

Investigative Reporting for Broadcast Journalists
RTV 3305, Section 1832
Spring 2015

Class Time: Thursdays 9:35 a.m. – 12:35 p.m. (Periods 3-5)

Class Location: Weimer 2050

Instructor: Ginger Blackstone

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Office: 2041-B

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., available alternate times by appointment

Course Objective:

Investigative journalism is the cornerstone of the Fourth Estate, tasked with holding those in power accountable to the people and the public good. In this class, students will explore investigative reporting techniques; practice obtaining and using public information for broadcast news stories; learn how to produce both in-depth investigative stories and use those skills to improve daily news reporting skills; discuss the practice of investigative reporting and its role in society; and produce in-depth news stories for TV and radio. In addition, students will build competencies in personal brand management to leverage their stories for career advancement.

Goals:

- Discuss the characteristics that are used to develop a solid investigative news story
- Identify computer assisted reporting resources and be able to utilize resources for newsgathering
- Participate in class discussion as an informed journalist and collegial group member
- Prepare to apply for journalism positions with a resume and resume reel

Required Readings:

Investigative Reporting: From Premise to Publication

Author: Marcy Burstiner

ISBN-13: 978-1890871918

Materials:

- You will be provided an SD card for newsgathering. These cards will be issued in class.
- You are expected to be knowledgeable and proficient with the appropriate equipment necessary to execute your projects. If this is a problem, please alert me right away and we'll set up training.

Assignments:

➔ **Investigative News Stories**

You are required to submit three investigative news stories over the course of the semester. One may be radio, but two **MUST** be TV. The only exception is if you have not completed TV1. If you are taking TV1 concurrently, your first two stories may be radio and your last must be TV. If you have not taken TV1 and are not currently signed up to take it, let me know and we will talk about options.

Each story MUST include:

1. A news peg! The story must be timely and have news value. What makes it important right now?
2. At least ONE audio or visual element that came from a public record or public access event, i.e., inside a courtroom (be sure the judge allows recordings!), a public meeting, evidence, first appearance, surveillance video, FOIA, 9-1-1 calls, etc.
3. Sound from at least THREE people. One of those people should be your human element, an individual directly affected by the story. If your story doesn't have a central character or doesn't directly affect anyone, you'll want to reconsider the idea. Viewer benefit is essential to a good broadcast news story.
4. At least TWO natsound breaks for TV stories or THREE natsound breaks for radio stories. TV stories must have a reporter standup. We want to see who is sharing this story with us.
5. BALANCE – we want to be sure you are representing all sides of the story. Give the accused the opportunity to defend themselves. Be critical but fair. An unfair or biased story will earn you a failing grade no matter how well it is written, shot, or edited. Objectivity is a cornerstone of journalism that will be strictly observed in this class.
6. ATTRIBUTION – where are you getting your information from? Be sure to be clear about your sources. Who said what? Where do these facts come from? This will also help protect you from legal action. (And good investigative reporters get sued a lot.)
7. This class will utilize the UF OneDrive for project submission. This is very similar to Dropbox. All projects will go into this box.
8. All TV stories must be submitted as complete packages and cannot run more than 2:30. I challenge you to keep them at or below 2:00.
9. In lieu of a final exam, you will select one of your three stories for revision and resubmit it. This is designed to take your best work and really make it shine. These revised stories will be shared with the WUFT news directors for possible broadcast.
10. Extra credit is given to stories that are selected by the news directors to run on WUFT radio and television newscasts.

➔ Story Pitches

On scheduled pitch days, students will submit three story ideas in writing. These must be 1 page, typed, double spaced, 12 pt font, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman font. Each pitch must indicate whether the pitch is TV or radio, what investigative element will be used (see number 2 above), who will be interviewed, what visual elements you will use to tell the story (for TV), and why you think the story is relevant or timely. This is your opportunity to really sell the story. You will use these sheets to pitch your story in class. The sheets are graded separately from the executed pkgs. Once your story is selected, you will have two weeks to execute it.

