

Investigative and In-Depth Reporting - SPRING 2026

Course: JOU 4123 and RTV 3305

Instructor: Sasha Jones

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Class Hours: Online - Mondays 8:30AM - 10:25 AM, Wednesdays 8:30 AM -9:20 AM

Online Office Hours: By appointment (M-F 9a-5p), Drop-In: Wednesdays 9:30 AM-11:30 AM

*Appointments are recommended

Course Description:

This advanced, hands-on course immerses students in the process of developing and executing investigative reporting projects from concept to publication. Over the course of the semester, students will investigate data-driven topics using. Students will gain experience using investigative tools and databases, mastering public records laws, and employing advanced reporting techniques to produce compelling, factual storytelling.

By semester's end, students are expected to produce potentially award-winning stories suitable for television, print, or digital publication, showcasing their readiness for newsroom employment and professional success in the evolving media landscape.

COURSE GOALS:

The goal of this course is to build a skill set that will position you for future success. This includes:

1. Identifying, requesting, and incorporating public records into news reporting.
2. Learn to use databases and free-research tools to enhance your storytelling
3. Conduct In-depth interviews
4. Plan and research for mid and long-range investigations
5. Evaluate reporting from a legal and standards scope
3. Create award winning journalism
4. Build a reporting reel or portfolio needed for the job application process

REQUIRED READING:

The Investigative Reporters' Handbook

Author: Brant Houston & IRE, INC

ISB 97803125899

OPTIONAL READING:

Government-in-the-Sunshine-Manual.

By: Florida Attorney General's Office

[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." "Local Matters" sign up link

GRADING:

The percent-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>

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

Activities (100 points):

- Project 1 (Environmental): 20 points
- Project 2 (Consumer Investigative): 20 points
- Project 3 (Investigative): 25 points
- Database Case Studies: 15 points
- Resume Reel or Portfolio: 20 points

Total points available: (100)

PROJECTS

Students must complete three projects by the end of this course. You will be responsible for enterprising the topic of each assignment and managing your time effectively to complete the final revision by the due date. I will offer guidance, suggestions, and feedback each step of the way. Your final grade will be determined by the projects submitted to Canvas, which should be your final revision.

Project 1: Environmental Reporting Project

For this assignment, you will research, report, and write an original news story focused on an environmental issue affecting your community, region, or a broader audience. Your goal is to inform the public about a timely and relevant environmental topic while demonstrating strong journalistic skills such as accuracy, balance, clarity, and depth of reporting. Your story should identify why the issue matters, who is impacted, and what efforts are being made to address it.

Project 2: Consumer Investigative Reporting Project

In this major reporting project, you will produce an in-depth consumer investigative story that uncovers and explains an issue impacting the public as consumers. Your story may focus on topics such as deceptive marketing, product safety, consumer scams, housing or insurance issues, financial transparency, or corporate responsibility. Whatever topic you choose, your work should clearly demonstrate how the issue affects people and why it matters.

Project 3: Investigative Report Project

This project gives you the opportunity to conceive, research, and produce an original investigative news story that exposes a problem, holds power to account, or reveals information of clear public interest. You will work independently to investigate a topic, verify facts through multiple sources, and present your findings in a professional, publishable format.

Database Case Studies (3) :

You will be asked to evaluate public, research, and reporting databases and find data to be used in potential in-depth reporting projects. Students will write a 2 page analysis of the key findings in the data, pinpointing what data they would most likely use if reporting on the topic.

Resume and Reel:

Students are required to make a compilation of their completed work from the class. This can be submitted in portfolio or Resume Reel format. This will serve as the final exam in the course.

MISSED DEADLINES

Late assignments will have points deducted. Students will lose 5 points per day if an assignment is late.

HONESTY

In this course you are expected to write and create your reports entirely on your own. You can not plagiarize another person's work and must demonstrate through process journalism how your work is original.

As a UF student, you're bound by [the Honor Pledge](#): We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Student 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."

Students caught cheating on any test or assignment in this class will also be given a zero and referred for academic misconduct.

ATTENDANCE

Students are required to submit all assignments on time and by the due date to receive full points regardless of attendance.

Requirements for class attendance, exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found here:

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

EVALUATIONS

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at this link. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. Summary results of these assessments are available to students here.

STUDENT TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS Students must comply with UF's Student Computing Requirements. No additional software or technology is needed for this course.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

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

COURSE SCHEDULE:

WEEK	LECTURE TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES
01/12/26	Course Introduction What elements make a news story investigative?	No assignment
01/19/26	No Class Monday. Finding Data to support your story	Database Case Study 1 Due: Jan 25th
01/26/2026	Understanding Environmental Storytelling	Submit Project 1 Ideas by February 1st
02/02/2026	How to find your characters. Interview techniques.	Submit Project 3 story Ideas
02/09/2026	No Lecture. Project 1 check-ins	No assignment
02/16/2026	Understanding Public Records Part 1	Submit Project 1 Rough Draft by Feb 22nd
02/23/2025	Scams, Consumer Laws, and investigating fraud	Final Project 1 Due: March 1st
03/02/2026	Creating balance in your consumer reporting. Finding experts and drafting Media Inquiries	Database Case Study 2 Due: March 8th
03/09/2026	Watch or Review Project 1 Project 3 FOIA updates/ Story outlines	Project 2 Story Ideas Due March 15th
03/16/2026	Spring Break	No assignment

03/23/2026	Understanding Public Records Part 2	Project 2 Rough draft due March 29th
03/30/2026	Project 3 Check-ins Assistance	Project 2 due April 5th
04/06/2026	Watch or Review Project 2 What is a Resume Reel/ Work Portfolio?	Database Case Study 3 Due: April 12th
04/13/2026	Work ahead on Project 3	Project 3 Rough draft due April 19th
04/20/2026	Work ahead on Final Portfolio or Resume Reel	Project 3 Final due April 26th
04/30/2026	FINAL RESUME REEL OR PORTFOLIO DUE ON APRIL 30TH	

Please note: This schedule is subject to change