

**JOU 4930: Special Study
Community Journalism – History, Practice, and Purpose
Spring 2026 Syllabus**

Instructor: Dr. Antoine Haywood
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Office Hours: TBD

Course Meeting Times: Mon. (12:50 pm – 1:40 pm) and Wed. (11:45 am - 1:40 pm)
Course Dates: January 12 – April 22, 2026
Course Location: Turlington 2346 (Mon.) and Turlington 2328 (Wed.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the history, practice, and civic purpose of community journalism. Students first trace how local news and grassroots media have evolved from early neighborhood papers and ethnic presses to today’s nonprofit, digital, and participatory models in the U.S. By studying key movements—such as the Black press, feminist media, and public access television—students examine how community journalism has long served as a platform for storytelling, representation, and social change. Global perspectives will also be incorporated to elucidate the influence of international media and social movements on the evolution of community journalism practices and philosophies within the United States.

In the second half of the course, students apply historically grounded conceptual lessons through hands-on reporting and community immersion projects. While learning how to collaborate with community organizations, they will produce stories that highlight local voices, needs, and assets while practicing ethical, inclusive, and solutions-oriented journalism.

Through historical analysis, guest speaker presentations, fieldwork, and reflection, students will develop a deeper understanding of journalism’s role in building informed, connected, and resilient communities.

COURSE LEARNING GOALS

This course aims to prepare students for engaging in creative, grounded, and respectful approaches to leading community-centered journalism initiatives.

By the end of the semester, students will learn how to:

- Identify significant developments and milestones in the history of community journalism.
- Analyze the relationship between journalism, community identity, and social change.
- Evaluate archival and contemporary examples of local (place-based) and alternative media.
- Reflect on how historical practices inform current challenges in community-based reporting.
- Design community-centered, multimodal journalism projects.
- Approach building trust with community leaders and organizational partners.

COMMUNITY VALUES & PRACTICES

The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications Department of Journalism is committed to an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along many dimensions, including race, ethnicity, and national origin; 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 the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

It is crucial that together, we create an inclusive learning environment where everyone feels comfortable and welcome. Many times, learning something new entails feeling uncomfortable and challenging preconceived ideas. This is a desired outcome of any learning environment because it encourages us to exercise rigor, fairness, and creativity.

The goal is never to reach agreement on issues or to find class consensus, but to educate each other rigorously and respectfully, adhering to the principles of social scientific knowledge. I expect everyone to engage in civil discussions about different topics. Thus, curiosity and respect for other viewpoints and experiences are essential for success in this class and personal and intellectual growth. For this, we all must exercise respect, courtesy, civil dialogue, and empathy toward one another.

Remember that many of the readings, documentaries, examples, etc., in the syllabus were created by specific individuals with unique viewpoints. I want everyone to feel comfortable sharing their observations and critiques about the material. Your ability to analyze those aspects is a primary goal of the class.

I will foster an environment in which each class member can hear and respect each other. Each class member must show respect for all worldviews expressed in class. It is expected that some of the material in this course may evoke strong emotions — please be respectful of others' feelings and be mindful of your own. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom by either me or other students is particularly troubling, causes discomfort, or causes offense. While our intention may not be to harm or offend, the impact of what happens throughout the course must not be ignored; it is something I consider very important and worth attention.

Please get in touch with me if there is anything you want to share about our learning process, or if you have any suggestions for new topics or ways to build this communal space for all of us to grow together. I am eager to collaborate with all of you to achieve these goals.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course Materials:

- Required readings and supplemental material will be available through Canvas, either linked or attached as a PDF.
- To access the material through the provided links, you must be connected to UF Wi-Fi or the UF network via our **VPN software** if you are off campus. Refer to this [video for instructions on how to connect to the VPN](#).
- We will use academic journal articles, book chapters, and non-academic sources (news articles, videos, documentaries, etc.).
- Students must complete assigned readings or materials before the class in which they are discussed. They must also be prepared to participate in full-class and small-group discussions and interactive activities.
- When there is more than one reading per class, I encourage you to read/watch the material in the order it is listed.
- Due to the nature of the course subject, reading assignments are likely to change during the semester. **Please refer to Canvas every week to see what's required for the following week.**