➔ **Deadlines**

Deadlines are paramount in the industry. Missing a deadline can result in dismissal or suspension from your job. With that in mind, all work for this class is due on the specified date at the beginning of class time. For each 24 hours after the deadline, a letter grade is subtracted INCLUDING weekends. After ten calendar days, an automatic zero is given for the assignment without exception.

Technical difficulties or interview cancellations are not license to submit late work. Plan ahead and have a backup plan.

➔ **Required Readings**

You will have regular readings from the textbook and possibly other materials. As of now, no quizzes are scheduled. However, if the discussions make it apparent that the reading materials are not being read, the instructor may implement quizzes.

Attendance & Participation:

- ➔ Students are allowed ONE “freebie” absence and ONE late arrival without penalty. Additional absences and tardies will be unexcused. It is recommended that you save your freebies for emergencies.
- ➔ In extenuating circumstances, the instructor may agree to grant an excused absence with at least 24 hours’ advanced notice and for a substantially good reason, i.e. a conflict absolutely cannot be resolved. The only exception is in the case of illness, which requires a doctor’s note on or before the next class period. If you tell me you have a death in the family, do not be surprised if I investigate your assertion.
- ➔ Unexcused absences will cost you 10 points from your participation grade (the maximum amount per class). If you walk into class after attendance has been taken, it will cost you 5 points. You are expected to remain in class until it is dismissed by the instructor. Leaving early will result in an unexcused absence.
- ➔ If you use a “freebie” absence, assignments are still due at the beginning of class.
- ➔ THE FREEBIE ALLOWANCE DOES NOT APPLY TO PITCH DAYS. You must be present in class and participate in the story pitch process in order to receive credit for the assignment. I will not accept late pitch sheets.
- ➔ If there is a quiz and you miss class for any reason, you must contact me and set up a time to make up the quiz before the next class period. Failure to do so will result in a zero for that quiz.
- ➔ If there is an in-class graded activity and you miss class, you will not be allowed to make up the activity. You must be present and participate in order to receive credit.

- You are expected to come to class prepared and actively participate in class discussions. Disruptive behavior or failure to participate in class discussions will negatively affect your participation grade.

Laptops & Cellphones:

- During lectures and discussions, you must turn off all laptops and cellphones, and pay attention. Note taking is to be done non-electronically. The use of recording devices in class without prior permission from the instructor is prohibited.

Grades:

5%	Pitch 1
5%	Pitch 2
5%	Pitch 3
5%	Draft Resume/Cover Letter
5%	Draft Resume Reel
10%	Participation/In-class activities/Quizzes
10%	Investigative Story 1
10%	Investigative Story 2
10%	Investigative Story 3
10%	Revised Resume/Cover Letter
10%	Revised Resume Reel
15%	Revised Investigative Story

A handout that specifies grading rubrics for projects will be distributed in class at the time the assignment is explained.

Grading Scale:

A	92.5-100
A-	89.5-92.4
B+	86.5-89.4
B	83.5-86.4
B-	79.5-83.4
C+	76.5-79.4
C	73.5-76.4
C-	69.5-73.4
D+	66.5-69.4
D	63.5-66.4
D-	59.5-63.4
E	59.4 or below

Plagiarism:

You are not permitted to recycle any work from another class. All work should be specifically produced for RTV 3305 and produced by you alone. You may recruit another student to help you shoot standups for your TV pkgs, but ALL other elements must be shot by YOU. All scripts are to be written by YOU without exception. Teamwork is only permitted when it is specified in the assignment parameters.

As any assignment in any course in UF, you are not allowed to copy work from another individual in any form. See the UF College of Journalism and Communications' Honor Code for further details: <http://www.jou.ufl.edu/academics/bachelors/journalism/academic-honesty/> Failure to comply with this policy can result in failing this course, as well as further action by the college and/or the UF Dean of Students Office.

