

JOU 3184 - Beat reporting

Instructor: Greg Hamilton

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Office hours: As needed

Class meeting times: MWF, 11:45 a.m. – 12:35 p.m.

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 two beats during the semester and learn the fundamentals of daily coverage, from source and story development to using social media and coordinating with photographers and artists.

Prerequisites: Grade of C or better in both JOU 3101 and JOU 3110.

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 you have been assigned to and will develop stories based on that interaction.

* Here are the beats: Alachua County – government and small towns; Gainesville - city government and neighborhoods; K-12 schools; Business – the local economy; Police; Health; Environment; UF campus; Transportation; Social services.

* From this list, indicate your first and second choices. The instructor will assign beats. Students will change beats mid-term.

* Students typically write at least six stories during the semester, five from each beat and at least one shift on the police beat, with the goal of having those stories published in The Sun. The stories will include short dailies; longer, issue-based pieces; person-in-the-news profiles; and public-record driven reports.

* Class attendance and participation factor into your grade. Class sessions will include discussions of story ideas and themes, with a premium put on cooperation and brain-storming with your classmates. We will also critique each other's work, constructively, so develop a thick skin. Take the criticisms - and praise – seriously. Do not make the same mistakes twice.

* We will discuss the fundamentals of beat coverage and hear from guest speakers – reporters and editors – who will share what they've learned in the trenches.

- * We will also hear from photographers, page designers and social media editors about how best to coordinate your efforts to give your stories the biggest impact in print and online.
- * We will meet frequently at The Sun newsroom, typically once a week, to interact with the staff. We'll work out transportation as necessary.
- * Be prepared to work outside of class hours reporting and writing your stories.
- * Superior performance in this class will result from individual efforts to develop stories by including public records, multiple voices, graphic elements, and other elements to add depth and authority to the report. You will be expected to know the issues and players on your beat, and to demonstrate that knowledge through your reporting.
- * Stories will be filed to hamilton4495@gmail.com. We will access them through a student file.
- * Deadlines will be set, and you must strive to meet them. However, it may not always be possible to line up your interviews and photographs when you need them. Just as in a newsroom, communication with your editor (instructor) is essential in these instances. Late assignments can be arranged through consultation.
- * Consistent with university policy, students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students office. That office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the professor when requesting accommodation.
- * 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.

Grading:

Your final grade will be based on A-F system determined by your work during the entire term, in both beats. Elements that factor into your grade include, but are not limited to: 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; if you do not recognize your story after it goes through the editing process, that is cause for concern. If you are hitting these marks regularly, by the end of the semester, your grade should be no surprise.

Week one

Monday, 1/7 – Intro: What to expect: coverage of real beats, working with Sun reporters and editors; getting stories published; meetings at the Sun (their availability to travel); emphasis on public records; use of social media; working with artists; kinds of stories; guest speakers; my availability (Fridays may be used for reporting/writing, no classes); late class cancellations due to breaking news; communication electronically.

Wednesday, 1/9 – Get emails and phone numbers (we will use texting a lot); discuss students' experience level; discuss beat options:

Friday, 1/11 – Assign beats; first assignment, find two issues on your beat from recent local coverage; prepare to discuss.

Week two – Setting up the semester

Monday, 1/14 - Discuss examples – likes and dislikes. How would you cover differently; Discuss themes and basic elements of beat coverage.

Wednesday, 1/16 – Meet at Sun with reporters; discuss ideas

Friday, 1/18 - Discuss story ideas; assign first story (due Monday, 1/28)

Week three – Daily beat coverage

Monday, 1/21 – Discuss meetings; why we advance and cover. The challenge: Making the reader care. Agendas, backup material, legal notices, etc.

Wednesday, 1/23 – Meet at Sun: Guest speaker: Nathan Crabbe.

Friday, 1/25 – Reporting day

Week four – Daily stories

Monday, 1/28 – First story due; discuss obstacles and successes.

Wednesday, 1/30 – In-class critique of stories; pitch ideas for issue story

Friday, 2/1 – Conclude story critiques; status of issue stories

Week five – Issue, in-depth, beat development

Monday, 2/4 – Guest speaker: John Lowe of Detroit Free Press

Wednesday, 2/6 – Meet at Sun with reporters and editors to discuss story and art ideas; coordinate with artists

Friday, 2/8 – Reporting day

Week six – Start profiles;

Monday, 2/11 – Issue stories due; discuss profile assignment (person in the news); profile due 2/25

Wednesday, 2/13 – Critique issue stories; discuss profile ideas

Friday, 2/15 – Conclude critique on issue stories; Guest speaker: Jon Silman on profiles

Week seven - art elements

Monday, 2/18 – Status check on profiles, especially art

Wednesday, 2/20 – Meet at Sun to discuss profiles; elements of the CP (Rob and Rob)

Friday, 2/22 – Reporting day

Week eight - Mid-term (profiles)

Monday, 2/25 - Profiles due; discuss obstacles and successes

Wednesday, 2/27 – Discuss profiles

Friday, 3/1 – No class

Week nine 3/2-9– spring break

Week 10 – Switch beats

Monday, 3/11 - review beats, share experiences; assign new beats

Wednesday, 3/13 – Meet at Sun with reporters; discuss ideas

Friday, 3/15- Discuss beat stories; assign beat story (due 3/25)

Week 11 – Develop beat

Monday, 3/18 – Status check on beat stories; discuss final issue stories;

Wednesday, 3/20 – Meet at Sun; Guest speakers: Morgan Watkins, Joey Flechas

Friday, 3/22 – Reporting day

Week 12 – Get started on final story; begin cop shifts

Monday, 3/25 – Beat story due; discuss final issue stories (Due 4/10)

Wednesday, 3/27 – Critique beat stories; Discuss story ideas and art elements

Friday, 3/29– Reporting day; start cop shifts (counts as a story)

Week 13 – Social media; more cop shifts

Monday, 4/1 – Finish critiques of beat stories; discuss story ideas

Wednesday, 4/3 – Meet at Sun (Guest speakers: Joel/Joe)

Friday, 4/5 – Cop shifts (any chance we can do a blog report?)

Week 14 – Wrap up

Monday, 4/8 – Discuss stories; wrap up cop shifts this week

Wednesday, 4/10 – Final stories due

Friday, 4/12 – Discuss stories – Guest speakers (John Cox, Will)

Week 15 - Final week, review

Monday, 4/15 – Review course

Wednesday, 4/17 -

Friday, 4/19 – Meet at Sun: Guest speaker: Doug Ray