

JOU 4123: Investigative Journalism

Fall semester 2019, University of Florida

R | Period 8 - 10 (3:00 PM - 6:00 PM)

Instructor

Adam Playford (727) 893-8575

adam.playford@gmail.com

Office hours: By appointment by phone/email

Office: 490 1st Ave. S, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Instructor

Kathleen McGrory (727) 893-8330

kathleen.mcgrory@gmail.com

Office hours: By appointment by phone/email

Office: 490 1st Ave. S, St. Petersburg, Fla.

OBJECTIVES

In this hands-on class, you'll learn how to shine a light on wrongdoing and unearth stories that powerful people wish would remain hidden. Working as a team, you'll scour public records, develop sources and piece it all together into a powerhouse investigation. Our goal will be to publish in a professional news outlet.

HOW THIS CLASS WORKS

We'll start each class with an hour-long lecture. After that, we'll assign specific tasks for the class investigation. You'll execute some of those tasks during class. But you'll also be expected to put in between three and five hours of work outside of class each week.

Some classes will be taught in person. Others will be taught remotely. We'll let you know by Thursday morning what to expect. When we teach remotely, we expect you to be in the classroom so that you can work collaboratively with your classmates on your project. We will also have frequent guest speakers.

This class won't have a textbook, but we encourage you to get a student membership to Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) at ire.org/membership. At \$25, it is a bargain, and you'll have access to some of the best resources out there.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1 — August 22, 2019

Lecture: Introduction to this class and investigative reporting

Due: Nothing

Week 2 — August 29, 2019

Lecture: What makes a good investigation; story scouting; writing a project plan

Due: First weekly memo

Week 3 — September 5, 2019

Lecture: Reporting with records

Due: Project plan (Team A and B)

Week 4 — September 12, 2019

Lecture: Reporting with data

Due: Second weekly memo

Week 5 — September 19, 2019

Lecture: Getting sources to trust you; handling difficult interviews; levels of attribution

Due: Third weekly memo

Week 6 — September 26, 2019

Lecture: Honing your thesis; staying organized amid the chaos; project management

Due: Fourth weekly memo

Week 7 — October 3, 2019

Lecture: Bulletproofing your investigation

Due: Fifth weekly memo

Week 8 — October 10, 2019

Lecture: All about structure

Due: Sixth weekly memo

Week 9 — October 17, 2019

Lecture: Ledes and nut grafs

Due: Seventh weekly memo

Week 10 — October 24, 2019

Lecture: Writing with humanity

Due: Eighth weekly memo

Week 11 — October 31, 2019

Lecture: Deep dive into Tyler Pipe

Due: First draft due

Week 12 — November 7, 2019

Lecture: Introduction to investigative editing

Due: Nothing

Week 13 — November 14, 2019

Lecture: Fact checking your investigation

Due: Second draft due

Week 14 — November 21, 2019

Lecture: Publishing your story, using social media, handling pushback, class recap

Due: Copies of your fact check, **the final story**

GRADE CALCULATION: 1,000 points total

Weekly memos: 400 points (40 percent)

Reporting plan: 100 points (10 percent)

Fact-checking: 100 points (10 percent)

Final story: 300 points (30 percent)

Attendance/participation: 100 points (10 percent)

You will submit 10 **weekly memos** over the course of the semester. They will be due by 6 p.m. Wednesday. For each memo, please describe in news copy the results of your reporting from the prior week. That should include interviews (list sources' names, titles, phone numbers, email addresses and what the person said), summaries of material you've learned from research or documents, any public record requests you filed and any data you analyzed. Memos should be written in story form (i.e. not in notes) and submitted through Canvas AND filed in our Google Drive.

In late August, you will learn what makes a good **project plan** and how to write one. Then, each team will craft 1- or 2-page plans outlining their work and goals.

Once we've finalized our investigation, we will go through a **rigorous fact-checking process**. The process will begin in class, but you will be expected to work on it outside of class. To get full credit, you'll have to show your work.

The class will receive a grade based on the quality of the investigation. If the story is not ready for publication by November 21, the entire class will lose points. If the project falls apart (as projects sometimes do), each student will have the opportunity to write an essay detailing what they learned from the experience. But they will only be eligible for 200 of the 300 points.

Any fact errors will result in an automatic penalty of one letter grade for that reporter.

OUR GRADING SCALE

A = 94-100

A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86
B- = 80-82
C+ = 75-79
C = 70-74
C- = 67-69
D+ = 63-66
D = 60-63
D- = 55-59
F = 54 or below

GRADING POLICIES

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

ATTENDANCE AND RULES OF THE ROAD

Class attendance is mandatory and critical to understanding the concepts. Students with unexcused absences will lose points available for class participation. Absences approved by the instructors in advance, or those due to extreme circumstances such as illness or emergency, may be forgiven at the discretion of the instructors.

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>.

Discussions in class may include information about professional 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.

CLASSROOM TECHNOLOGY

This is a hands-on/distance learning course, meaning you'll spend much of the class on computer. Computers 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 by the instructor based on the infraction and whether a student had been previously warned. The same rules apply for cell phones and other electronic devices.

ACCOMMODATION 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/) 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.

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.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

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.