

**Investigative Reporting for Broadcast Journalists**  
**RTV 3305, Section 1B36 - Spring 2016**

**Class Time:** Tuesdays 10:40 a.m. – 1:40 p.m. (Periods 4-6)

**Class Location:** Weimer 3024

**Instructor:** Ginger Blackstone

**E-mail:** [gblackstone@ufl.edu](mailto:gblackstone@ufl.edu)

**Office:** Weimer 2019

**Office Hours:** Thursdays 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m., available other times by appointment

**Course Objective:**

Investigative journalism is the cornerstone of the Fourth Estate, tasked with holding those in power accountable to the people and the public good. In this class, students will explore investigative reporting techniques; practice obtaining and using public information for broadcast news stories; learn how to produce both in-depth investigative stories and use those skills to improve daily news reporting skills; discuss the practice of investigative reporting and its role in society; and produce in-depth news stories for TV and radio. In addition, students will build competencies in personal brand management to leverage their stories for career advancement.

**Goals:**

- Discuss the characteristics that are used to develop a solid investigative news story
- Identify credible reporting resources and be able to utilize resources for newsgathering
- Participate in class discussion as an informed journalist and collegial group member
- Prepare to apply for journalism positions with a resume and resume reel

**Required Readings:**

Investigative Reporting: From Premise to Publication

Author: Marcy Burstiner (2009)

ISBN-13: 978-1890871918

**Optional/Recommended Readings:**

The Investigative Reporters' Handbook

Author: Brant Houston & IRE, Inc. (2008)

ISBN-13: 978-0312589974

Government-in-the-Sunshine Manual

Author: Florida Office of the Attorney General (2015)

Publisher: First Amendment Foundation

## **Materials:**

- You will be provided an SD card for newsgathering. These cards will be issued in class.
- You are expected to be knowledgeable and proficient with the appropriate equipment necessary to execute your projects. If this is a problem, please alert me right away and we'll set up training.

## **Assignments:**

### **→ Investigative News Stories**

You are required to submit two investigative news stories over the course of the semester. One may be radio, but the other **MUST** be TV. If you are pursuing a TV news career, it is strongly encouraged that both stories be TV.

Each story **MUST** include:

1. A news peg! The story must be timely and have news value. What makes it important right now?
2. At least **ONE** audio or visual element that came from a public record or public access event, i.e., inside a courtroom (be sure the judge allows recordings!), a public meeting, data from public (but trustworthy) sources, surveillance video, FOIA, 9-1-1 calls, etc.
3. Sound from at least **THREE** people. One of those people should be your human storytelling perspective element, an individual directly affected by the story through whom the story is told. If your story doesn't have a central character or doesn't directly affect anyone, you'll want to reconsider the idea. Viewer benefit is essential to a good broadcast news story.
4. At least **TWO** natsound breaks for TV stories or **THREE** natsound breaks for radio stories. TV stories must have a reporter standup. We want to see who is sharing this story with us.
5. **BALANCE** – we want to be sure you are representing all sides of the story. Give the accused the opportunity to defend themselves. Be critical but fair. An unfair or biased story will earn you a failing grade no matter how well it is written, shot, or edited. Objectivity is a cornerstone of journalism that will be strictly observed in this class.
6. **ATTRIBUTION** – where are you getting your information from? Be sure to be clear about your sources. Who said what? Where do these facts come from? This will also help protect you from legal action. (And good investigative reporters get sued a lot.)
7. This class will utilize YouTube or Vimeo for project submission. You must have an account and, in order to meet deadlines, the content must be available for me to observe (set your security restrictions carefully!)
8. All TV stories must be submitted as complete packages and cannot run more than 3:30. I challenge you to keep them in the 2:30 range. Going less than 2:00 and more than 3:30 will result in grade penalties.
9. In lieu of a final exam, you will complete a resume reel project. This is designed to showcase your best work and prepare you for the job market. I encourage you now to go back through your personal archives and chase down any past work

that you may not have readily available. If you do not have much to showcase, consider covering extra stories for WUFT/WRUF newscasts.

10. This is a broadcast reporting class and, as such, you are expected to personally report stories and turn in news reports using your likeness and your voice.
11. Well executed stories will be shared with the WUFT news directors for possible broadcast.

### → Story Pitches

On scheduled pitch days, students will submit three story ideas in writing. These must be 1 page, typed, double spaced, 12 pt font, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman font. Each pitch must indicate whether the pitch is TV or radio, what investigative element will be used (see number 2 above), who will be interviewed, what visual elements you will use to tell the story (for TV) or compelling audio elements (for radio), and why you think the story is relevant or timely. This is your opportunity to really sell the story. You will use these sheets to pitch your story in class. The sheets are graded separately from the executed pkgs. Once your story is selected, you will have three weeks to execute it.

