

JOU 3184 - Beat reporting

Instructor: Greg Hamilton

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Office hours: Available as needed.

Class meeting times: MW, 11:45 a.m. – 12:35 p.m.; Friday is reporting/writing day

Description: Students will gain experience in beat reporting, the backbone of daily journalism, through hands-on work with professional reporters and editors. Students will cover one or two beats during the semester (the class will decide at midterm whether to switch) and learn the fundamentals of daily coverage, including source and story development, using social media and coordinating with photographers and artists.

There is no textbook required.

Format:

- * This course is designed to prepare you to work in a newsroom by giving you real-world experience. You will work with Gainesville Sun reporters who are covering the same beats that you have been assigned to and you will develop stories based on that interaction. You also will work closely with the Sun's editors, photographers and artists.
- * Class will meet at The Sun newsroom and conference room. If transportation is a problem, make friends with your classmates and work out carpool arrangements. You will be a newsroom within a newsroom, so get all of your classmates' contact information.
- * From the list of beats provided, indicate your first and second choices. I will assign your beats and you may not get the one you want, at least not at first. At midterm, the class will decide whether to stay with the original beats or swap. We can make individual changes as warranted.
- * You will write at least seven stories during the semester: At least one quick-hit daily story (meeting coverage, for example); two issue stories (think weekender);

you will work at least one cop shift; a person-in-the-news profile for midterm; the class will cover an event (likely the elections) live for the Sun's website and Twitter feed; your final story will be an extensive story that we will determine in class. The goal is for all of your stories to be published in The Sun, ideally on 1A or 1B.

* Be prepared to work outside of class hours reporting and writing your stories. Fridays will be set aside as reporting/writing days because many of your sources may not be available during your non-class hours. A word of advice: Use this time wisely!

* Stories will be sent to me through email and I will route them through the Sun's editing desks. You will be working with all of the editors, photographers and graphic artists as well as the reporters.

* I will set a deadline for all of your stories. You may need more time to set up your interviews and photos. If so, contact me immediately.

* Communication is essential. You will have my office phone, cell phone and email address – use them. Typically, texting is best. I will also need all of your contact information to share stories and to let you know if I have to cancel classes because of breaking news or other issues at The Sun. You also will be working with other Sun editors, and you will need their contact info as well.

* Class attendance and participation are major elements of your grade. In class, we will discuss story ideas and themes, we will try to critique all of the stories BEFORE publication. This will be done constructively, but develop a thick skin. Take the suggestions - and praise – seriously.

* We will have a number of guest speakers who will talk about how they handle daily beat coverage. You will hear from The Sun's reporters, photographers, page designers and social media editors. Pay attention and ASK QUESTIONS. These folks are busy and are taking time to share their experiences with you. Pump them for knowledge.

* Consistent with university policy, students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Disability Resource Center at 352-392-8565 or www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/. That office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the professor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early in the semester as possible.

* Academic and professional honesty should require little discussion for advanced junior and senior journalism majors. Be sure to read the discussion on the college web page, www.jou.ufl.edu/academic/jou/honesty. This is serious business. Problems here are firing offenses in the professional world and cause to fail the class and to be referred to the Office for Student Judicial Affairs. If you have the slightest doubt, ask the professor before submitting the work.

* 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 the last two to 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 at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Grading:

Your final grade will be based on A-F system determined by your work during the entire term. Elements that factor into your grade include: Accuracy, spelling, grammar, story ideas, story organization, quality of writing, depth of reporting, coordination with artists, communication with editor, class participation and deadline performance. As in any newsroom, the goal is to get the best story and the best placement while meeting deadline and length requirements and developing art. Your stories should be organized logically and intelligently written. All stories will be edited by several editors after we have a critique in class. If you are hitting these marks regularly, by the end of the semester, your grade should be no surprise.

For more information on the university's grading policies, go to:

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

Week one - Intro

Wednesday 1/7 – Who am I, who are you. How serious are you about being a working journalist? Class history (stinterns); Alligator overlap.

What to expect: what do I mean by beat coverage? How you will work with Sun reporters and editors. Logistics of meeting at the Sun. Use of social media. Guest speakers. My availability (Fridays may be used for reporting/writing, no classes); late class cancellations due to breaking news. How we communicate. Get emails and phone numbers (we will use texting a lot); discuss students' experience level; discuss beat options, send requests to me.

Week two – Setting up the semester

Monday, 1/12 –Assign beats; Meet Sun reporters; start reading up on your beat; identify quick-hit story.

Wednesday, 1/14 – Send me story pitches

Friday, 1/16 – reporting day

Week three – Daily story

Monday, 1/19 – Holiday

Wednesday, 1/21 - Discuss story ideas: Assess your ability to identify stories, execute. Trust talk. Story is due Friday

Friday, 1/23 – Stories due.

Week four – Critiques and issue stories

Monday, 1/26 – Critique stories; discuss issue stories

Wednesday, 1/28 – Discuss centerpiece elements

Friday, 1/30 – meeting/reporting day

Week five – Issue stories

Monday, 2/2 – Critique daily stories; discuss issue ideas

Wednesday, 2/4 – Guest speakers: Designer Rob Mack, Photo editor Rob Witzel, discuss turning your idea into a centerpiece.

Friday, 2/6 – reporting/writing day

Week six – Centerpieces

Monday, 2/9 – Issue s stories due. Begin critiques

Wednesday, 2/11 – Critiques; begin profile discussions

Friday, 2/13 – Reporting day for profiles

Week seven – Profiles, guest speakers

Monday, 2/16 – Status check on profiles, especially art

Wednesday, 2/18 - Guest speakers: Joel Axon/Joe Byrnes on live coverage

Week eight - Mid-term (profiles)

Monday, 2/23 - Profiles due; begin critiques

Wednesday, 2/25 – Critique profiles; Discuss/assign new beats

Week nine – Spring Break/Reset for second half

Monday, 3/9 –New beats/stories

Wednesday, 3/11 – Discuss cop shifts

Friday, 3/13 –Begin cop shifts

Week 10 – Meetings and cop shifts

Monday, 3/16 – Cop shifts; discuss meeting story

Wednesday, 3/19 – Guest speakers: Morgan Watkins/Chris Curry discuss meeting coverage

Friday, 3/21 – reporting day

Week 11 – Live coverage

Monday, 3/23 – Prepare for live coverage

Wednesday, 3/25 – Event?

Week 12 – Loose ends

Monday, 3/30 – Wrap up cop shifts and meetings; Discuss final story ideas

Wednesday, 4/1 – Discuss final stories

Week 13 – Wrap up

Monday, 4/6 – Discuss final stories – any problems?

Wednesday, 4/8 – Final stories due

Week 14 –Final stories

Monday, 4/13 – Critique final stories

Wednesday, 4/15 – Critique final stories

Week 15 – Reviews

Monday, 4/20 - Review class; Guest speaker: Doug Ray