

Investigative Reporting for Broadcast Journalists
RTV3305, Section 0269 - Summer A 2016

Class Time: Mon & Wed 9:30a.m.-12:15p.m. (Periods 2-3); Fri 9:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m. (Period 2)

Class Location: Nuclear Science Center, Room 225

Instructor: Ginger Blackstone

E-mail: gblackstone@ufl.edu

Office: Weimer 2019

Office Hours: Thursday 1 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.; available other times by appointment

Course Objective:

Investigative journalism is the cornerstone of democracy's 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.

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
- Recognize what makes a well-executed investigative report and what responsibilities and/or impact that may have on the community and those featured in such reporting, be it potential professional, legal, or social ramifications

Required Textbook:

Investigative Reporting: From Premise to Publication

Author: Marcy Burstiner (2009)

ISBN-13: 978-1890871918

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 and software 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 this accelerated summer semester. One will be for radio and the other will be for TV. Each story must include:

1. NEWS PEG – The story must be timely and have news value. What makes it important and relevant right now?
2. INVESTIGATIVE ELEMENT – 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 such as a city council, data from public (but trustworthy) sources such as police reports, surveillance video, FOIA, 9-1-1 calls, etc. You are also responsible for making sure such information comes from a reliable, valid source on which you would stake your reputation.
3. PEOPLE – Sound from at least three people. One of those should be your “person of interest,” an individual directly affected by the story through whom the story is told. This gives the story a “face” and allows viewers to develop empathy with your character and the story. If your story doesn’t have a central character, you’ll want to reconsider the idea.
4. NATSOUND – At least two natsound breaks for TV stories or THREE natsound breaks for radio stories.
5. BALANCE – you must present all sides of the story. Give the accused the opportunity to defend themselves. Be critical but fair. Objectivity is a cornerstone of journalism that will be strictly observed.
6. ATTRIBUTION – from where or whom are you getting your information? Who said what? Who gave you this information? Be clear. This will also help protect you from legal action. Assertions presented as facts without attribution will result in grade penalties.
7. PRESENTATION – This class will utilize YouTube or Vimeo for video project submissions. You must have an account and, in order to meet deadlines, the content settings must be set so that I am able to see the project. If I receive a project and cannot view the project, you may receive a zero or late penalties. *This is your responsibility as part of making deadline.*
8. TIME LIMITS – All radio/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. **STANDUPS** – This is a broadcast reporting class and, as such, you are expected to personally report stories using your likeness and your voice. TV stories in this class must also have a reporter standup.
10. **ON-AIR** – While not mandatory, you will be permitted to share well-executed stories with the WUFT/WRUF news directors for possible broadcast *after they're graded*. Do NOT submit your stories directly to student producers without management approval. If your story is particularly sensitive, you may file the story as simply a project for a grade in this class. It's up to you.

Story Pitches:

Each radio/TV story begins with a story pitch on a designated pitch day. Each student will prepare and submit three investigative story ideas in writing and use this information to pitch the story to the rest of the class.

Each pitch must indicate what investigative element will be used (see number 2 above), who will be interviewed, what visual elements will be presented to tell the story (for TV) or compelling audio elements (for radio), and why the story is timely and relevant to the community. A template is provided that spells out each required element in order to receive full credit. A well-researched pitch can lead to a successful execution later.

You will pitch your top story idea in class and the class as a group will weigh in. Your pitches are your opportunity to really sell the stories you want to cover. Each student must pursue a different story—no duplications—and topics are first-come, first-served. Story pitches are graded separately from projects.

Required Readings:

You will have regular readings from the textbook and other supplementary materials. Quizzes will be given to evaluate reading comprehension ahead of class discussion. The class will also utilize some in-class projects related to the reading assignments.

Deadlines:

Deadlines are paramount in the industry. 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 10 days, there is no grade left to give other than a zero. Because of the expedited nature of the summer semester, it is strongly encouraged that you stay on top of assignments.

Technical difficulties or interview cancellations are not license to submit late work without penalty. Plan ahead and have a backup plan. It is strongly recommended that you give yourself room to troubleshoot last minute problems.

In order for me to make mandatory final grading deadlines, *late work will not be accepted for the final project*. All work for the semester, late or otherwise, must be submitted on or before the final day of class, June 17th.

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class and counts as 10% of your final grade. Because of the accelerated nature of the summer course, there is no “excused/unexcused” distinction. All absences count. Arriving late or leaving early counts as a half-absence.

In extenuating circumstances, the instructor might agree to grant half-credit for an absence for a substantially good reason, i.e. death in the family, emergency, etc., but this is not guaranteed. You must contact me before the class period. In the case of illness, please keep your germs at home, but you must present a doctor’s note on or before the next class period for partial credit.

Even if there is an extenuating circumstance, all assignments remain due at the beginning of class and subject to deadline penalties.

If you are absent for any reason, you cannot receive credit for class participation or an in-class graded activity. You must be present and participate in order to receive credit.

Missing class to shoot interviews for this class or another RTV class is not an extenuating circumstance. Absences will count per usual.

You are expected to come to class prepared and actively participate. Failure to participate will negatively affect your participation grade. Participation grades are typically 10 points per class. If you offer interesting points that demonstrate you did your homework, you’ll get a 10. If you come and sit quietly, you’ll get a 7. If you do not show, you’ll get a zero. Points are subtracted for cellphone use. If you fall asleep, you’ll get a 0.

During class discussions, you must respect the opinions of your fellow classmates even if you disagree. Debate is welcome and encouraged, but comments are to be appropriate. Personal attacks will not be tolerated. The instructor reserves the right to evict anyone from class for disruptive, disrespectful, inappropriate, unusual, or extreme behavior.

