

Applied Newsroom Experience

MMC 6936 – Spring 2014

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Course Description

This advanced graduate course will prepare students for working in a digital first newsroom on multiple platforms. Students will be asked to participate in newsroom shifts throughout the course of the semester, and each will be required to spend at least 12 hours a week working in the newsroom. The schedule will be determined in consultation with your calendar and the needs of the newsroom.

Students will apply skills and methods learned earlier in the pro-master's curriculum as they report, write and develop news stories on various topics for the online news environment.

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

The defining objective of this course is the applied experience in the college's Innovation News Center. All students enrolled in this course will be required to spend at least 160 hours during the course of the semester as a multiplatform reporter in the newsroom or working on news products.

You will work individually and occasionally team report with 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 are available on the newsroom Intranet at www.wuft.org/newsroom (user: newsroom pass: newsroom).

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 Some advanced gear is available for checkout from the INC and the equipment room in G020. You will be required to check out the gear and adhere to all rules as outlined at time of checkout for the equipment.

Course Schedule & Deliverables:

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.

Students enrolled in the course will be expected to have at least 10 published clips on WUFT.org or contribute significantly to a package airing on one of the other WUFT News and WRUF sports platforms.

Shifts will officially begin the week of Jan. 13 and expire following exams week May 2. Should your scheduled shift fall on a University holiday or reading day, you will be required to arrange an alternative time to make up that scheduled shift in order to meet or exceed your 160 hour work requirement.

Grading

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

Newsroom Diary/Story Pitches: 50 points

Enterprise Story: 100 points

Newsroom Shift Assessment: 350 points

Published (10) Story Evaluation: 500 points

Total: 1000 points

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 (one story in 12 hours of work is not unreasonable, strive to do more than one story). This is not repurposing content from radio and TV reporters, but original work designed for the Web, radio or TV.

The enterprise story will be at least one story, but could be a series of stories, that takes an in-depth examination of an issue or trend that you have reported during your experienced

Newsroom Diaries

Each student will be required to complete a written newsroom diary, detailing each week the hours you worked, the tasks you completed and links to the story(ies) you produced. A diary check-in will be periodically held, so make sure you have a printed or electronic version with you when in the newsroom. You should include your three story pitches in each week's diary entry.

Your Stories/Story Ideas

In general, these are timely but not breaking stories that are of general interest to adults in North Central Florida of sufficient quality to appear on WUFT.org. Examples include features, profiles, localizations of state or national stories, trends and investigative stories.

Bottom line: You get course credit only if the story is published.

You can improve the chances that your story is suitable for publication if you consult with an assignment editor several days in advance of your deadline. Contact them through email at wuftnews@gmail.com and use the words "story approval" in the subject line. Be sure to give them sufficient time to answer your queries. Emailing the night before the story is due is too late. Our assignment editors also will ensure that we aren't duplicating efforts by having multiple students chase the same story.

Because this is a chance for you to get meaningful clips for your portfolio, make these high-quality stories that would impress a potential employer.

We can be flexible and count a complicated, compelling investigative story involving public records as worth two assignments. But doing so requires the prior approval of INC director Matt Sheehan and applies only to investigative stories.

Each shift you should come prepared with story ideas (at least three) to present to the newsroom 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 out, **you will lose 20 points** (of 50 – and yes, it is possible to accumulate negative points). At least one of your shifts each week should be scheduled to allow you to attend the 9:30 a.m. story meeting where you will/can pitch your story idea.

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. This is a non-daily, long term story taking a deeper dive into a trend or idea that is affecting lives in North Central Florida. You may decide to help develop your master's degree final project by using this assignment for that purpose.

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 **150-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 16 points – unexcused tardiness forfeits those points) for a total of 250 points. The final 100 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 10 points of extra credit on your final grade (up to 100 points). An additional volunteer reporting shift will result in an extra 20 points (and any makeup shifts will also be awarded 20 points, again up to 100 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 1000-900, A; 899-800, 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.