

**JOU 4930**  
**Reporting from Ground Zero**  
Thursday periods 6-7 (12:50 p.m. to 2:45 p.m.), 3334 Weimer Hall

**Professor: Moni Basu**

**Office: 3327 Weimer Hall**

**Email: [Mbasu@ufl.edu](mailto:Mbasu@ufl.edu)**

**Phone: 352.273.3529** (Best to email me first and set up a time to talk.)

**Office Hours: Wednesdays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. or by appointment**

War, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, mass shootings, terrorist attacks, political revolutions. These chaotic and often tragic events don't bode well for the planet, but they can result in amazing stories for journalists.

How do you report a story when you are in the line of fire? Or when the winds are gusting at 150 miles an hour? How do you get your story out safely under such trying circumstances? And how do you ensure you are reporting fairly and accurately when you are under so much pressure?

These are the kinds of questions we will tackle in this class.

My intent is to expose you to reporting that can be difficult and dangerous. I hope this course will raise your awareness level of this kind of work and help prepare you to cover such stories.

You will hear from guest speakers – veteran journalists and disaster experts – who will discuss reporting as well as critical life skills needed to operate in challenging situations. You will go through simulated exercises and also be asked to report breaking news stories happening around us (example: Hurricane Michael).

We will discuss the challenges journalists face when they are reporting across cultural and national boundaries, including language barriers, focusing on everything from logistical issues to how to report sensitively on victims of trauma. We will discuss best practices when interviewing people who have suffered great loss and hardship. Last but not least, we will explore what you can do as journalists to develop self-care methods after being exposed to tragedy.

In this course, you will:

- Dissect the coverage of the big news stories of our day
- Discuss why it's important to have journalists on the ground
- Learn ways to prepare yourself – physically and mentally -- for parachuting into unfamiliar and potentially hostile or dangerous territories
- Get hands-on training in emergency preparedness
- Hear testimonials of veteran reporters who have covered challenging stories
- Discuss best practices when covering people who have suffered trauma

- Understand how to ethically and safely report across cultures and deal with language barriers
- Identify and utilize sources of information for international stories, including but not limited to online databases, think tanks, NGOs, UN agencies, experts, scholarly research, activists and people on the ground
- Understand the pros and cons of digital technology
- Be presented with difficult scenarios that you will work through
- Report from a breaking news event (if one happens within our reach)
- Discuss how to take care of yourself during and after a traumatic event

### **REQUIRED READING:**

There are no textbooks for this class. But you will be assigned weekly readings. You will also be expected to keep up with the news of the day from reading media outlets online such as The Associated Press, The New York Times and CNN.com. You will be quizzed on current events as well as on the reading material. Good reporters are voracious readers!

### **SUPPLIES**

You will need notebooks and a recording device, if your phone does not have a voice recorder.

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

If a big news story is breaking around us, you will be expected to report from the scene. If no such event happens during the semester or you are unable to cover the story because of class conflicts, your main reporting assignment will be a term paper. You must clear the subject of your term paper with me.

### **GRADING**

You will be judged on the quality of your work and how well you comprehend the material presented in this class. Your final grade will be determined by the points you earn for each assignment. We will use email for filing your work. Grades will be posted in Canvas.

#### **Total points: 1000**

Breaking news assignment or term paper: 300 points

Final exam: 200 points

Writing assignments: 200 points

In-class quizzes: 200 points

Class participation: 100 points

#### **Grading scale:**

A 925-1000

A- 900-924

B+ 875-899

B	825-874
B-	800-824
C+	775-799
C	725-774
C-	700-724
D+	675-699
D	625-674
D-	600-624
F	623 and below

More information on grades and grading policies is here:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

### **ACCURACY, FAIRNESS AND STYLE**

Your assignments must be factually correct. You must review your stories and double check every fact. That includes the names of people, places and organizations. You are expected to have a strong command of spelling and grammar and will lose points (at my discretion) for mistakes. You will also lose points for failing to adhere to AP style. This is an advanced journalism class and I expect your copy to be clean and polished when you turn it in.

You are also expected to engage in storytelling that is fair, complete and based on information gathered from diverse sources. A greater understanding of societal differences will help you become reporters who are sensitive, culturally aware and better equipped to write across differences. Please pay attention not just to race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation but also to class, age, education, geography, occupation and religion.

It's always best to conduct interviews in person. You may also speak with people by phone but avoid email interviews.

### **HONESTY AND INTEGRITY**

The media plays a vital role in our democracy. The public depends on journalists for news and a deeper understanding of the world around them. As such, there is nothing more important than our honesty, fairness and credibility.

I cannot stress this enough: Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest will not be tolerated and **you will fail** not just the assignment but the entire class.

Plagiarism is stealing someone else's ideas or work, including chunks of copy from the Internet. Fabrication is the use of invented information or the falsification of material. Conflicts of interest include writing about your roommate, boyfriend, parents, business partners or others with whom you have close relationships or financial ties. If you are unsure about whether you are facing a conflict of interest, please discuss with me.

You are expected to abide by the **UF Honor Code**, which you can read here:  
<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

## **DEADLINES**

In the world of professional journalism, deadlines are critical, as they will be in this class. On deadline dates, your writing assignments will be due within the first 5 minutes of class. After that, your piece will be considered late and you will lose points on that assignment.

## **ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION AND DEMEANOR**

This class meets only once a week and your attendance is mandatory. You are expected to arrive to class on time and behave in a manner that is respectful to me and your fellow students. Please refrain from using cell phone or any other devices that ring, chirp, beep or make any other sounds. Please keep laptops closed unless you are asked to write in class. Your class notes must be handwritten. Also, please refrain from eating food and other distractions in class.