The use of video, images, or audio from third-party sources must be approved in advance, must come from sources that WUFT-TV has legal access to use, must not violate copyright laws, must be used in very limited amounts, and must be used only in cases where no other video or graphics will make sense for the story. Failure to comply with this mandate will result in a failing grade on the assignment. Pulling media off of the Internet without prior written consent from the copyright holder is theft of property. This includes social media, YouTube, and Google. In addition to violating course policy, lifting media can get you into serious legal trouble.

Equipment Checkout:

There are television production kits assigned to RTV 3305. You are allowed a one-day checkout, with the equipment due back by 9:00 a.m. the following morning. On Friday, equipment can be checked out until 9:00 a.m. Monday. Steve Kippert is the contact person.

There is a 24-hour wait to reserve equipment again once you bring it back. For special projects and situations, it may be possible to grant exceptions. Send me an e-mail in enough time that I can contact Steve Kippert on your behalf to try to arrange something. This is not a guarantee that the equipment will be made available.

There are a lot of people using this equipment. Reserve early. Arrange your shoots early. Don't procrastinate. Lack of equipment availability is not an acceptable reason to miss deadlines.

I strongly advise you to respect that this is expensive equipment. Do not leave it unattended. Do not leave it in your car. Do not leave it in excessive hot or cold temperatures. Do not expose it to humidity or moisture. Do not expose it to extreme conditions. Do not allow other students or friends access to it for any purpose. Do not leave it in a place where your dog can chew on it.

A hard copy of the WUFT equipment policy will be distributed to the class. ***Any equipment checkout violations will result in 10 points off of the student's project grade for each violation.***

The equipment is the sole property of the University of Florida. You are to use the designated equipment only to generate content for this class. All course content is also the sole property of the university. You do not have the right to sell or distribute it to any other broadcast or media outlet or entity without the express permission of the University of Florida.

Disabilities:

If you have a disability that requires special consideration from the course instructor, you must self-identify with the instructor and register with the UF Dean of Students Office.

Accommodations will be arranged. More information is available from the Disability Resource Center online: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Tentative Course Schedule:

January 8	Course Introduction, Syllabus Review “All the President’s Men” (138 minutes) Class discussion
January 15	What constitutes investigative reporting? Chapter 2: Finding the Story Chapter 3: Setting up your Investigation
January 22	Chapter 4: Requesting Public Records Chapter 5: The Game Plan Award-winning Investigative Work
January 29	Pitch Day Protocols & Investigative Story Assignments Chapter 14: Pitching Your Story Chapter 6: The Interview Process
February 5	Pitch Day 1 Personal Brand Management: Resumes & Cover Letters Explained
February 12	Chapter 7: Analyzing the Big Story Chapter 8: Documenting the Story Draft Resumes & Cover Letters Due
February 19	Investigative Story 1 Due Watch/listen to reports
February 26	Chapter 9: Finding & Using Data Chapter 10: Shaping the Story Revised Resumes & Cover Letters Due
March 5	Spring Break, no class
March 12	Pitch Day 2 Personal Brand Management: Resume Reels Explained

March 19	Chapter 11: Writing the Story Chapter 12: Legal & Ethical Considerations Famous Investigative Lawsuits: What went wrong?
March 26	Investigative Story 2 Due Watch/listen to reports
April 2	Pitch Day 3 Resume Reels 1 st Cut Due
April 9	Chapter 13: Advanced Methods Overview “Watergate: Shadow of History” (117 mins.) Chasing Additional Records, Pushing Through Roadblocks
April 16	Last Day of Class Investigative Story 3 Due Watch/listen to reports
April 23 & 24	Reading Days/No Classes Watch e-mail for Story 3 Evaluation & Feedback
Wednesday, April 29	Revised Resume Reel & Revised Investigative Story due 7:30 p.m.