



Doug Fisher, who is 6 feet 4 inches tall, does what he can to relieve classroom tension, including wearing a hat with a functioning pencil attached.

by z'anne covell

Doug Fisher admits that journalism students have deemed him “Great Satan.” He’s heard them shout gleefully upon earning a C in his class. He realizes they fear both him and his copy-editing course.

“The fear of the course concerns me terribly, and I try to do everything I can to break down that fear while, at the same time, being honest and saying there are standards and you must learn to meet them,” Fisher said.

Fisher, who joined the School of Journalism and Mass Communications faculty in 2001 after serving nine years as a news editor for The Associated Press, teaches his students the importance of precise journalism writing. As the course’s six-page syllabus asserts, the three most significant aspects of editing are accuracy, accuracy and accuracy.

“It’s either right or it’s wrong,” Fisher said. “You don’t get rewarded for guessing in journalism; you get sued.”

“Close” does not count, he said. He demands accuracy from his students because journalistic inaccuracies impact people’s lives and potentially their decisions.

“If you don’t get it right, you hurt people, and that is just not acceptable,” he said.

Fisher sets high standards for his students to prepare them for the demands of the journalism

world beyond the classroom. Late assignments are heavily penalized because in the real world, “being late on deadline can cost you thousands and thousands of dollars, even just being a few minutes late,” he said.

Fisher also stresses the necessity of collaboration between editors and writers.

“I want students to develop a respect for what the editor does, so when they are a writer, they’ll understand how to work with an editor,” Fisher said.

Coming into the course, though, many students aren’t thinking about its greater significance; they are merely terrified of failing it because it requires so much time and effort.

“I think any course that promises to challenge you probably throws a little fear of God into you,” he said.

But Fisher says he has no problem giving A’s in his class, and if students deserve A’s, that’s what they’ll get.

“By the same token, if everyone deserved an F for the semester, they’d get it, and then I’d go home and really, really cry because I would think I had failed them somehow.”

Fisher helps his students perform well by providing a success guide on Blackboard, holding online chat sessions twice a week in which students can ask questions, offering extra-credit opportunities and allowing students to use their texts on graded assignments.

“This is a totally open-book course,” Fisher said. “As I tell people, if you want to bring the Library of Congress, back up the truck.”

Fisher also tries to alleviate students’ fears of him, believing his physi-

“The fear of the course concerns me terribly, and I try to do everything I can to break down that fear while, at the same time, being honest and saying there are standards, and you must learn to meet them.”  
— Doug Fisher

cal stature alone can be intimidating. He stands at 6 feet 4 inches and weighs 300 pounds.

“I take up a lot of space,” he said. “I try to do a lot of my teaching sitting down because I don’t like to loom over people, but when you’re up in front and you have 50-some-odd students, it’s not like we can all sit around and sing Kumbaya.”

Although Fisher does not entertain his students with song, he does wear amusing hats — including his favorite, a cap attached to a giant, workable pencil — to make his students laugh and relieve classroom tension.

Despite students’ perceptions of him, Fisher insists students should not be fooled by his appearance.

“Just ask my wife. I’m a huge marshmallow inside.”

doug fisher  
copy editing