You are expected to come to class each week fully prepared to participate in activities and discussions. Because your contribution is important, class participation makes up 100 points of your final grade. You will lose points for participation after two unexcused absences.

Please note that participation doesn't just mean speaking a lot; you will be judged on the quality of what you say and how focused you are in class, even when you are not speaking. Your insights and comments should be respectful to all.

Absences for serious illness, family emergencies and other urgent matters will be excused only if you notify me before class begins. If you need to miss multiple classes, you will be required to provide appropriate documentation of the problem. You will still be responsible for making up in-class quizzes, submitting on time all assignments on their due dates and for material covered in class. Instructions for assignments will be given in class so it's in your best interest to be present each week.

## **STUDENT RESOURCES**

If you need a little extra help with writing, organizing and editing your stories, the **UF Writing Studio**, located at 302 Tigert Hall, may be able to help. You can also get online tutoring. For more information, go to: <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

Mental health is extremely important. The **UF Counseling and Wellness Center** is free for all students. Please use this fantastic resource if you are having trouble coping. You can reach a support staff member between 8am-5pm Monday through Friday at [352-392-1575](tel:352-392-1575). The center's address is 3190 Radio Road. You can see all the services the center provides at: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the **Disability Resource Center** 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. Call 352-392-8565 or go to: [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)

## **ABOUT ME**

I began my career as a journalist in Tallahassee (home of that “other” university) and have been reporting and editing now for 35 years. I have been covering the Iraq War since its inception in 2003. On several trips, I was embedded with the U.S. Army and earned the moniker, Evil Reporter Chick -- affectionately, of course. My e-book, *Chaplain Turner’s War* (2012, Agate Publishing) grew from a series of stories on an Army chaplain at war. I’m not a super hero but I was featured in Marvel Comics’ “Civil War” series. Most recently, I was a senior writer at CNN. This is my second semester teaching in Gatorland.

You can find me on:

[www.monibasus.com](http://www.monibasus.com)

Twitter: @TheMoniBasu

Instagram: @evilreporterchick

And my journalist Facebook page: <https://bit.ly/2KCXScJ>

## **SCHEDULE**

This is a new course and the schedule is **an estimation** of how we will proceed this semester. It is **subject to change** depending on guest speakers and other needs of the class. All readings and assignments should be completed by start of class on the due date. Quizzes will be unannounced and frequent.

### **Week 1, Jan. 10**

Introduction to the class. Why we need journalists on the ground.

Go over syllabus and expectations.

**Watch:** TED talk by war correspondent Janine di Giovanni

**Reading assignment:** “The Girls at the Front.” *Vanity Fair*

### **Week 2, Jan. 17**

Risk assessment and preparedness.

**Watch:** Video of Eman Mohammed, Palestinian photojournalist

**Watch:** Video of Ammera Houda, fixer in Gaza

Physical and emotional limitations; developing and verifying sources; sexual violence; security and arms; dealing with threats

### **Week 3, Jan. 24**

More on preparedness: What’s in your bag?

Logistics and planning

**Week 4, Jan. 31**

**Guest speaker:** Kathy Gannon, AP bureau chief, Islamabad. Come to class with many questions!

**Week 5, Feb. 7**

Covering a political convention

**Reading assignment:** “Photojournalists are bringing gas masks and Kevlar to the Republican National Convention.” *PetaPixel*

“Tennis balls, coolers, lasers: What’s been banned at the RNC.” USA Today

“Journalists and news outlets prepare for security challenge during political conventions.” Politico

**Week 6, Feb. 14**

Lessons from Ferguson

Bias and stereotypes; the importance of sourcing and verification; the power of social media

**Reading assignment:** “You’re Asian, right? Why are you even here?” *Politico*

“How the Times covered Ferguson.” New York Times

**Week 7, Feb. 21**

Alachua County Sheriff demonstration on safety and emergency medical care. Please note this class may take place off campus.

**Week 8, Feb. 28**

Digital security and using social media.

Banjo demonstration via Zoom

**Watch:** short film on the internet

**Watch:** Jason Reich videos on digital security

**Week 9, March 7**

Spring Break. No class. Enjoy!

**Week 10, March 14**

Covering mass shootings and terrorist attacks.

**Guest speaker:** Reporter and recent CJC grad Caitie Switalski on the Parkland shootings.

**Reading assignment:** TBD

**Week 11, March 21**

International reporting.

**Guest speaker:** CNN senior correspondent and UF grad Sara Sidner

**Reading assignment:** “Safety Guide for Journalists.” Reporters Without Borders

**Week 12, March 28**

Covering war and natural disasters (part 1).

**Film:** “Jim: The James Foley Story”

**Reading assignment:** “James Foley’s Choices.” *New Yorker*. And “The Rules of Conflict Reporting are Changing.” The Committee to Protect Journalists

**Week 13, April 4**

Covering war and natural disasters (part 2).

Interviewing victims of trauma

**Guest speakers:** Kari Pricher, producer of CNN’s AC360 and Frank Ochberg of the Dart Center on Journalism and Trauma

**Reading assignment:** “Why the best war reporter in a generation suddenly had to stop.” *Esquire*

**Week 14, April 11**

Taking care of yourself.

PTSD among journalists. Things you can do for self-care after witnessing tragedy.

**Reading assignment:** “The Road to Ward 17: My Battle with PTSD.” Reuters

**Week 15, April 18**

Last class. Open discussion.

**Watch:** Tom Hundley video

**Week 16, April 25**

Reading day. No class.

**Week 17, May 2**

**Final exam.**