

# JOU 4313 SPORTS REPORTING

Tuesday periods 9-11  
WEIM 1090

Adj. Prof. Zach Abolverdi

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No Office Hours; Please call/text (352) 283-3253

## COURSE OBJECTIVE

Instruction and practice in reporting sports with special emphasis on game coverage and interviewing techniques. Includes features, sidebars and press conference coverage. This course is designed to broaden and deepen a student's understanding of effective sports reporting and to sharpen and develop the student's writing, reporting and other skills required in today's industry.

## COURSE GOALS

- To expose you to multiple forms of sports reporting and improve your skill set.
- To learn techniques used by sports reporters and apply them to your career.
- To produce original content of professional quality across various genres.

## COURSE TOPICS

### Techniques

Understanding audiences  
Reporting/developing sources  
The art of interviewing  
Developing your voice  
Developing story ideas  
Working on deadline

### Genres

Game coverage (previews, recaps, sidebars)  
New coverage (original vs. aggregation)  
Commentary and analysis  
Writing features, profiles  
Multimedia: Video, podcasts  
Alternative story types

## READING

- The Year's Best Sports Writing 2023, edited by Richard Deitsch; recommended
- The Associated Press StyleBook; recommended
- Daily national and local sports coverage

## GRADING

You will be graded on a 1,500-point scale:

A: 93-100%	(1,395–1,500)	C: 73-76.9%	(1,095–1,154)
A-: 90-92.9%	(1,350–1,394)	C-: 70-72.9%	(1,050–1,094)
B+: 87-89.9%	(1,305–1,349)	D+: 67-69.9%	(1,005–1,049)
B: 83-86.9%	(1,245–1,304)	D: 63-66.9%	(945–1,004)
B-: 80-82.9%	(1,200–1,244)	D-: 60-62.9%	(900–944)
C+: 77-79.9%	(1,155–1,199)	F: 59.9%	(Below 899)

## CLASS SCHEDULE

**Week 1 (Jan. 9)** – Introduction: Overview of the course and syllabus

**Week 2 (Jan. 16)** – Understanding audience; What makes a good sports story?; Leads to stories

**Week 3 (Jan. 23)** – Game coverage: Traditional (previews/recaps/sidebars), Social media (live), multimedia (video/audio); class guest

**Week 4 (Jan. 30)** – Live Assignment 1: GHS basketball vs. Newberry, 7:30 PM (meet at the game, not on campus)

**Week 5 (Feb. 6)** – Class Assignment 1: Breaking news, deadline writing and building sources; Aggregation and attribution.

**Week 6 (Feb. 13)** – Live Assignment 2: Florida men's basketball vs. LSU, 8 PM (meet at the game, not on campus)

**Week 7 (Feb. 20)** – Beat coverage: Developing ideas, prioritizing stories and content planning; Class guest

**Week 8 (Feb. 27)** – Class Assignment 2: Press conferences; Getting (and using) quotes; Art of the interview; Q&A techniques

**Week 9 (March 5)** – Live Assignment 3: Florida men's basketball vs. Alabama (meet at the game, not on campus)

**Week 10 (March 12)** – No class, spring break

**Week 11 (March 19)** – Class Assignment 3: Commentary/analysis. Column writing (event/opinion columns); Pitching stories

**Week 12 (March 26)** – Reported storytelling. Short features, profiles, longform; working with editors; Class guest

**Week 13 (April 2)** – Live Assignment 4: Florida baseball vs. FAMU (meet at the game, not on campus)

**Week 14 (April 9)** – Class Assignment 4: FOIA requests and contract releases; Reporting on serious issues (injuries, concussions, legal and ethics)

**Week 15 (April 16)** – Live Assignment 5: Florida baseball vs. Jacksonville (meet at the game, not on campus)

**Week 16 (April 23)** – Individual meetings to review final project drafts/plans. Projects due May 1.

## ASSIGNMENT BREAKDOWN (1,500 points)

**600 points:** Live Assignments

**400 points:** Class Assignments

**250 points:** Final Project

**150 points:** Midterm Project

**100 points:** Participation/Attendance/Professionalism

### ***Class Assignments (400 points)***

We will have four in-class assignments designed to sharpen a skill for sports reporting. One assignment will involve covering a press conference from class, transcribing the audio as a group and writing on deadline. Details of each assignment will be provided at the start of class, but you will be given one-week notice. Bring laptops.

Class Assignment 1: Breaking news on deadline (Week 5)

Class Assignment 2: Covering a mock press conference (Week 8)

Class Assignment 3: Writing a column or analysis (Week 11)

Class Assignment 4: FOIA requests and contract releases (Week 14)

***Live Assignments (600 points)***

We will have five live assignments where we cover games as a class. Every student will live-tweet (20 points) and write a game recap (100 points) from each game.