In-Class Activities / Class Participation:

- In this course, we will apply "active learning" in-class activities.
- Students should come to class having read/listened/watched all class material for that class and be prepared to engage in individual or group activities.
- Students do not know when in-class activities will occur, but they will likely happen every other class/week.
- Participation in these activities will be graded, and attendance will be taken.
- Missing in-class activities:
 - For any missed in-class activity, students will get a 0.
 - Students will obtain an "Excuse" on Canvas for a missed in-class activity if they email me an official medical note or other proof of a justified absence, including religious holidays. Please always review [UF attendance policies](#).
 - Students are allowed to miss 1 class due to a non-medical reason a semester and receive an "Excuse" on Canvas. This is your personal emergency absence. Exceptions include unexpected traveling back home, needing to take your pet to the vet, needing a mental health day, traveling to visit friends/family, caring for a relative, participating in a non-UF activity, etc. **You only have one personal absence a semester, so manage it properly.**
- Students are responsible for keeping track of their absences on Canvas.
- In-class activities are only done in class and cannot be done afterward

ASSESSMENT & ASSIGNMENTS

- **Community Media Analyses (40 points)** – Critical essays analyzing a historical or contemporary example of community journalism.
- **Community Story Audits (40 points)** – Compare coverage of a local issue across different media types.
- **Fieldwork Project (50 points)** – Collaborate with a local organization to produce a multimedia story package.
- **Reflection Portfolio (40 points)** – Curated reflections on learning, ethics, and engagement.
- **Participation (30 points)** – In-class discussion, peer review, and community event engagement.

TOTAL: 200 points

GRADING SCALE

Letter Grade	Percent	Letter Grade	Percent	Letter Grade	Percent	Letter Grade	Percent
		B+	89-87%	C+	79-77%	D+	69-67%
A	100-94%	B	86-83%	C	76-73%	D	66-63%
A-	93-90%	B-	82-80%	C-	72-70%	D-	62-60%

Scores are rounded to the nearest whole point—for example, 89.4% rounds down to 89%, 89.5% rounds up to 90%. We will stick to this rule even when it impacts the letter grade obtained. Students can also review [UF grades and grading policies](#).

STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). Students must share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

ACADEMIC POLICIES & RESOURCES

Students can visit the [Academic Policies & Resources site](#) to learn more about UF's academic policies and resources, including course evaluation protocols, campus health, and student wellness services.

REACH OUT

Please don't hesitate to talk to me about any difficulties or challenges in this class. You can sign up for office hours, email me, or knock on my door ☺

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1: Origins and Traditions of Community Journalism

Week 1 – What Is Community Journalism? Defining community, news, and participation

Week 2 – The Early Local Press: Town papers, civic boosters, and the rise of the penny press

Week 3 – The Black, Immigrant, and Ethnic Press: Journalism as self-representation and resistance

Week 4 – Labor, Feminist, and Alternative Media: Challenging mainstream narratives

Week 5 – Public Access and Community Media Movements: Radio, Cable TV, Indy Media, and interactive approaches to DIY storytelling.

Unit 2: Contemporary Contexts and Practices

Week 6 – From Neighborhood Newsrooms to Hyperlocal Digital Platforms

Week 7 – Nonprofit, Civic, and Solutions Journalism Models

Week 8 – Ethics, Equity, and Representation in Local Reporting

Week 9 – Fieldwork Preparation: Building trust and partnerships with communities

Week 10 – Story Development: Research, sourcing, and participatory approaches

Unit 3: Reporting and Reflection

Week 11 – Field Reporting: Conducting interviews and documenting community life

Week 12 – Story Production Workshops: Editing, feedback, and collaboration

Week 13 – Sharing the Story: Publishing across community and digital platforms

Week 14 – Assessing Impact: How communities respond to and use journalism, as well as finding novel approaches to realizing sustainability and public trust building.

*Final Project Presentations

*The final project presentations will be coordinated with student groups and community partners.

All assignment due dates and weekly in-class activities are subject to change.