### → Deadlines

Deadlines are paramount in the industry. Missing a deadline can result in dismissal or suspension from your job. With that in mind, all work for this class is due at the beginning of class on the specified date.

For each 24 hours after the deadline, a letter grade is subtracted **INCLUDING** weekends. After ten calendar days, an automatic zero is given for the assignment without exception and cannot be made up.

In order for me to make mandatory final grading deadlines, ***late work will not be accepted for the final project.***

Technical difficulties or interview cancellations are not license to submit late work. Plan ahead and have a backup plan. *There is always at least one thing that does not go according to plan.* Give yourself room to troubleshoot.

### → Required Readings

You will have regular readings from the textbook and possibly other materials. The occasional quiz may be given in lieu or in addition to chapter homework.

### **Attendance & Participation:**

- Students are allowed ONE “freebie” absence and ONE late arrival without penalty. Additional absences and tardies will be unexcused. It is recommended that you save your freebies for emergencies.
- In extenuating circumstances, the instructor may agree to grant an excused absence with at least 24 hours’ advanced notice and for a substantially good reason, i.e. a conflict absolutely cannot be resolved. The only exception is in the case of illness, which

requires a doctor's note on or before the next class period. If you tell me you have a death in the family, do not be surprised if I investigate your assertion.

- ➔ Unexcused absences will cost you 10 points from your participation grade (the maximum amount per class). If you walk into class after attendance has been taken, it will cost you 5 points. You are expected to remain in class until it is dismissed by the instructor. Leaving early will result in an unexcused absence.
- ➔ If you use a “freebie” absence, assignments are still due at the beginning of class and subject to the deadline penalty policy if late.
- ➔ **THE FREEBIE ALLOWANCE DOES NOT APPLY TO PITCH DAYS.** You must be present in class and participate in the story pitch process in order to receive credit for the assignment. I will not accept late pitch sheets.
- ➔ If there is a quiz and you miss class for any reason, you must contact me and set up a time to make up the quiz before the next class period. Failure to do so will result in a zero for that quiz.
- ➔ If there is an in-class graded activity and you miss class, you will not be allowed to make up the activity. You must be present and participate in order to receive credit.
- ➔ You are expected to come to class prepared and actively participate in class discussions. Disruptive behavior or failure to participate in class discussions will negatively affect your participation grade.

### **Laptops & Cellphones:**

- ➔ During lectures and discussions, you are expected to pay attention, contribute to the discussion, and know the material. Do yourself a favor and keep your phones in a bag or pocket to avoid temptation. I promise to give you my undivided attention and, in exchange, I expect the same from you. The use of recording devices in class without prior permission from the instructor is prohibited.

### **Grades:**

10%	Pitch 1
10%	Pitch 2
5%	Draft Resume/Cover Letter
15%	Participation/In-class activities/Quizzes/Homework
20%	Investigative Story 1
20%	Investigative Story 2
5%	Revised Resume/Cover Letter
15%	Resume Reel

A handout that specifies grading rubrics for projects will be distributed in class at the time the assignment is explained.

**Grading Scale:**

A	92.5-100
A-	89.5-92.4
B+	86.5-89.4
B	83.5-86.4
B-	79.5-83.4
C+	76.5-79.4
C	73.5-76.4
C-	69.5-73.4
D+	66.5-69.4
D	63.5-66.4
D-	59.5-63.4
E	59.4 or below

**Extra Credit**

Extra credit opportunities to participate in research or other related projects may be offered at the instructor's discretion to boost the homework portion of your grade; although this is, in no way, guaranteed.

**E-Learning:**

As much as possible, this course will utilize the Canvas online platform for maintaining grades, attendance, and assignments (except video/audio project files that are too large to upload).

**Plagiarism:**

You are not permitted to recycle any work from another class. All work should be specifically produced for RTV 3305 and produced by you alone. You may recruit another student to help you shoot standups for your TV pkgs, but ALL other elements must be shot by YOU. All scripts are to be written by YOU without exception.

As any assignment in any course in UF, you are not allowed to copy work from another individual in any form. See the UF College of Journalism and Communications' Honor Code for further details: <http://www.jou.ufl.edu/academics/bachelors/journalism/academic-honesty/> Failure to comply with this policy can result in failing this course, as well as further action by the college and/or the UF Dean of Students Office.

