

Reporting/Writing for Online Media

JOU 4341 – Spring 2013

Instructors: Ethan Magoc, deputy Web director of the INF and grad assistant
emagoc@ufl.edu @ethanmagoc

Matt Sheehan, *Director of the 21st Century News Lab and Lecturer*
msheehan@jou.ufl.edu @mattsheehan 352-354-3629 (rings all phones)

Newsroom online leadership: Christina DeVarona

Course Description

This advanced level undergraduate course will prepare students for working in an online newsroom. Students will be asked to participate in newsroom shifts throughout the course of the semester, and each will be required to spend at least five hours a week working in the newsroom. The schedule will be determined in the first few class sessions.

Students will apply skills and methods learned earlier in the journalism curriculum as they report, write and develop news stories on various topics for the online news environment. The University's course description is as follows: "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:

Tu 7 (1:55 to 2:45 p.m.)

A newsroom shift of at least five hours a week TBD based on your schedule
G037 – 21st Century News Lab

Please note: Attending news events outside of class may be required to complete some assignments. The course time shown for Tuesday will not be our only meeting, and we will generally not meet the entire time. That time will be made up by your individual newsroom shifts, TBD.

Course Objectives:

- Students gain hands-on experience in multimedia and interactive journalism.
- Students experiment with tools and best practices in written, visual and audio storytelling.
- Students learn best practices for producing digital journalism stories.
- Students will be able to use appropriate multimedia reporting and production tools.
- Students will be able to explain and critique current storytelling practices in journalism.

Newsroom Experience

A major part of this course is the applied experience in the college's new integrated news facility. All students enrolled in this course will be required to spend at least six hours a week as an online reporter in the newsroom. This requirement is an analogue to the telecom majors' experiential learning labs in Radio 1 & 2 and TV 1 & 2.

You will work individually and occasionally team report with each other and other students working in the newsroom during the semester. You will report to the online leadership team who will be evaluating your work, but will also take direction from the other news leaders for other platforms. Pay particular attention to Forrest Smith and Bridget Grogan, who will help shape the day with assignments in the morning.

We expect you to arrive on time and be responsive to the news. There may be occasions when the news does not fit neatly into regular hours. *Your job is done when the news has been reported, not when the clock ticks out.* We will be flexible with you as long as you are flexible with us. You will be evaluated on this experience not only on the quality of product you create, but your attitude and performance in the newsroom.

Students will be expected to appear and act professional. Adhere to the rules and regulations of the newsroom, which we will go over in the newsroom orientation.

Equipment and Supplies:

Students are expected to own basic digital audio, photo and video equipment as well as a MacBook Pro with necessary software installed. Specific requirements are posted here: http://www.jou.ufl.edu/academic/jou/curriculum-revision/index.php?page_id=8

Course text and readings:

Producing Online News: Digital Skills, Stronger Stories - Ryan M. Thornburg, CQ Press (2011) (ISBN 978-1-60426-996-3)

Web readings and articles as selected by the instructor and posted on the course website

Access to training materials on Lynda.com (available through UF)

Online Course Communication

We will be using LORE.com as our method of communicating in private during the course. All students should create an account and log in to the course by the third meeting of class (Thursday, August 30). You may create your account and join the class via the following link: http://lore.com/create_account/e732bdc877df.

Public communication and information sharing may also be part of this course via Twitter. Posts from the instructor and fellow students that tie into the subjects and readings of this course will be shared with the hashtag #ufnewsroom

Course Schedule:

This course is a professional and newsroom-based course. Thus, the path and daily schedule of this experience will be adapted as the session progresses. Just as life in a newsroom adapts everyday, so shall this course. The following is a basic outline of what we will cover this term. Explicit assignments and due dates will be provided throughout the course

Please note: Newsroom shifts will begin the week of Jan. 14 and complete on MAY 3 (this is the end of exam week). You will only be excused from your shift that week if you have a documented official exam at the time of your shift. If that is the case, we will work to find an alternate shift.

