

JOU 4930: Breaking News, Class No. 20156

Fall semester 2025, University of Florida
Thursdays, 1:55p-4:55p, WEIMER 1090

Weekly schedule (subject to adjustments, which I will announce):

Aug. 21 – Week One

Syllabus review & Intro to course

Resources: WUFT inbox, Florida Data, court websites, AP Stylebook, social media, Airtable

Filing practices for out-of-class assignments

Scheduling out-of-class assignments for the semester

Quiz No. 1

Aug. 28 – Week Two

How to look for breaking news: What makes an engaging story?

Quiz No. 2

Sept. 4 – Week Three

Newswriting review: Finding your lede, tight writing, time element, quote selection, attribution

How to write news in the “running” format

In-class writing assignment No. 1

Quiz No. 3

Sept. 11 – Week Four

Criminal justice: Arrests, manhunts, sexual assaults, executions

In-class writing assignment No. 2

Quiz No. 4

Sept. 18 – Week Five

Disasters: Fires, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes

Quiz No. 5

In-class writing assignment No. 3

Out-of-class writing assignment No. 1 due Sept. 24

Sept. 25 – Week Six

Speeches; legislative meetings, hearings

Quiz No. 6

In-class writing assignment No. 4

Oct. 2 – Week Seven

Environmental disasters: Pipelines, dams, shipping; spills & red tide

Quiz No. 7

In-class writing assignment No. 5

Out-of-class writing assignment No. 2 due Oct. 8

Oct. 9 – Week Eight

Transportation accidents: Planes, trains, automobiles

Quiz No. 8

In-class writing assignment No. 6

Oct. 16 – Week Nine

Election nights

Quiz No. 9

In-class writing assignment No. 7

Out-of-class writing assignment No. 3 due Oct. 22

Oct. 23 – Week 10

Court verdicts, rulings

Quiz No. 10

In-class writing assignment No. 8

Oct. 30 – Week 11

Corporate news: openings, closings, earnings, layoffs (WARN notices)

In-class writing assignment No. 9

Out-of-class writing assignment No. 4 due Nov. 5

Nov. 6 – Week 12

Obituaries/resignations

Quiz No. 11

In-class writing assignment No. 10

Nov. 13 – Week 13

Civil lawsuits: Local, county, state, federal

Quiz No. 12

In-class writing assignment No. 11

Nov. 20 – Week 14

Protests/civil unrest

Quiz No. 13

In-class writing assignment No. 12

Out-of-class writing assignment No. 5 due Nov. 21

Extra-credit opportunity for submitting course evaluations (+50 points)

Nov. 27 – Week 15

Thanksgiving break. No class

Course description:

Students will learn best practices for reporting and writing – quickly and on deadline – content about the most common breaking news assignments they would face as young journalists in professional newsrooms. This course will include lectures and in-class exercises, with regular, brief quizzes to cover material we have reviewed. It also will include an out-of-classroom assignment each week: Each student will work a contiguous three to four-hour shift in the Innovation News Center on any weekday and any window of time that fits their schedules (mornings or early afternoons are preferable). During this assignment students will be expected to produce at least one example of a breaking news article on any topic, subject to pre-approval by course instructors and INC staff (this is mostly intended to be sure that no other students are working on the same reporting).

Practical instructions and guidelines for the class can be viewed here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rL-QVlazKU-8YxTi1eysjDlisQqZ-hkwGK86ADhLx3E/edit?usp=sharing>

There is no final exam. You will be done with this course after UF's last regular day of classes for the semester.

Attendance:

Students can learn the material only by attending the classes and listening carefully to lectures. You also are responsible for arranging to complete any missed quizzes, assignments or other graded work within one week of your return to class. 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>

Student hours:

Drop-in student hours will be 10a to 2p Thursdays. You can also connect with me during that time using this link, if you let me know this is your preference and when you want to connect:

<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/98148141718?pwd=azcLaEzPD5KkM3qap6PVL6elkGPaZB.1>

Please make an appointment in advance, whenever possible, to avoid the real-world or virtual waiting room. I am also generally available by appointment on other days. My email is tbridis@ufl.edu. I generally respond within 24 hours to emails during weekdays or within 48 hours during weekends.

Homework:

There will be no homework assignments for this course.

Grading:

Your weekly out-of-class assignments will be graded on how compelling or newsworthy was the topic that you selected, the thoroughness of the reporting involved during your shift and whether the writing met professional standards that include an appropriate lede, grammar, AP Style, quote selection, etc.

Assignment	Percentage	Points
Topic selection	20	40
Reporting depth	40	80
Writing/AP Style	40	80

Weekly quizzes will be based on the lecture material only and will be a combination of multiple choice and true/false questions. Each quiz is worth 100 points. Each in-class assignment is worth 100 points. Each out-of-class assignment is worth 100 points.

For all students, a “professionalism” grade of up to 400 points for the semester, or roughly 10 percent of your grade, will be assigned by instructors. This will reflect a student’s ability to meet deadlines; establish priorities; interact professionally with instructors, peers and classmates; deal with unusual reporting challenges and more.

Grading	Points
13 quizzes @ 100 each	1,300
12 in-class assignments @ 100 each	1,200
5 out-of-class assignments @ 300 each	1,500
Professionalism grade	400

Grading scale:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

E = 59 or below

Class requirements:

Most of our class-wide communication, including updates to this syllabus, will arrive via Canvas and via Slack in the #breakingnews channel. **Please install the Canvas and Slack apps on your smart phone and enable notifications**, and please regularly log in using your laptop. Please keep in touch with me if you have any questions.

Grading policies:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Textbooks:

There is no assigned textbook for this course.

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. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Honesty policy:

Plagiarism and fabulism (ie, inventing journalism sources or details) are unacceptable. You may not turn in work that is not your own, including work generated by Chat GPT and other AI programs. Additionally, it is a violation of UF policy and my copyright to share without authorization any course materials I have produced for this class, including quizzes. This includes informal sharing through social networks or uploading such course materials to a variety of online services that purport to serve as academic assistance sites.

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://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-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.

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 352-392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 911 for emergencies.