

# **JOU 4930 SEC 08CH**

## **Investigative reporting**

Spring semester 2015, University of Florida

WEDNESDAYS periods 7-9 (1:55 – 4:55 P.M.)

### **Instructor**

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### **Co-instructor**

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### **OBJECTIVE**

Students in this course will learn to think like an investigative reporter and to apply the skills reporters use to uncover information no one wants you to have. You will learn how to track people down, how to uncover secrets in documents and data and how to get people to talk when they shouldn't. You will learn how to push news stories beyond the typical, "he-said, she-said" by moving beyond the most basic questions journalists answer (who, what when and where) and focusing more on why, how, so what and who is to blame? You will learn how to ask tough question to people in power and the importance of holding them accountable.

This course is meant to be a practical learning experience. So the semester will be built around semester-long, group reporting projects, with the goal of publishing a story at the end. You will learn first-hand what it's like to work on an investigation and how to deal with the challenges all investigative reporters face – overwhelming amounts of information, accuracy, reluctant sources, ethical challenges and organizational issues.

### **ATTENDANCE AND RULES OF THE ROAD**

Class attendance is **mandatory** and will be taken regularly throughout the course. Students with more than one unexcused absence will lose a letter grade from their class participation grade. Additional absences will result in further penalties at the sole discretion of the instructor. Absences approved by the instructor in advance, or those due to extreme circumstances, such as illness, may be forgiven at the discretion of the instructor.

Discussions in class may include information about stories in progress. Students will be asked at the beginning of the course to agree to keep all class conversations off the record. Students should not Tweet or share information from class on Facebook or other forms of social media.

If you miss class, it is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to obtain material missed through other students. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

### **Grades**

Grades will be calculated based on participation in class discussions, effort put into reporting and a series of five writing assignments throughout the year. There may be additional assignments that arise during the year at the discretion of the instructor.

Class participation – 25 percent (includes your participation in class discussion as well as your effort in gathering information for your project)

Writing assignments – 75 percent (15 percent each)

### **Major assignments**

Additional assignments may be made at the instructors' discretion.

#### **Due Jan 13**

##### Reporting plan

Write a reporting plan that includes a summary of the story(ies) you expect to research and write as well as a detailed description of what reporting steps you will take to get there. Include any records you will request, and data you plan to collect, the name or a description of any sources you intend to approach or interview. You should write your plan in chronological order, describing your first steps, second steps and so on. You must set a deadline to accomplish each major reporting element.

Your plan should be based on “scouting” research and actual knowledge about what sources exist. It can, and should, also incorporate potential sources (records or people) that you do not yet know exist, but that you believe might exist.

Your plan should be 1,000 to 1,500 words.

**Due Feb 3**

## Story memo

Write a story memo of roughly 1,500 words to your editor to describe the story you have discovered and where you are in the reporting process. Begin this memo with a concise budget line that clearly gets across the nut graph of the story and your best “findings” as of this time. The best plans will incorporate both of these elements in story form (nut graph and findings written into the top of a story)

Additional elements of the story memo must include:

1. Description of the major reporting efforts done so far.
2. A detailed description of additional reporting expected including when it will be completed
3. A description of your organizational plans, including how you will organize public records, interviews, key findings and data and how you will share them with team members.

**Due Feb. 24**

## Story memo

Write a story memo of roughly 1,500 to your editor to describe the story you have discovered and where you are in the reporting process. Begin this memo with a concise budget line that clearly gets across the nut graph of the story and your best “findings” as of this time. At this stage, your nut graph and findings must be written in story form. For this exercise you are essentially producing a first draft of the top of your story.

Additional elements of the story memo must include:

1. Description of the major reporting efforts done so far.
2. A detailed description of additional reporting expected including when it will be completed
3. A sketch or outline of the story you plan to write including a subhead for each section of the story, a topic sentence for each subber and a one sentence description of what will be in each section.

**Due March 23****Story draft**

Turn in a complete version of your story for editing. You will be graded on the strength of your reporting and how well you synthesized your research and presented it to the reader. Clarity, accuracy and structure will be critical. Style and grammar will also be considered. Stories should be filed electronically and will be edited and returned for additional reporting and writing work.

**Due April 20**

Final story due.

You will be graded on how well you adjusted to your editor's edits and once again on the strength of your reporting and how well you synthesized your research and presented it to the reader. Clarity, accuracy and structure will be critical. Style and grammar will also be considered.

### **CLASS REQUIREMENTS:**

Computer needs and behaviors: Weekly computer and online exercises will be conducted in the classroom, so it is strongly encouraged for students to come to class with a laptop. Laptops are to be used only for classroom assignments. Use for other reasons, including unrelated email or messaging, will result in lost points from a student's class participation score. Lost points will be determined solely by the instructor based on the infraction and whether a student had been previously warned. The same rules apply for cell phones and all other electronic devices.

### **WEEK BY WEEK SCHEDULE**

#### **Jan. 6 -- Davis**

Introduction to investigative reporting. How to scout a story.

**Homework:** Read handouts from the Investigative Reporters Handbook. Begin working on your reporting plan. Be prepared to share your reporting plan and discuss it and the reading assignment in next class. Reporting plan due Jan 13

#### **Jan. 13 -- Davis**

Getting into a records state of mind. How to approach records in an investigation.

#### Reporting plan due

**Homework: Begin drafting first story memo; due Feb. 3**

#### **Jan. 20 -- Davis**

Organizing masses of information for yourself and within groups. How to keep track of everything that's coming in. Filing systems, writing early, story memos and other strategies, plus technology that can help.

#### **Jan. 27 -- LaForgia**

Getting people to talk. Strategies for finding people to tell you what you need to know

#### **Feb. 3 -- LaForgia**

Reacting to what you're finding. How to bullet-proof your reporting to avoid dead-ends and dry wells.

**1<sup>st</sup> story memo due**

**Begin work on 2<sup>nd</sup> story memo, due Feb 24**

**Feb. 10 -- LaForgia**

Vetting ideas. How to choose good investigative stories from the start.

Homework: Read Day 1 of Insane. Invisible. In danger. Plus Part 1 of In God's Name. Look for common structural and organizational elements and be prepared to discuss in the next class.

**Feb. 17 -- Davis**

Writing the investigative story. A formula for organizing your writing. Plus, how to avoid being boring.

**Feb 24. -- Davis**

In-class reporting/project discussion

**2<sup>nd</sup> story memo due**

**Homework: Draft of your story due March 23**

**March 2**

Spring break – no class

**March 9 -- LaForiga**

In-class reporting/project discussion

**March 16 -- LaForgia**

In-class reporting/project discussion

**March 23 -- Davis**

In-class reporting/project discussion

**Draft story due**

**Final story due April 20**

**March 30 -- Davis**

In-class reporting/project discussion

**April 6 -- LaForgia**

In-class reporting/project discussion

**April 13 -- LaForgia**

In-class reporting/project discussion

**April 20 -- Davis**

In-class reporting/project discussion

**Final story due****GRADING POLICIES**

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

**ACCOMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

**MAKEUP WORK:**

Make-up assignments and exams are not permitted. However, under an extreme circumstance, if you have an excused absence AND the professor was notified in advance, an exception may be made.

**GROUP PROJECTS:**

This course includes extensive work in groups. Each group is responsible for the content within the final project and to attempt to work out differences among members before alerting the professor. Under extenuating circumstances, grades may be differentiated based on work level. Near the end of the year, each student will file a peer evaluation describing the effort put in by the other group members. This required peer evaluation may impact points awarded for a student's project work or class participation.

**ONLINE COURSE EVALUATION:**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

**HONESTY POLICY:**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.