Week 1: (Jan. 8)

Course Introduction & Expectations

Newsroom Orientation

Reading: Chapters 1 & 3, Thornburg

Week 2: (Jan. 15)

Diagnostic Project

NEWSROOM SHIFTS BEGIN

Reading: Chapter 2, Thornburg; Chapter 6, Thornburg

Week 3: (Jan. 22)

Story forms

Reading: Chapter 10, Thornburg; Readings on Lore: links in the “week 3 stack”

Week 4: (Jan. 29)

Remixing the news & introducing the news as conversation

Reading: Chapter 12, Thornburg; Readings on Lore: links in the “week 4 stack”

Week 5: (Feb. 5)

NO FORMAL CLASS MEETING

Newsroom shifts continue as scheduled

Follow tweets from #jiconf Feb. 8-9

Readings: Chapter 11, Thornburg

Week 6: (Feb. 12)

Reporting Online

Reading: Chapter 6, Thornburg

Week 7: (Feb. 19)

It's not just about the reporting anymore... essential skills for online journalists

Reading: Chapters 4 & 5, Thornburg

Week 8: (Feb. 26)

Audio Storytelling

Reading: Chapter 8, Thornburg

Week 9: (March 2)

NO FORMAL CLASS MEETING

Week 10: (March 12)

Storytelling through Data and Visualization

Week 11: (March 19)

Gainesville City Election

Week 12: (March 26)

Election recap

Week 13: (April 2)

Project Work

Week 14: (April 9)

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Week 15: (April 16)

Project Work & Project Presentations

Week 16: (April 23)

Course Wrap

Grading

Students will submit multiple deliverables throughout the 16 weeks and will be evaluated in the following criteria:

News Tests: 15 percent

Story Pitches: 5 percent

Published (10) Story Evaluation: 50 percent

Newsroom Shift Assessment: 20 percent

Enterprise Story: 10 percent

Your story evaluations will take into account the use of multiple media, innovative coverage, self-direction in addition to the quality of content produced.

You will be required to have at least 10 published stories on WUFT.org during the spring term (there are 16 weeks of shifts). This is not repurposing content from other reporters, but original and independently reported works.

Each shift you should come prepared with story ideas (at least three) to present to the online leadership team and assignment editors. Each time that you do not have story ideas generated, or the editor feels that they are not well thought, you will lose two points (of five – and yes, it is possible to accumulate negative points).

In addition to weekly stories (with hope, from your pitches), each member of the class will be responsible for conceptualizing and executing one piece of “enterprise” reporting.

Students will be responsible for attending all scheduled shifts. Should a conflict arise, it is the responsibility of the scheduled party to find a replacement (e.g. shift exchange), but you must let your editors know. A missed, uncovered shift will result in a 10 point deduction (again, possible to go into negative territory here).

Newsroom shift assessment will be calculated by one point for each week's shift (showing up nets 1 point – unexcused tardiness forfeits that point) for a total of 16 points. The final 4 points will be awarded by the supervisors to reward independent and strong work ethic and positive attitude.

Extra credit: Students do have opportunities to earn extra credit. Each additional story published beyond the required 10 will result in 1 point of extra credit on your final grade (up to 10 points). An additional volunteer reporting shift will result in an extra 2 points (and any makeup shifts will also be awarded 2 points, again up to 10 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.

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: One of the best ways to ensure your stories are fair accurate and complete is to gather information from a variety of sources. In selecting potential sources for your stories, keep in mind that we live in a diverse, multicultural world. You should make every effort to have your stories reflect that. Talk to a variety of people from different backgrounds, educational levels, etc. to get a complete story.

Students enrolled in this course should not be used as sources in your stories unless they are involved directly in the story. Friends, roommates, relatives, sorority sisters, fraternity brothers, etc. usually pose a conflict-of-interest threat when used as sources.

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. Should that be discovered, you will fail the course and be recommended for expulsion from the University. You can find the college's official ethical standards at <http://www.jou.ufl.edu/academic/jou/honesty/demic/jou/honesty/>. If you have even the smallest doubt or are confused about this or anything else in the course, PLEASE ASK.

Lectures and materials in this class are the property of the University/faculty member. Lectures may not be taped without permission from the lecturer and may not be used for any commercial purpose. Students found in violation may be subject to discipline under the University's Student Conduct Code.

The **University of Florida Honor Code** was voted on and passed by the Student Body in the Fall 1995 semester. The Honor Code reads as follows:

Preamble: In adopting this Honor Code, the students of the University of Florida recognize that academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students who enroll at the University commit to holding themselves and their peers to the high standard of honor required by the Honor Code. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. A student-run Honor Court and faculty support are crucial to the success of the Honor Code. The quality of a University of Florida education is dependent upon the community acceptance and enforcement of the Honor Code.

The Honor Code: We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity. 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." (*In this course, everything you complete has an implied acceptance of the honor code.*)

For more information about academic honesty, contact Student Judicial Affairs, P202 Peabody Hall, 392-1261.

Students requesting classroom accommodation must register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean will provide documentation to the student who must provide documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.