

Investigative Reporting for Broadcast Journalists

RTV 3305 Thursday 4:05-7:05pm
Weimer #3334 (INC 3rd Floor)
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Office Hours: R 2-4pm, F 9:40-10:40am, or by appt.

PURPOSE OF COURSE:

This course is designed to help prepare students for work in news with a focus on broadcast platforms. During the course, you will write, shoot, edit, and report your stories on camera. You will also learn about investigation techniques, tools, and public records law to aid in uncovering the Truth. You are expected to leave this course having created award-winning content and ready for employment at television stations or digital news outlets.

COURSE GOALS:

The goal of this course is to build a skill set that will enable you to work for a broadcast news organization. This includes:

1. Synthesizing theory and putting it into practice.
2. Identify, request, and incorporate public records in news reporting.
3. Plan and research for mid and long range investigations.
4. Create graphics and visual elements that enhance visual storytelling.
5. Build a reporting reel needed for the job application process.
6. Publish all work.

INSTRUCTOR'S ADVICE:

This is a very “hands-on” course because you only develop these skills with practice. That is

why your projects weigh so heavily in determining your grade. Public records requests can take time. Many hours can be spent researching and digging in an effort to find the Truth. This project based course requires you to properly budget your time. Start early and work ahead. You will hit snags, bumps in the road, interviews that fall through. This is no excuse for missing deadlines. We have a limited number of cameras and camera availability is not an excuse for missing a deadline.

I want to see every student grow and be successful. I need you to do your part- show up and participate. I am here to help you with this process. You are welcome to ask for help, more in depth information, assistance, or offer comments and suggestions. This course is designed specifically with you in mind.

REQUIRED READING:

The textbook will reinforce material taught in class. Our book can also be used as a resource with many examples to help facilitate understanding.

Required: *Government-in-the-Sunshine-Manual*. By: Florida Attorney General's Office (available to order at [http://myfloridalegal.com/webfiles.nsf/WF/MNOS-B9QQ79/\\$file/SunshineManual.pdf](http://myfloridalegal.com/webfiles.nsf/WF/MNOS-B9QQ79/$file/SunshineManual.pdf)).

Optional: Investigative Reporter & Editors is an organization that showcases strong enterprise and investigative reporting from across the country. An annual student membership costs \$25 and includes a number of resources, tip sheets, a website, and contacts. This is helpful for any reporter and can help you generate lots of great, impactful story ideas.

IRE also has a free weekly newsletter called "Local Matters." Sign up via this link:

https://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/manage/optin?v=001jNS0O4Ui3OO7md-9Ryd0WOKdq14U-VfK9aIRH18MLku7VRyaaHESUptkwHw-8FO3X8Dhpw6_U4bO-hrpYrIzmYZy_m-F01qUfYYiFg0mDpo%3D

GRADING:

Grading will be very strict in this course to mirror the pressure professional broadcast journalists face. The **point-based** grading scale in this class is: 93 - 100 (A), 90 - 92.99 (A-), 87 - 89.99 (B+), 83 - 86.99 (B), 80 - 82.99 (B-), 77 - 79.99 (C+), 73 - 76.99 (C), 70 - 72.99 (C-), 67 - 69.99 (D+), 60 - 66.99 (D), Below 60 (E). Note that there is *no rounding* in the points system. UF grading policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

****Disregard any percentage grades you see. You will strictly look at the number of points you acquire in this course (point total) to determine your grade in this course.**

The following are the components of your grade for the term:

Project 1 (Feature): 15 points

Project 2 (Enterprise): 20 points

Project 3 (You Pick): 20 points

Project 4 (Investigative): 25 points

Bi-weekly journalist conference: 15 points

Source and story idea lists: 5 points

*Please note: critiques are a vital part of this course and the broadcast news industry. The instructor reserves the right to show your projects publicly both on UF media properties and in class, which will be followed by public critiques. All critiques are meant to be constructive in nature and designed to facilitate professional growth.

Projects: Project due dates are listed in the schedule below. There will be a project sheet posted in canvas, explaining the requirements of each project. A rubric will also be posted in canvas so you can see how each project will be evaluated.

Bi-weekly journalist conference: Students are required to meet with Harrison every other week during the term, outside of the regularly scheduled class. This is an opportunity to get one-on-one guidance about your projects. This will ensure you are building the best possible project and managing your time appropriately. These meetings can be in person or via phone/facetime.

Source and story idea lists: We need to cultivate positive, helpful habits now. You are to assemble a working source list through this course. You will include the name, title, contact information, and how/why you interacted with of every single person you worked with on all four stories this term. This working source list will allow you to have an organized document you can refer to for use with future stories. You are also required to keep a running story ideas list. Jot down ideas when you see other great content, randomly think of something, read an article that inspires you, or have a productive conversation. This running list of story ideas will help make you the best enterprise/investigative reporter in your market.

STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO USE ANY NECESSARY EDITING SPECIAL

EFFECTS LIKE COLOR CORRECT, TRANSITIONS, AND GRAPHICS/ANIMATIONS IN ANY OF THEIR WORK.

The instructor reserves the right to offer extra credit assignments, which all students will have the opportunity to complete.

