subject area or theme for his/her reporting and writing that we loosely call “beats,” built off a combination of the individual student's passion, interests, and expertise. To give you an idea of the subjects our students have undertaken, there has been one on the means and impact of U.S. immigrant remittances to Latin America; an inventive one on the many forms of retirement; and still another on the uses and abuses of garbage—a remarkably rich and ranging topic.
- **The Portfolio Publishing Record:** Garbage, for example, led to that student's investigative piece in the *Wilmington Star News* on a proposed landfill to be built on a suspected floodplain. That same student's piece on the pneumatic tube that spews garbage away from Roosevelt Island appeared in the *New Yorker's* “The Talk of the Town.”

Such high watermarks in student publishing have become almost commonplace in the very short life of Portfolio. By December of 2003, two students had secured literary agents on the basis of book proposals developed in Portfolio. Portfolio-generated projects have been printed in such publications as the *New York Times*, *Newsday*, the *New York Daily News*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Architecture Week*, *ARTnews*, the *New York Observer*, the *Austin Chronicle*, the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, the *Village Voice*, *Odyssey* (Athens),

2004 MASTER CLASSES

Lillian Ross is a staff writer for the *New Yorker* and the author of 11 books, including *Reporting Back: Notes on Journalism, Here but Not Here*, and *Picture*. She is also the editor of *The Fun of It: Stories from the Talk of the Town*.

James Traub is a contributing writer for the *New York Times Magazine* and a frequent contributor to the *New Yorker*, *Harpers*, and other publications. He is the author of *City on a Hill: Testing the American Dream at City College* and *Too Good to Be True: The Outlandish Story of Wedtech*.

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William Finnegan has been a *New Yorker* staff writer since 1987. He is the author of *Crossing the Line* (1986), *Dateline Soweto* (1988), *A Complicated War* (1992), and *Cold New World: Growing Up in a Harder Country* (1998). He is a two-time National Magazine Award finalist, and *Crossing the Line* was named one of the 10 best nonfiction books of 1986 by the *New York Times Book Review*.

Joseph Lelyveld, former executive editor of the *New York Times*, won a Pulitzer Prize for his book, *Move Your Shadow*. His articles have appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New York Review of Books*, and the *New Yorker*.

ADDITIONAL PORTFOLIO MASTERS AND MENTORS

Eric Alterman is columnist for the *Nation* and MSNBC.com as well as author of several books including *What Liberal Media?*

Philippa Brophy is president of Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc.

Robin Cembalest is executive editor of *ARTnews* magazine.

Liza Featherstone is a journalist, essayist, and book critic. Her work has appeared in the *Nation*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Newsday*, *City Limits*, *Rolling Stone*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and the *Washington Post Book World*, among others.

Theodore Hamm is founding editor of the *Brooklyn Rail*.

Lee Hotz is science writer for the *Los Angeles Times*.

Nat Hentoff is a columnist for the *Village Voice*.

Alyssa Katz is editor of *City Limits*.

Adrian Nicole LeBlanc is author of *Random Family*.

Laura Marmor has been an editor at the *Wall Street Journal* and *Elle*, *Mirabella*, and *Esquire* magazines.

Amy O'Connor is features editor for *Glamour*.

Susan Orlean is a writer for the *New Yorker*.

Lawrence Osbourne is author of *American Normal: The Hidden World of Asperger Syndrome*, *The Poisoned Embrace: A Brief History of Sexual Pessimism*, and *Paris Dreambook*.

Metropolis, *Women's eNews*, the film journal the *Independent*, and a youth literary magazine from Random House, *Rush*.

In addition, two well-respected local publications have welcomed stories from Portfolio students written in the heavily researched narrative style that is Portfolio's hallmark. These are *City Limits*, the award-winning urban affairs magazine, and the *Brooklyn Rail*, a new monthly. The *Rail* named one of our students a contributing writer after her first piece for the publication appeared. That story, about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Greensboro, NC, also earned a bronze prize from the Independent Press Association. For the sake of future students, we are paying special attention to developing other such relationships.

- **The City Limits Urban Reporting Fellowship:** With *City Limits*, we have just established a competitive six-month postgraduate fellowship in urban affairs reporting and writing, starting with a first recipient in January 2004. Portfolio sponsors the fellowship, but it is open to all graduating M.A. degree students in journalism. We hope to encourage more such opportunities for our graduates with other serious publications.
- **The Master Class:** Joseph Lelyveld and William Finnegan have both conducted intensive three-week "master classes" with our students, setting the agenda, and then doing one-on-one critiques of student queries and the stories that result. James Traub and Lillian Ross are scheduled to conduct these sessions in 2004, and other master classes are in the works.
- **The Speaker Series, Mentor Program, and Portfolio Affiliates:** The master class complements Portfolio's outstanding speaker series, another major highlight of every semester thus far. Alexander Stille, Susan Orlean, Sam Tanenhaus, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, and Walter Shapiro have appeared, to name only a few. We make a point of inviting all the Portfolio speakers and master class leaders to become Portfolio affiliates, who then continue to make themselves available to the students one-on-one and at informal gatherings. The list continues to grow.
- **The Journalistic Literacy Project:** Portfolio students are invested in producing what we call the "journalistic literacy project," an effort to put together a fully annotated reading "canon" for every subject a journalist is likely to cover—from politics to international affairs, from environment to food. Once complete, we hope to make the lists available to journalists everywhere, via our Web site. We built this into the Portfolio design, envisioning the result as a service to the profession.
- **The Digital Portfolios:** The students are loading their published and best unpublished work onto their digital portfolios. Even students who have graduated are continuing to find them useful. The digital portfolios provide an excellent way for students to get their clips and best unpublished work into the hands of editors and potential employers. You can view their work from the Portfolio home page: journalism.nyu.edu/portfolio/index.html.

Ron Rosenbaum is author of *Explaining Hitler*, *The Secret Parts of Fortune*, and *Travels with Dr. Death*, among others.

Doug Simmons is managing editor of the *Village Voice*.

Alexander Stille is an author and a journalist. His books include *The Future of the Past*; *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism*; and *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*.

Sam Tanenhaus is author of *Whittaker Chambers* and contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*.

Michael Tomasky is author of *Hillary's Turn*, an analysis of Hillary Clinton's campaign for Senate, and *Left for Dead*, a study of the intellectual collapse of the American left. He has been a political columnist for *New York* magazine, the *Village Voice*, and the *New York Observer*.

Matthew Yeomans is former senior editor at the *Industry Standard* and national and international affairs editor at the *Village Voice*. He is currently writing a book about the politics of oil.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please visit our Web site:
journalism.nyu.edu/portfolio/index.html

Who teaches the course?

The course is led by two full-time faculty members: Robert Boynton and Brooke Kroeger. Each semester, students also enjoy the benefit of special speakers, mentoring relationships, and master classes taught by accomplished professionals in the field.

Who are the students?

Our students are self-motivated writers from all genres who have a burning desire to create a body of critical journalism exploring a particular theme or subject.

Can I pursue Portfolio as a part-time student?

No, Portfolio is only open to full-time graduate students.