

PUR4243: Investigations for Social Change

Course number: 26307 & 26308 (UFO)

Instructor: Steve Horn

Thursdays from 10:40-11:30 AM ET on Zoom

(Instructor is in San Diego, CA)

Email: shorn@ufl.edu or use the [Canvas InboxLinks](#)
to an external site conversation tool to message your
instructor.

Virtual Office Hours: By Appointment

Required Texts

All readings, videos, or other materials to review pre-class will be provided on Canvas and no textbook purchase is required. Students will be exposed to a range of investigative journalism outlets and research-driven social change organizations that regularly publish articles, reports, briefs, and other materials throughout the semester. The work those organizations publish will be intermixed with other articles and contextual multimedia materials during the course.

All assigned readings or multimedia engagements (watching or listening) in the syllabus should take place in advance of the class for which they are listed. Be prepared to participate and bring ideas to class for class discussion based on the assignments.

Course Description

Are you the type of person who likes to do deep dives on topics, unearth hard-to-find facts, and present them in narratives that can lead to social change? Are you a critical thinker with an interest in exploring ways of doing investigative work across a number of issues areas?

If any of that resonates, you're in the right place! Welcome to Investigations for Social Change, where you'll learn the basics of what researchers, communicators and others in a variety of organizations do, and what it takes to break into the field.

As traditional news outlets shrink and disappear, media relations work by public interest communicators is increasingly important — and challenging. Public interest organizations, labor unions, political campaigns, private investigation firms, and academic centers are increasingly tasked with doing the work that well-staffed newsrooms once did, in some cases even becoming quasi-newsrooms themselves in an age of ever-changing media dynamics. That's where public interest communications-oriented investigative work comes into play.

The purpose of this class is to define the niche of investigations within public interest communications and the opportunities to make a difference doing such research

therein, convey an understanding of how research can bolster and make a difference between winning and losing within different issue-based campaigns, present ethical issues that arise in practice, learn from experts doing this work, gain basic skills on how to perform an investigation for social change within public interest communications, and get a hands-on primer by doing a small project in this tradition. This course will introduce students to potential career trajectories into and within this field, understanding it as a viable pathway within the public interest communications sector.

Like anything in life, you will get out of what you put into this class, so be thoughtful and engaged with the assignments and experiences presented. By the time it is over, you should walk away with a basic framework of what investigative research means within public interest communications, different issue areas in which doing this work can be useful within public interest communications campaigns, examples and definitions of ethical issues within investigations for social change, basic investigative research skills, some contacts in the field to expand your network, and a completed project transferable from virtual classroom into the workforce that can go into your professional portfolio.

Upon completing this course, students will:

- **Describe** what investigative work servicing public interest communications is and **generate** a mental map of how to do that work in multiple contexts.
- **Identify** and **interpret** examples of how investigations for social change play out in various issue advocacy campaigns within public interest communications.
- **Carry out** entry-level written and verbal discussion on concepts and frameworks within investigations for social change within public interest communications.
- **Critically assess** options in ethically challenging investigative research for social change situations.
- **Differentiate** between fact-based empirical investigative work and baseless claims branded as such.
- **Develop** a basic menu of skills and pathways to complete public interest communications-oriented investigative research work
- **Standardize** pathways for gaining and maintaining skills in this area on a continuing basis.
- **Execute** a basic focused investigative research project within the public interest communications campaign realm.
- **Represent** investigative findings for a public interest communications campaign in both written and verbal form.
- **Determine** how to land a job in one of the pathways covered and plant the seeds for future prospective employment pathways in the field.
- **Examine** what it's like to work in the investigations for social change field by meeting professionals doing that work, in turn developing a professional network within the field.

Course Learning Objectives

College of Journalism and Communications Objectives

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires

that by graduation all students should be able to:

- apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located;
- demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts;
- present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

Minimum Technology Requirements

The University of Florida expects students entering an online program to acquire computer hardware and software appropriate to their degree program. Most computers are capable of meeting the following general requirements. A student's computer configuration should include:

- Webcam
- Microphone
- Broadband connection to the internet and related equipment (cable/DSL modem)
- Microsoft Office Suite installed (provided by the university)

Individual colleges may have additional requirements or recommendations, which students should review before starting their program.