ABSENCES: Requirements for class attendance, newsroom shifts, and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found her: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> Students **will not** be permitted to make up in class assignments when absences are **unexcused** (including vacation or illness without doctor's note). The same policy applies to students arriving or leaving class early/late. Because project due dates are assigned in this syllabus at the beginning of the term, all work must be submitted by these deadlines. If you are absent on these days, you will need to submit the work ahead of time or make arrangements with the course instructor **BEFORE** the deadline. **Lastly, students will incur a five point FINAL grade deduction for each unexcused absence starting at the third unexcused absence. This includes any combination of class meetings AND newsroom shifts. Arriving late or leaving early will count as .25 of an absence. Four tardies equal one absence.**

Note: Students are NOT allowed to turn in any project work for this class that has also been used or will be used as an assignment, project, report or interview for any other class without prior agreement from the instructor.

Missed deadlines result in loss of points. Students will lose one point for each hour an assignment is late during the first five hours. After that, a student will lose five points per day. For Projects this means links must be emailed and hard copy scripts must be submitted on time or the assignment is NOT complete. Example: If an assignment is worth 20 points and it is turned in two days late, a student can only earn a maximum of 10 points. Fact errors can also result in failure of the assignment/project. Stories with conflicts of interest of the reporter will result in automatic failure. Grades on stories can be lowered (e.g. to zero) as the result of students misrepresenting themselves or otherwise being unprofessional while working on story assignments.

WITHDRAWAL POLICY

Not all classes fit your schedule or your academic plan, and I understand that. Please know, however, that I very much wish to meet with you before you drop (especially the deeper we get into the semester) to see what we can do to work through any challenges together. If you do have questions about how to drop or the impact on your transcript or financial aid, please visit the Academic Advising website.

SYLLABUS

Every effort has been made to create a syllabus that is as comprehensive and accurate as possible, but each class is a living entity and changes may arise. Please know I will notify you in writing as soon as any syllabus change may arise.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

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 (<http://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.

Note that failure to comply with this commitment will result in disciplinary action compliant with the UF Student Honor Code Procedures.

See <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/procedures/honorcode.php>

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

UF Counseling Services –Resources are available on-campus for students having personal problems or lacking clear career and academic goals. The resources include:

- UF Counseling & Wellness Center, 3190 Radio Rd, 392-1575, <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, counseling services and mental health services.
- U Matter, We Care: If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or call (352)392-1575 so a team member can reach out to the student.
- Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS). Student Health Care Center, 352-392-1161
- University Police Department 352-392-1111 or 911 for emergencies. www.police.ufl.edu

Academic Resources

- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career and job search services.
- E-Learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or email learning-support@ufl.edu
- Library Support, cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask
- Teaching Center, Broward Hall 352-392-2010. www.teachingcenter.ufl.edu
- Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall (352)846-1138. This service offers help with brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. www.writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio
- Student Complaints: https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities – Students Requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. That office will provide the student with documentation that he/she must provide to the course instructor when requesting accommodation.

SOFTWARE USE

Software Use – All faculty, staff and student of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

EVALUATIONS

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/>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(tentative, subject to change as needed)

Week 1 (8/22)

- Syllabus Review
- Introductions

- Equipment Policy review
- What makes a WINNING story (the formula)
- View Examples
- Characters/Sources for a story

Week 2 (8/29)

- Storytelling devices: Character-centered, hook, reveal
- Writing (in and out of bites, strong examples)
- Sound brings it home (Nats!)
- Watch examples
- Public Records/Investigations Part 1 (including vetting tips/ideas)

Week 3 (9/5)

- Photography
- Interview Techniques
- Creative Standups
- Examples
- Public Record/Investigations Part 2

Week 4 (9/12)

- Editing
- Graphics drive a point home
- Public Records/Investigations Part 3

Week 5 (9/19)

Project 1 Rough Draft Due by 4:05pm Eastern Time

- Story ideas (in the context of enterprise and investigative)
- Guest speaker

Week 6 (9/26)

Project 1 Final Version Due by 4:05pm Eastern Time

- Watch project 1
- Group critique
- Examples of packages and discussion

Week 7 (10/3)

- Journalism Advisory Council
- Public Records in class exercise
- Personalizing an investigation
- Finding Sources
- Work ahead: Investigative/record request (FOIA) updates.
- Assessing our progress as a group.

Week 8 (10/10)

- Evaluating award-winning content
- Job search
- Last minute enterprise questions
- Guest speaker?

Week 9 (10/17)

Project 2 Rough Draft due by 4:05pm Eastern time

- Midterm feedback/assessment
- Creating a path forward based on student feedback

Week 10 (10/24)

Project 2 Final Version due by 4:05pm Eastern time

- watch final versions
- group critiques

Week 11 (10/31)

- Award winning project examples
- Guest Speaker

Week 12 (11/7)

Project 3 Rough Draft due by 4:05pm Eastern time

Week 13 (11/14)

Project 3 Final Version due by 4:05pm Eastern time

- Watch projects
- Group critique

Week 14 (11/21)

- **Source Lists/Story Idea generator due at 4:05pm Eastern time**

-Investigative planning

-Work group

-Parting words/thoughts

Week 15 (11/28)

No Class, Thanksgiving

Week 16 (12/5)

No Class-Reading Day

*****Project 4 Rough Draft is due by Tuesday, 12/3 by 5:00pm Eastern time.**

Finals Week

*****Project 4 Final Version is due by Monday, 12/9 by 12:00pm Eastern time.**

*****No gear from equipment room is to be checked out on finals week!**

Please note: This schedule is subject to change