Reporting/Writing for Online Media
JOU 4341 – Fall 2013

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Course Description
This class is designed for junior and senior-level undergraduates and intends to prepare students to work in an online newsroom, particularly on longterm projects.

Students will apply skills gleaned from previous journalism classes or experiences as they report, write and develop news stories focused on one topic — Florida and the nation's "stand your ground" laws.

For many years, the college's telecommunication students completed an experiential learning requirement similar to this through the Radio 1 & 2 and TV 1 & 2 courses. This class, along with JOU 4201, has been redeveloped to model and work in tandem with those experiences.

The University's (somewhat dated) course description: "Explore ways to adapt reporting practices to online media. Develop original journalistic stories in *chunks* and link them in usable structures that readers can navigate according to their own choices. Students focus on writing and on editing their own work as a necessary part of the process of writing. Emphasis on information design, not graphic design. Students produce both individual and group projects."

Class Meetings
- Lectures: Tue. Periods 7-10 (1:55 to 6 p.m.) in Weimer 1076 (Class will not meet 4 hours straight)
  - We will also meet with the PUR 4932 Public Interest Communications class for guest experts on select Tuesdays in McCarty Hall B Room G086 from 3 to 4:55 p.m. Details on these sessions TBA.
- A weekly reporting shift created around students' schedules.
  - This will be based in the College's Innovation News Center (INC) on the second floor.
  - *Please note: Attending news events outside of class may be required to complete some assignments. The Tuesday course time will not be the only meeting, and class may not always meet the entire time to allot for additional reporting time as may be required.*

Course Objectives
- Students will focus exclusively on multimedia and interactive storytelling formats.
- Students learn to recognize and pursue the best avenue for telling a given story through text, photo, video, audio, in-depth narratives, live coverage or aggregation.
- Students are expected to become relative experts in the assigned topic, the "stand your ground laws and its effects.
- Students will be proficient in online storytelling techniques sought by all disciplines of today's media industry — journalism, public relations and telecommunications.
- Through readings, guest experts and hands-on experience, students will learn what is expected of online reporters working on longterm projects in professional newsrooms.

The Topic
Florida's "stand your ground" law has remained in the news almost nonstop since the shooting death of Trayvon Martin on Feb. 26, 2012. George Zimmerman was not charged, then he was, then he went on trial, then he was acquitted.

Throughout the 16-month process, Florida's controversial 2005 law had serious headline cache.

Now, the trial is over, Florida's governor and legislature have rejected fervent calls for a special session, and it's unclear where the story is heading. This course offers an opportunity for students to be part of the vanguard dedicated to *explaining* the story's direction, effects and meaning.

The Topic Within The Course
As stories are reported out, they will become part of WUFT News's ongoing stand your ground coverage — on air and online. While the content will mainly live on a section of WUFT.org, reporters should consider how both in-depth and daily stories can be ported for WUFT-FM or WUFT-TV.

This course is modeled on the Carnegie-Knight Foundation's News21 program, a national reporting project based at Arizona State University in which more than a dozen universities have participated since 2006. News21 is a leader in journalism education and has been successful in advancing its alumni into fulfilling storytelling careers. This course has been designed to provide students experience in its mold.

Course text and readings:
- *Producing Online News: Digital Skills, Stronger Stories* - Ryan M. Thornburg, CQ Press (2011) (ISBN 978-1-60426-996-3)
- Readings and articles as selected by the instructor will be emailed throughout the semester.
- Suggested: Student membership to Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE).
- Access to training materials on Lynda.com (available through UF).

Equipment and Supplies:
- Journalism students must own digital audio, photo and video equipment, plus a MacBook Pro with necessary software installed.
- These requirements are at http://www.jou.ufl.edu/academic/jou/equipreq/index.php

Grading
Assignments are divided into the following six categories, with the heaviest weight given to published stories:

Assignment	*Point totals*	*Percent of total grade*
Diagnostic project	90	9%
News and reading quizzes (9)	160	16%
Story pitches (3)	150	15%
Published story evaluations (3)	300	30%
Peer editing	100	10%
Skill advancement	200	20%
Total	1000 points	

An **A** indicates superior performance; **B**, highly competent, above-average work; **C**, average; **D**, below average; **E**, unsatisfactory. Final grades are calculated following the scale of 100-90, A; 89-80, B; etc.