Minimum Technology Skills

To complete your tasks in this course, you will need a basic understanding of operating

a computer and word processing software, as well as access to online search engines and university library resources. Some technology skills will be taught by the instructor as a means of guiding completion of the final project (see more on that below).

Course technology

You will need reliable Internet access and a reliable computer with Microsoft Word (or other word processing software that can generate a .doc or .docx file), Adobe Flash (for viewing video content) and Adobe PDF reader.

Zoom

Zoom is an easy-to-use video conferencing service available to all UF students, faculty, and staff that allows for meetings of up to 100 participants. You can find resources and help using Zoom at the (<https://ufl.zoom.us>) website.

Key Course Policies

Late or Missed Work:

Deadlines for each assignment will be given and students are expected to meet them. Late assignments will automatically lose a full letter grade for each day assignments are late (e.g. B to a C). Some consideration, however, might be given (at the discretion of the instructor) if there are extenuating circumstances such as prolonged hospitalization, family or personal issues, or extended individual sickness. However, you need to notify me before the deadline is missed and come up with a mutually agreed upon alternative deadline.

Attendance:

Success in this course is premised upon regular class participation and group discussion. Active engagement and presence will ensure getting the most you can out of the class and waking away from it achieving the objectives laid out above. You are responsible for notifying me in advance of the cause of your absence and, if it is due to illness, provide a note from your medical provider. For further information on attendance policy, please go [here](#).

University 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](#) 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 me. I will document and report all honor code violations, including cheating

and plagiarism. The minimum penalty for a violation of the honor code is a zero on the assignment or exam, but may be higher, depending on the severity of the violation.

As an investigations professional in my full-time capacity, I have an eye for plagiarism and use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, so be aware of that if inclined to take shortcuts. Also be mindful that this course is meant to prepare you for specific professional experiences, so if you think the conduct in question might get you fired from a job, do not do it in this class either. These policies are in place to help you prepare yourself for the future, not to be punitive in nature.

Students Requiring Accommodations:

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center.](#) It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations [here](#). 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 [here](#).

Grading and Assignments

I will be fair and impartial in grading assignments and participation in this course, meaning each of you will be graded on the same criteria for the same work. Refer to the rubrics posted on Canvas for each assignment to see those criteria and use them to guide your work. Grades are earned, just like performance evaluations in the workplace, and they are not gifts. If you come prepared for discussion and put thought and effort into assignments, you are bound for success not only in this course but for your workforce experiences to come. So, put your best foot forward because it will pay off.

Grades will be posted on Canvas, and it is your responsibility to check your progress throughout the semester. I am always available via email or during office hours if you have questions as you're doing the work. I am here to help you succeed. Consider the instructor-student relationship to be collaborative, rather than paternalistic.

The grading criteria for the class is as follows:

Weekly Attendance and Active Participation: 30%

Attendance and active participation are mandatory in this course and will ensure more active engagement with the reading and material being taught. Students will be expected to participate in various interactive exercises, be fully engaged, and ideally on camera within the Zoom virtual classroom. Attendance and active participation will be graded as follows:

- 0 – didn't attend class that day/unexcused absence

- 1– attended class but no participation
- 2– attended class with active participation and demonstrated average engagement and baseline comprehension of the materials assigned
- 3– attended class with active participation and demonstrated excellent engagement and baseline comprehension of the materials assigned

Each absence after the drop/add period will result in a reduction to your grade for attendance. You are responsible for notifying the professor in advance of the cause of your absence when possible and, if it is due to illness, provide a note from your medical provider. For further information on attendance policy, please go [here](#).

