

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.

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. You will work closely with the Sun's editors, photographers and artists.
- \* Most, if not all, classes will be conducted 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 I will provide, indicate your first and second choices. I will assign your beats and chances are, you won't get the one you want, at least not at first. We'll reset at midterm and you may get your preferred beat then. Students in the past have preferred to stay in their initial bear, so that is an option as well.
- \* You will write at least six stories during the semester: daily beat stories, issue stories, daily police briefs, person-in-the-news profiles, live blog coverage and an extensive piece for your final story. I hope to publish all of the stories in The Sun.
- \* Be prepared to work outside of class hours reporting and writing your stories. Most Fridays will be set aside as reporting/writing days (especially during hunting season).
- \* Deadlines will be set, and you must work 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.

\* Class attendance and participation are part of your grade. In class, we will discuss story ideas and themes, brain-storming story elements, ledes, etc. You 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 have a number of guest speakers who will talk about how they handle daily beat coverage – all from The Sun's award-winning newsroom. Reporters and editors will share what they've learned doing battle 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.

\* 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](http://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, Jan. 6 – Intro: What to expect: coverage of real beats, working with Sun reporters and editors; getting stories published; meeting at the Sun (your 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, 1/8 – Get emails and phone numbers (we will use texting a lot); discuss students' experience level; discuss beat options:

## **Week two – Setting up the semester**

Monday, 1/13 – Assign beats; discuss kinds of stories you will be pursuing.

Wednesday, 1/15 – Meet your Sun reporter; discuss ideas; first story due 1/27

## **Week three – Daily beat coverage**

Monday, 1/20 – Holiday

Wednesday, 1/22 – Meet Sun photo editor Rob Witzel and discuss setting up art.

Friday, 1/24 – Reporting day

## **Week four – Daily stories**

Monday, 1/27 - First story due; Guest speakers: Morgan Watkins/Chris Curry discuss meeting coverage, and how to stay awake through 11-hour marathon sessions.

Wednesday, 1/29 – In-class critique of stories; pitch ideas for issue story

Friday, 1/31 – Reporting day

## **Week five – Issue, in-depth, beat development**

Monday, 2/3 – Finish critiques; discuss issue story ideas with reporters and editors

Wednesday, 2/5 – Guest speaker: Rob Mack, who will discuss turning your idea into a centerpiece.

Friday, 2/7 – Reporting day

## **Week six – Start profiles**

Monday, 2/10 – Issue stories due; discuss obstacles and successes; Guest speaker: Kristine on profiles

Wednesday, 2/12 – Critique issue stories; discuss profile ideas; profile due ??

Friday, 2/14 – Reporting day

**Week seven - art elements**

Monday, 2/17 – Status check on profiles, especially art

Wednesday, 2/19 – Guest speaker: Nathan Crabbe

Friday, 2/21 – Reporting day

**Week eight - Mid-term (profiles)**

Monday, 2/24 - Profiles due; discuss obstacles and successes;

Wednesday, 2/26 – Discuss/assign new beats; assign cop shifts

Friday, 2/28 – Cop shifts begin

**MARCH 3-7 SPRING BREAK**

**Week nine – Switch beats**

Monday, 3/10 – Discuss story ideas; set cop shifts

Wednesday, 3/12 – Meet reporters; discuss beat story ideas

Friday, 3/14- Continue cop shifts/reporting day

**Week 10 – Develop beat**

Monday, 3/17 – Status check on beat stories; discuss final issue story

Wednesday, 3/19 –Guest speaker: Erin Jester

Friday, 3/21 – Beat story due; reporting day for final story

**Week 11 – Get started on final story**

Monday, 3/24 – Discuss final story ideas

Wednesday, 3/26 – Guest speakers: Jeff Schweers, Cindy Swirko

Friday, 3/28– Reporting day

**Week 12 – Social media**

Monday, 3/31 – Discuss final story ideas and live coverage

Wednesday, 4/2 – Guest speakers: Joel Axon/Joe Byrnes on live coverage

Friday, 4/4 – live blog

**Week 13 – Wrap up**

Monday, 4/7 – Cop shifts available

Wednesday, 4/9 – Discuss final stories and art

Friday, 4/11 – Reporting day

**Week 14 – Wrap up**

Monday, 4/14 – Discuss final story

Wednesday, 4/16 – Final story due

Friday, 4/18 – Off

**Week 15 – Final weeks**

Monday, 4/21- Review stories

Wednesday, 4/23 – Review class; Guest speaker: Doug Ray