- **Story pitches** are akin to memos to one's editor in a newsroom (in this case, the course instructor). They should be at least 200 words in length, summarizing a student's research and reporting, and adding analysis and a specific story idea. Pitches should describe — in detail — the story and its angles, how the story fits into the project's overall mission, as well as a realistic deadline agreed upon by the reporter and editor. It should include sources of information, reporting techniques, and integration of multimedia elements for WUFT's various platforms.
- **Published stories** will explore underreported angles of the ongoing stand your ground law controversy. Stories should carry impact through a well-crafted narrative and/or captivating use of multimedia. There

is no set minimum length, but breaking news stories can be as short as 200 words. These will be the exception, with average story text length closer to 800 or 1,000 words. Max: 2,000.
- Each story should reflect one or more of the following storytelling techniques: **photo, video, audio, data visualization, longform narrative** or **aggregation (Storify).** Students are expected to experiment and produce in each of those areas.
- **Attendance** will not be taken for lecture sessions, but there are **9 news quizzes**. The top 8 will be counted. Missed classes result in missed news quizzes, which is an automatic 0 of 10.
- **Skill advancement** will be based off of a student's prior clips and the initial diagnostic project. It allows for the instructor to evaluate — during the entire semester — each student's progress of experimentation in, and mastery of, the above multimedia techniques.

Extra credit: Students do have opportunities to earn extra credit. Each additional story published beyond the required **three** will result in **25 points** of extra credit on your final grade (up to 100 points).

Caution
This is a professional course. The rules probably are different than those of other courses. You must not only do the work, but you must demonstrate that you can do the work acceptably within a limited time. Missed deadlines result in automatic failure of the assignment/project. Errors in proper nouns or facts result in automatic failure of the assignment/project. Stories with conflicts of interest of the reporter shall also result in automatic failure. Grades on stories can be lowered (e.g. to zero) as the result of students misrepresenting themselves or otherwise being unprofessional while working on story assignments. Do NOT tell sources you are working for the Alligator or any other publication. Students often find sources are more willing to talk if the students are dressed appropriately.

Sources
Simple rules here. Talk to as many people as possible. Make as many calls as one can in either a longterm or deadline environment. It is what is expected of reporters in the real world. Do not interview friends or family members. Should the professor or another newsroom supervisor discover students have included a friend (be they from childhood or from a fraternity/sorority) as a source, the result will be a failure of the assignment.

Do your own reporting and writing
Plagiarism—including using material from news releases and information gathered from the Internet without attribution—will result in serious and harsh consequences. If an offense is discovered, you will fail the course and be recommended for expulsion from UF. You can find the college's official ethical standards at http://http://www.jou.ufl.edu/academic/jou/honesty

If you have even the smallest doubt or are confused about this or anything else, PLEASE ASK.

Disabilities
If you would benefit from disability-related accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center as early in the semester as possible. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, 392-8565.

Wellness
The UF Counseling and Wellness Center is available for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. It's on campus at 3190 Radio Road and is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call 352-392-1575.

Course Schedule:
This is an approximate roadmap of where the class is headed, though much was not set in stone at the course's outset, providing for flexibility in guest experts' schedules.

Readings and assignments are due during the weekly meeting date under which they're listed.

Week 1: (Thursday, Aug. 22)
Course Introduction & Expectations
Newsroom Orientation
*Diagnostic Project **(Due 8/28 at 11:59 p.m.)***

Week 2: (Thursday, Aug. 29) Online storytelling
News and readings quiz
Diagnostic project evaluation/discussion
Reading: Chapter 1 & 3, Thornburg

REPORTING BEGINS SEPT. 2

Week 3: (Tuesday, Sept. 3)
—Guest experts: Legal perspectives—
Readings TBA

Week 4: (Tuesday, Sept. 10) Reporting Online
News and readings quiz
First story pitch **(Due 9/9 at 11:59 p.m.)**
Reading: Chapter 6, Thornburg (p. 135-166)

Week 5: (Tuesday, Sept. 17)
—Guest experts: SYG reporters—
Readings TBA

Week 6: (Tuesday, Sept. 24)
—Guest experts: Dream Defenders—
Readings TBA

Week 7: (Tuesday, Oct. 1) Data & data viz
News and readings quiz
Second story pitch **(Due 9/30 at 11:59 p.m.)**
Reading: Chapter 9, Thornburg (p. 241-272)

Week 8: (Tuesday, Oct. 8) Audio storytelling
News and readings quiz
Reading: Chapter 8, Thornburg (p. 210-220)

Week 9: (Tuesday, Oct. 15) Video storytelling
News and readings quiz
Third story pitch **(Due 10/14 at 11:59 p.m.)**
Reading: Chapter 8, Thornburg (p. 223-235)

Week 10: (Tuesday, Oct. 22) Video storytelling
News and readings quiz
Reading TBA

Week 11: (Tuesday, Oct. 29) Photography
News and readings quiz
Photos as story, photos as support
Reading: Chapter 8, Thornburg

Week 12: (Tuesday, Nov. 5) Heds, SEO, editing
News and readings quiz
Reading: Chapters 4 & 5, Thornburg

Week 13: (Tuesday, Nov. 12) Edit & report
In-class peer editing

Week 14: (Tuesday, Nov. 19) Edit & report
In-class peer editing

Week 15: (Tuesday, Nov. 26) Edit & report
In-class peer editing

Week 16: (Tuesday, Dec. 3)
Final news quiz and course wrap