Individual Weekly Written Responses: 30%

Each week before class — based on assigned materials — students will receive question prompts from the instructor and will be asked to respond to them. The purpose of these questions is to ensure further thought and engagement with the topics taught, while also giving a chance to allow for well-articulated written comprehension to shine through. Taken together, written responses combined with in-class discussion will mirror a workplace setting in the communications sector, in which a competent employee is expected to both come to meetings with ideas and contribute them toward campaign strategy while also being expected to present cogent ideas and arguments into written form heading into those meetings (and sometimes coming out of them, too, though this course will only require pre-class responses). The written responses will be graded each week as follows:

- 0 – didn't complete assignment
- 1 – completed assignment, but showed poor baseline comprehension of the questions posed
- 2 – completed assignment and showed average baseline comprehension of the questions posed
- 3 – completed assignment and showed excellent baseline comprehension of the questions posed

Individual Investigative Research Assignment: 40%

This individual assignment will make sure you can put theory and the big ideas introduced throughout the course into practice at an entry-level, working with the instructor to design and conduct a small and narrowly focused investigative research project within a thematic topic covered throughout the course. This will require consultation with the instructor to come up with a topic based on the student's interest area. This should come from thematic areas the course has covered or will cover, though there is wiggle room on that if discussed with and agreed upon by the instructor.

The student is expected to be proactive about touching base with the instructor as the research project is carried out for troubleshooting and iterative ideation, and make use of office hours or other forms of communication to ensure a quality end product yielding actionable intelligence and the finding of something useful to inform a communications-oriented campaign. Mandatory check-in dates are also built into the semester, though those are a bare minimum to ensure the project

stays on track.

The final investigative research product produced should be written in the form of a one to three-page research memorandum. The professor will provide examples that students can use as a template and/or from which they can draw inspiration. There will be two mandatory interim check-in meetings scheduled between the student and the instructor before the final memorandum is handed in to ensure the ability to give helpful feedback and allow for troubleshooting, conveying and assisting on investigative research methods, etc.

Lastly, students will present their project findings to the class during the third to last week and second to last week of the course, creating a slide deck to make the findings visually accessible to classmates. Each student will be assigned a date/time at random for their respective presentation dates. Students should be ready to field questions from classmates and/or the instructor on presentation day, mirroring what might take place among colleagues or a supervisor in the workplace when research findings presentations occur. Vice versa, students attending these presentations will still be graded on their active participation, meaning listening intently to the presentations and asking questions after them. The written memorandum is due at 11:59 ET the night before the student's scheduled presentation date.

This written version of this assignment will be graded as follows:

- **0** – didn't complete assignment
- **1** – completed assignment, but did not perform investigative research that would be actionable in a strategic communications campaign due to materially significant factual or structural project errors not corrected after multiple rounds of instructor feedback
- **2** – completed assignment and did investigative research that would be actionable in a strategic communications campaign, responsive to multiple rounds of instructor feedback built into the process, though in need of some additional iteration or fact-checking to smooth out to be of actionable intelligence quality within a strategic communications campaign setting
- **3** – completed assignment and did investigative research that would be actionable in a strategic communications campaign, responsive to multiple rounds of instructor feedback built into the process, ready to go and act upon within a strategic communications campaign setting
- **4** – completed assignment and did investigative research that would be actionable in a strategic communications campaign, responsive to multiple rounds of instructor feedback built into the process, ready to go and act upon within a strategic communications campaign setting.
- **5** – completed assignment and did investigative research that would be actionable in a strategic communications campaign, responsive to multiple rounds of instructor feedback built into the process, ready to go and act upon within a strategic communications campaign setting. Additionally, the student ideated further research concepts while doing this round of research that could be

actionable in the future and/or identified limitations within the investigation’s findings — in either case, demonstrating thought leadership and not simply execution within the discipline.