***Midterm Project (150 points)***

In addition to the games we attend as a class, everyone will be required to cover at least one game on their own in person. You may choose any spring sport, but it must be a team from UF, a local community college or a local high school. Pro games will not work unless you can get credentialed. Every student will live-tweet (50 points) and write a game recap (100 points).

***Final Project (250 Points)***

Reported, in-depth feature or profile with multimedia element. Minimum 1,000 words. Professor will review, discuss drafts with each student at a selected scheduled time. More specific details on the assignment to come later in the semester. Project due May 1.

***Participation/Professionalism (100 points)***

You are expected to attend class on time. You are allowed one unexcused absence. After that, 25 points are deducted for each class missed. Points will also be deducted at the instructor's discretion for chronic lateness, being disengaged in class, and failure to participate in class and/or in online discussions.

**SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

- Always directly email me your submission
- When applicable, include source info (name, phone/e-mail, links) at bottom of your email or story. Failure to follow guidelines will result in a point penalty at instructor's discretion.

**DEDUCTIONS**

Journalism is a deadline business. This course is designed to mirror the expected behavior of a professional newsroom. They're called deadlines for a reason.

Failure to meet assignment deadlines will result in a 20-point deduction in the first 24-hour period it's late. Late assignments beyond 24 hours may not be accepted, and could be graded as a zero, unless an emergency can be documented. If an illness or a personal emergency prevents you from completing an assignment on time, advance notice and written documentation will be required. If advance notice is not possible because of a true emergency, written documentation will be required ASAP.

Fact errors will result in a deduction at instructor's discretion, depending on the error and assignment.

**COURSE GUESTS**

The class will include guest speakers who cover prep, college and professional sports, including sports media professionals who graduated UF's College of Journalism and Communications.

In the interest of honest and frank discussions, my lectures and comments of guest speakers are strictly off-the-record. This means that they may not be published in any format, either in a print publication or on a web site, personal blog or social media.

## **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Plagiarism is one of the biggest sins in journalism. Do your own work.

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Violation of the honor code includes plagiarizing material from other sources, using artificial intelligence (such as ChatGPT), fabricating material or using any work done by another person for a class assignment. Even copying photos from the internet could lead to a copyright claim in the real world. See the Department of Journalism website, as well as UF guidelines, for specific outline of honor code violations.

## **HONOR CODE**

UF Student Honor Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

Any violations of this code will be reported to the Dean of Students. Failure to comply with this commitment will result in disciplinary action compliant with the UF Student Honor Code Procedures. If you have any degree of uncertainty, please ask.

Violation of the honor code includes plagiarizing material from other sources or fabricating material, as well as other forms of cheating. Violations will result in a failing grade, and you will be dismissed from the journalism program and reported to the Honor Court. See the Department of Journalism website, as well as UF guidelines, for specific outline of honor code violations.

## **PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

This is a workshop-style class in which we will all contribute ideas and critiques of others' work and ideas. Please use professional courtesy. Turn cell phones off. No texting (or checking your phone) in class. If you need to use your phone, please leave the room to do so. Bring laptops to class.

## **CLASSROOM NEEDS**

Students requesting special classroom needs must first register with the Dean of Students Office, which will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide the documentation to the instructor.

## **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications Department embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We expect each of our journalism courses to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this process as early as possible in the semester. Course Evaluations Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on a minimum of 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last three weeks of the semester, but announcements will be made giving specific times when they are open. Summary results of these evaluations are available to students at the evaluations website URL above. Course Grading Students will be graded in accordance with UF policies for assigning grade points as articulated in the link that follows.

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

## **U MATTER, WE CARE**

Your well-being is important to the University of Florida. The U Matter, We Care initiative is committed to creating a culture of care on our campus by encouraging members of our community to look out for one another and to reach out for help if a member of our community is in need. If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) so that the U Matter, We Care Team can reach out to the student in distress. A nighttime and weekend crisis counselor is available by phone at 352-392-1575. The U Matter, We Care Team can help connect students to the many other helping resources available including, but not limited to, Victim Advocates, Housing staff, and the Counseling and Wellness Center. Please remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. In case of emergency, call 9-1-1.

## **THE INSTRUCTOR**

Zach Abolverdi is the *Gators Online* Senior Writer for On3.com and Sports Reporting Adjunct Professor at the University of Florida. Orlando born but Gainesville raised, he grew up on college football during the Steve Spurrier era and started his sports journalism career in 2010 prior to Urban Meyer's final season with the Gators. Zach is a Hearst Award winner and graduated from University of Florida's College of Journalism in 2014. He spent a total of seven years at the Gainesville Sun (2010-15, 2021), along with stops at Rivals, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and the Lake City Reporter. Zach enjoys spending time with family and his boxer dogs. SEC football, March Madness and NBA hoops provide his sports fix.