*The use of video, images, or audio from third-party sources must be approved in advance, must come from sources that WUFT-TV has legal access to use, must not violate copyright laws, must be used in very limited amounts, and must be used only in cases where no other video or graphics will make sense for the story. Failure to comply with this mandate will*

***result in a failing grade on the assignment. Pulling media off of the Internet without prior written consent from the copyright holder is theft of property. This includes social media, YouTube, and Google. In addition to violating course policy, lifting media can get you into serious legal trouble***

**Equipment Checkout:**

There are television production kits assigned to RTV3305. You are allowed a one-day checkout, with the equipment due back by 9:00 a.m. the following morning. On Friday, equipment can be checked out until 9:00 a.m. Monday. Steve Kippert is the contact person.

There is a 24-hour wait to reserve equipment again once you bring it back. For special projects and situations, it may be possible to grant exceptions. Send me an e-mail in enough time that I can contact Steve Kippert on your behalf to try to arrange something. This is not a guarantee that the equipment will be made available.

There are a lot of people using this equipment. Reserve early. Arrange your shoots early. Don't procrastinate. Lack of equipment availability is not an acceptable reason to miss deadlines. Remember that there are two RTV3305 classes using this equipment.

If you miss equipment deadlines and lose equipment access, you are responsible for remedying the situation. I will not and cannot override the equipment policies established by the UF Department of Telecommunication/WUFT.

I strongly advise you to respect that this is expensive equipment. Do not leave it unattended. Do not leave it in your car. Do not leave it in excessive hot or cold temperatures. Do not expose it to humidity or moisture. Do not expose it to extreme conditions. Do not allow other students or friends access to it for any purpose. Do not leave it in a place where your dog can chew on it. You may be responsible for repair costs.

A hard copy of the WUFT equipment policy will be distributed to the class. ***Any equipment checkout violations will result in 10 points off of the student's project grade for each violation.***

***The equipment is the sole property of the University of Florida. You are to use the designated equipment only to generate content for this class. All course content is also the sole property of the university. You do not have the right to sell or distribute it to any other broadcast or media outlet or entity without the express permission of the University of Florida.***

**Disabilities:**

If you have a disability that requires special consideration from the course instructor, you must self-identify with the instructor and register with the UF Dean of Students Office. Accommodations will be arranged. More information is available from the Disability Resource Center online: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

## Course Schedule for RTV3305-Section 1B36, Spring 2016

*The instructor reserves the right to make changes to accommodate unforeseen circumstances; however, any changes will be clearly announced in class*

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<b>January 5</b>	Course Introduction, Syllabus Review Documentary: “Watergate: Shadow of History” (117 mins.) Class discussion
<b>January 12</b>	What constitutes investigative reporting? Chapter 1: Introduction/Overview “All the President’s Men” (138 minutes) Class discussion
<b>January 19</b>	Digging for Data Chapter 2: Finding the Story Chapter 3: Setting up your Investigation Award-winning Investigative Work
<b>January 26</b>	Pitch Day Protocols & Investigative Story Assignments Chapter 14: Pitching Your Story Chapter 4: Requesting Public Records
<b>February 2</b>	Pitch Day 1 Chapter 6: The Interview Process Personal Branding: What makes a good resume & cover letter?
<b>February 9</b>	Bolstering Information & Investigative Might Chapter 7: Analyzing the Big Story Chapter 8: Documenting the Story Draft Resumes & Cover Letters Due
<b>February 16</b>	Telling the Story Chapter 10: Shaping the Story Chapter 11: Writing the Story
<b>February 23</b>	Investigative Story 1 Due Watch/listen to reports Mandatory class & self-critiques due

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<b>March 1</b>	Spring Break, no class
<b>March 8</b>	Pitch Day 2 Personal Brand Management: Resume Reels Explained Chapter 9: Finding & Using Data
<b>March 15</b>	Famous Investigative Lawsuits: What went wrong? Chapter 12: Legal & Ethical Considerations
<b>March 22</b>	Chasing Additional Records, Pushing Through Roadblocks Chapter 13: Advanced Methods Overview Guest Speaker TBD
<b>March 29</b>	Investigative Story 2 Due Watch/listen to reports Mandatory class/self-critiques due
<b>April 5</b>	The Legacy of Edward R. Murrow & McCarthyism/Red Scare Showtime: "Good Night and Good Luck" (93 mins.) Class discussion
<b>April 12</b>	Last Day of Class Final Resumes, Cover Letters, & Resume Reels Due Watch reels in class Mandatory class/self-critiques due