73 Points total possible in this area

This presentation version of this assignment will be graded as follows:

- **0** – didn’t do a presentation
- **1** – completed slide deck presentation, but did not coherently explain the investigation’s problem it aimed to solve, the research undertaken, the findings, or how it might inform a communications campaign
- **2** – completed slide deck presentation, adequately explaining the investigation’s problem it aimed to solve, the research undertaken, the findings, or how it might inform a communications campaign, though certain sections of the presentation had inadequate explanations and left the presentation lacking clear and actionable takeaways in those respective sections
- **3**– completed slide deck presentation, adequately explaining the investigation’s problem it aimed to solve, the research undertaken, the findings, or how it might inform a communications campaign, with the slide deck including adequate explanations and clear explanations throughout it that left the audience with clear and actionable takeaways.
- **4** – completed slide deck presentation, adequately explaining the investigation’s problem it aimed to solve, the research undertaken, the findings, or how it might inform a communications campaign, with the slide deck including adequate explanations and clear explanations throughout it that left the audience with clear and actionable takeaways.
- **5** – completed slide deck presentation, adequately explaining the investigation’s problem it aimed to solve, the research undertaken, the findings, or how it might inform a communications campaign, with the slide deck including adequate explanations and clear explanations throughout it that left the audience with clear and actionable takeaways and pointed to limitations in the findings too. Further, the presentation was both visually and verbally captivating from start to finish and the presenter answered questions where possible, while also transparently stating when not capable of answering audience questions due to lack of knowledge.

Grading follows current [UF grading policies](#). *The grading scale for the course is as follows:*

A	94.0 – 100%	C	74.0 – 76.99%
A-	90.0 – 93.99%	C-	70.0 – 73.99%
B+	87.0 – 89.99%	D+	67.0 – 69.99%
B	84.0 – 86.99%	D	64.0 – 66.99%
B-	80.0 –	D-	60.0 –

	83.99%		63.99%
C	77.0 –	E	below 60%
+	79.99%		

Tentative Course Schedule*

Week 1 January 16	-Introduction of Professor and Class Ice Breaker -Instructor Presentation: What Are Investigations for Social Change in Public Interest Communications? -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation
Week 2 January 23	-Class Ice Breaker -Instructor Presentation: Ethical Considerations in Investigations for Social Change -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation
Week 3 January 30	-Class Ice Breaker -Instructor Presentation: Advocacy Investigative Journalism -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation
Week 4 February 6	-Class Ice Breaker - Investigations in Political Campaigns (Opposition Research) -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation
Week 5 February 13	-Class Ice Breaker - Instructor Presentation: Investigations for Climate/Environmental Justice <i>-FEB. 14: DEADLINE FOR FIRST MEETING WITH INSTRUCTOR TO DISCUSS FINAL INVESTIGATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT</i>
Week 6 February 20	-Class Ice Breaker -Instructor Presentation: Investigations for the Labor Movement -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation
Week 7 February 27	-Class Ice Breaker -Instructor Presentation: Investigations for Democracy/Civil Rights -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation
Week 8 March 6	-Class Ice Breaker - Instructor Presentation: Investigations for Corporations, Investors, and Legal Practitioners -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation
Week 9 March 13	-Class Ice Breaker - Instructor Presentation: Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) Tools and Techniques -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation <i>Mar. 14: DEADLINE FOR SECOND MEETING WITH INSTRUCTOR TO DISCUSS FINAL INVESTIGATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT</i>
Week 10 March 20	Spring Break! No Class.

Week 11 March 27	-Class Ice Breaker -Instructor Presentation: Investigating Campaign Finance, Lobbying, and Money in Politics -Discussion of Assigned Materials/Presentation
Week 12 April 3	-Student Presentations of Investigative Research Projects
Week 13 April 10	-Student Presentations of Investigative Research Projects
Week 14 April 17	Open Q&A with Professor: Ask Me Anything – Internships, Career Planning, Jobs, Interviews, Networking, etc.

*While the structure of this course will remain, some weeks may feature guest presenters who work as professionals within various investigative research topical tracks.

Standard UF Policy Information and Links

Software Use:

All faculty, staff, and students 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.

Student Privacy:

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please go [here](#).

In-Class Recording:

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or

medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation

4.040 Student Policy on Course Syllabi 3 UF, Academic Affairs, July 28th, 2021 Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Campus Resources

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the [Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352- 392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the [Student Health Care Center website](#).

University Police Department: Visit [UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1- 1 for emergencies).

Academic Resources

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the [UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e- mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the [Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage](#) for more information.

On-Line Students Complaints: View the [Distance Learning Student Complaint Process](#).