

**Investigative Reporting for Broadcast Journalists**  
**RTV3305, Section 1835 - Spring 2017**

**Class Times:**

Monday 12:50 p.m.–1:40 p.m. (period 6)

Wednesday 12:50 p.m.–2:45 p.m. (periods 6 & 7)

**Class Location:** Weimer 3324, Canvas (This is a hybrid online/classroom course that will meet every other week. See course schedule for clarification.)

**Instructors/Office Hours:**

- Dr. Ginger Blackstone, available Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:00 p.m.–3:30 p.m. via Skype (ggbstone), 501-279-4040, [gblackstone@ufl.edu](mailto:gblackstone@ufl.edu)
- TA Laura Barrero, available in the INC Tuesday 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m., 305-815-6733, [laurabarr@ufl.edu](mailto:laurabarr@ufl.edu)

**Course Objective:**

Investigative journalism is democracy's Fourth Estate, tasked with holding those in power accountable to 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 in-depth investigative stories and how those skills can also improve daily reporting; discuss the practice of investigative reporting and its role in society; observe ethical and legal challenges to investigative work; and produce in-depth 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 discussions as an informed journalist and collegial group member
- Improve existing skills and resume tools to be more competitive in the job market
- Recognize what makes a well-executed investigative report and what impact it may have on the community, including potential professional, legal, or social ramifications

**Required Textbook:**

*Investigative Reporting: From Premise to Publication*

Author: Marcy Burstiner (2009)

ISBN-13: 978-1890871918

**Materials:**

- Students will each be issued an SD card for shooting video for this course.
- Students are expected to be knowledgeable and proficient with the appropriate equipment and software necessary to execute required projects.

## Assignments

### Investigative News Stories:

Students are required to submit two investigative news stories over the course of this semester. One of these stories may be for radio, but at least one story must be for television.

Each story must include:

1. NEWS PEG – The story must be timely and have news value.
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. Students are responsible for making sure such information comes from a reliable source.
3. PEOPLE – Sound from at least three people. One of those should be a “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. If there is no central character, the student may want to reconsider the story idea.
4. NATSOUND – Two natsound breaks for TV stories or three natsound breaks for radio.
5. BALANCE – Students must present all sides of the story, to give the accused the opportunity to defend themselves. Objectivity will be strictly observed in this class.
6. ATTRIBUTION – From where or whom is the reporter getting the information? Be very clear about sources and avoid declarative statements presented as facts. “A hundred people every year die from salmonella poisoning” is incorrect. “The Center for Disease Control says a hundred people every year die from salmonella poisoning” is correct.
7. PRESENTATION – Each student must have a YouTube or Vimeo account to upload stories for this course, and the content settings must allow course instructors to view the stories. If a project is submitted that cannot be viewed, students will receive a warning on the first infraction; however if this happens again, the student may receive a zero or late penalties. *This is the student’s 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. The ideal time frame is 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, each student is expected to personally report stories using their own likeness and voice. TV stories in this class must also have a reporter standup.

10. GRAPHICS – Graphics are not mandatory, but often used to illustrate numbers typical of investigative TV pkgs. All graphics in this class should correspond to the WUFT format. Students may have someone familiar with the WUFT templates assist in building the graphics. DO NOT INCLUDE LOWER THIRD NAME/LOCATION SUPERS IN TV PKGS. Do include super information in the intro script.
11. SCRIPTS – As part of the investigative story assignment, students will also upload an anchor intro (with super information), the verbatim script of the pkg, and an anchor tag. It is not necessary to type these up in ENPS. Word is fine.
12. ON-AIR – While not mandatory, students are permitted to share well-executed stories from this class with the WUFT/WRUF news directors for possible broadcast *after they are graded*. Do NOT submit stories directly to student producers without management approval (i.e., Bridget Grogan, Mark Leeps, Forrest Smith). If a story is particularly sensitive, the student has the right to file the story as simply a project for a grade.

### **Story Pitches/Pitch Day:**

Each investigative story begins with a story pitch. Each student will submit three investigative story ideas in writing, then use those ideas to pitch their story of choice to the rest of the class.

Pitch day is students' opportunity to sell the stories they want to cover, while classmates have the opportunity to provide critical feedback and supportive ideas. Each student must pursue a different story—no duplications—and topics are first-come, first-served.

Students are advised to be strategic about story pitches. Students will have a limited time to execute stories and no extensions will be granted. It is strongly recommended that students conduct background research and make initial calls before pitching a story.

Only in extenuating circumstances will pitch day absences be excused. Students who miss class must still get their topic approved by the instructor, but after those students who attended class have submitted their pitches. Submitting an investigative story without topic approval ahead of time will result in a 10 point penalty on the project grade.

### **Required Readings:**

As this is an online hybrid class, a weekly “to do list” will post on Canvas every Wednesday afternoon that details the work required for the upcoming week. This may include chapter readings from the textbook, recorded lecture presentations, video clips or films to watch, and homework assignments or quizzes. Students may also be expected to make online discussion posts related to the relevant topics.