Laptops, Cellphones, & Other Electronic Devices

During discussions, you are expected to pay attention, contribute ideas/thoughts, and know the assigned materials. You may use laptops or tablets to take notes but cell phone usage will erode your participation score. I strongly advise you to keep phones in a bag or pocket. I promise to give you my undivided attention and I expect the same from you.

If I catch anyone texting, using social media, or shopping online during class at any time, he or she will automatically receive zero participation points. Please pay attention.

Because of privacy rights, the use of any recording devices in class without prior permission from the instructor and the consent of each student in attendance is prohibited.

Grades

Your final grade will be generated by the following weightings:

10%	Attendance
15%	Participation/Graded In-Class Activities
15%	Story Pitches
20%	Quizzes/Homework
20%	Investigative Radio Story
20%	Investigative TV Story

Grading Scale (percentages):

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

A handout that specifies directions and grading rubrics for each project will be distributed in class at the time the assignment is explained. All handouts and rubrics will also be posted in Canvas under Modules/Resources for easy access. If an assignment is confusing to you, please bring that to my attention before the assignment is due.

E-Learning:

This course will utilize the Canvas online platform for maintaining grades, attendance, class materials, feedback, and assignments. You may check individual or cumulative grades at any time.

You are encouraged to review your grades and posted feedback throughout the semester. If at any time you see evaluations or grading that you believe to be incorrect, you are encouraged to bring this to my attention right away so we can discuss it and make any appropriate revisions. Grade revisions, however, are not guaranteed. Waiting until the end of the semester to request adjustments is strongly discouraged and less likely to be successful.

Once final grades are submitted to the registrar, changes will be considered only in the most extreme of cases and may require additional documentation or action.

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

Plagiarism

You are not permitted to recycle any work from another class. All work should be specifically produced for RTV3305 and produced by you alone. You may recruit another student to help you shoot STANDUPS for your solo TV pkg, but ALL other elements must be shot by YOU. All scripts are to be written by YOU. All assignments must be completed by YOU.

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, department, 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.

Equipment Checkout

Specific television production kits are 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 equipment manager in the checkout room on the ground floor of Weimer Hall.

There is a loading zone available on the ground level parking lot in the back of Weimer Hall dedicated to picking up or dropping off equipment. Any abuse of the loading zone may result in your car being ticketed or towed. If something does happen to your car, the responsibility is yours alone.

You must have prior approval to take the equipment out of town. You must e-mail me in advance and I will relay your request to Steve along with my consent. A request does NOT guarantee an approval, but I will work with you to help you execute your story **if you give me time to do so**. Last minute requests will erode your chances of success.

There is a 24-hour waiting period to reserve equipment again once you bring it back. For special projects and situations, it may be possible to grant exceptions. Again, send me an e-mail in enough time that I can contact Steve Kippert on your behalf.

Reserve early. Be proactive about arranging shoots. Lack of equipment availability is not an acceptable reason to miss deadlines.

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.

EQUIPMENT SUSPENSIONS WILL BE UPHELD.

Furthermore, any equipment checkout violations will result in a 10 percent penalty (one letter grade) on the student's project grade for EACH violation.

A stern reminder 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 (and this is Florida).
- Do not expose it to humidity or moisture (again, Florida).
- 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.
- Never take it to the beach. (Sand is deadly to cameras.)

You may be held financially responsible for repairs or missing property.

A hard copy of the WUFT equipment policy will be distributed to the class and you will be asked to sign a document acknowledging you have received and understand the policy.

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 entity without the express permission of the University of Florida.

It is acceptable and encouraged that you post your work to a resume reel or online portfolio for the purposes of career advancement. You may also submit your work to WUFT/WRUF for possible broadcast *once it has been graded*. All work must be approved by the appropriate news manager before broadcast i.e. Bridget Grogan, Mark Leeps, Forrest Smith, etc.—not me and not student producers.

Disabilities

If you have a disability that requires special consideration from any UF 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 RTV3305-0269 Summer 2016

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to accommodate unforeseen circumstances; however, any changes will be announced in class and posted in Canvas.

WEEK 1

May 9, Monday	Course Introduction, Syllabus Review, Drop/Add “Watergate: Shadow of History” Documentary
May 11, Wednesday	Turning the Daily Headline into Something Bigger Chapter 1 & 2: Finding the Story
May 13, Friday	Selling Your Idea Chapter 14: Pitching Your Story

WEEK 2

May 16, Monday	Pitch Day: Investigative Radio Story
May 18, Wednesday	Laying the Groundwork Chapter 3: Setting up your Investigation
May 20, Friday	Digging for Data Chapter 4: Requesting Public Records

WEEK 3

May 23, Monday	Telling the Story: Broadcast Story Construction Chapter 6: Interviews
May 25, Wednesday	Finding the Holes in the Story Chapter 7: Analyzing the Big Story The Post-It Exercise
May 27, Friday	Investigative Radio Story Due/Listen to Reports

WEEK 4

May 30, Monday	Memorial Day Holiday
June 1, Wednesday	Pitch Day: Investigative TV Story
June 3, Friday	Bolstering Information & Investigative Might Chapter 8: Documenting the Story

WEEK 5

June 6, Monday	Proving It: Locating the Numbers Chapter 9: Finding & Using Data
June 8, Wednesday	Woodward & Burnstein's Legacy "All the President's Men"
June 10, Friday	Famous Investigative Lawsuits: What went wrong? Chapter 12: Legal & Ethical Considerations

WEEK 6

June 13, Monday	Personal Branding: Landing the Job Resumes, Cover Letters, Reels, & Portfolios
June 15, Wednesday	The Legacy of Edward R. Murrow "Good Night and Good Luck"
June 17, Friday	Last Day of Class Investigative TV Story Due/Watch Reports