### **Deadlines:**

Deadlines are paramount in the industry. With that in mind, all work for this class is due at the posted time 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. In extenuating circumstances, late fees may be waived or reduced at the instructor's discretion. This typically requires documentation of some kind (doctor's note, etc.).

Technical difficulties or interview cancellations are not license to submit late work without penalty. It is strongly recommended that each student allow ample time to troubleshoot last minute problems. A strong plan B and strategic timing can make all the difference.

Telling me you will submit work late is appreciated, but that alone does not count as an extenuating circumstance that will result in waived penalties.

In order for the instructors to make mandatory final grading deadlines for the university, ***all work for the semester, late or otherwise, must be submitted on or before the final day of class, at the beginning of class time, Wednesday, April 19<sup>th</sup>. This includes the final project.***

### **Attendance & Participation**

Even though this is largely an online class, this class does meet every other week on Wednesdays. There are certain elements to this class that rely on feedback and participation. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class and will count as 10% of the student's final grade. On these days, Ms. Barrero will facilitate and Dr. Blackstone will Skype in as needed.

In extenuating circumstances, the instructor might agree to an excused absence for a substantially good reason, i.e. death in the family, emergency, etc., but this is not guaranteed. Students seeking approval must contact one of the instructors before the class period. In the case of illness, students are asked to please keep their germs at home, but a doctor's note must be presented in a timely fashion in order for the absence to be excused.

Even if there is an extenuating circumstance, all assignments remain due at the posted deadline dates/times and are subject to penalties if turned in late. **Deadlines are not automatically extended because of absences, excused or unexcused.**

Telling me you will be absent is appreciated, but that alone does not make an absence excused.

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

Each student is expected to come to class prepared and actively participate. During class discussions, students must respect the opinions of fellow classmates even if there is disagreement. Debate is welcome and encouraged, but comments are to be appropriate. Personal attacks will not be tolerated. The instructors reserve the right to evict anyone from class for disruptive, disrespectful, inappropriate, unusual, or extreme behavior. This includes sleeping.

### **Laptops, Cellphones, & Other Electronic Devices**

During classroom discussions, students are expected to pay attention, contribute ideas/thoughts, and know the assigned materials. Students may use laptops or tablets to take notes. It is strongly advised that all students store their phones in a bag or pocket out of sight. Texting in class is

disrespectful and highly irritating to instructors. Online shopping or social media usage is grounds for dismissal from class.

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

## Grades

Final grades will be generated by the following weightings:

10%	Attendance
25%	Quizzes/Homework/Online Discussions
15%	Resume Reel/Resume/Cover Letter
25%	Investigative Story 1/Story Pitch 1
25%	Investigative Story 2/Story Pitch 2

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 posted in Canvas at the time the assignment is revealed. All handouts and rubrics will also be posted under Modules/Resources for easy access. If an assignment is confusing to any student, he or she is advised to meet with one of the instructors for clarification *before the assignment is due*.

### **E-Learning:**

This course will utilize Canvas for maintaining assignments, grades, attendance, feedback, and announcements. Students may check individual or cumulative grades at any time. Students are also encouraged to review posted feedback in a timely manner. If at any time evaluations or grades appear to be incorrect, students are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the instructors right away. 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 to boost the homework portion of students' grades, although this is not guaranteed. The maximum cap for extra credit or any other grade in this course is 100%.

## Plagiarism

Students are not permitted to recycle work from another class. Students are not allowed to copy work from another individual in any form. All work should be specifically produced for RTV3305 and produced by each student alone. Students may recruit another student to shoot standups for TV pkgs, but ALL other elements must be shot by the student alone. All scripts are to be written by the student alone. All assignments must be completed by the student alone.

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.

*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. Students 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 are time-restricted parking spaces available to students on the ground level parking lot in the back of Weimer Hall dedicated to picking up or dropping off camera equipment. Any abuse of this loading zone may result in students' cars being ticketed or towed.

Students must have prior approval to take the equipment out of town. Students must e-mail one of the instructors in advance and the request will be relayed to Mr. Kippert along with consent. A request does NOT guarantee approval, but the instructors will work with students to assist in their stories for this course **if students allow the appropriate amount of time for the instructors to do so**. Last minute requests will erode the chances of success.

There is a 24-hour waiting period to reserve equipment again once it is brought back. For special projects and situations, it may be possible to grant exceptions. Again, students may send one of the instructors an e-mail in enough time to allow the instructors to contact Mr. Kippert.

Students are strongly advised to reserve equipment early and be proactive about arranging shoots. Lack of equipment availability is not an acceptable reason to miss deadlines.

**Students who miss equipment deadlines and lose equipment access are responsible for remedying the situation. Neither Dr. Blackstone nor Ms. Barrero will 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 reminder that this is expensive equipment.

- Do not leave it unattended.
- Do not leave it in the 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.)

Students 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 all students will be asked to sign a document acknowledging they have received and understand the policy.

The equipment is the sole property of the University of Florida. The equipment is to be used only to generate content for this class. All course content is also the sole property of the university. Students do not have the right to sell or distribute video or other materials to any other entity without the express permission of the University of Florida.

### **Disabilities**

Any student with a disability that requires special consideration from any UF course instructor 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/>