

J339F Investigative Reporting, Spring 2017
Unique number 08153
Monday-Wednesday (occasional Fridays), 2-3 p.m., BMC 4.204

Instructor: Kathleen McElroy
Office: BMC 3.334
Office phone: 512-471-1965
Cell phone: 917-693-0548
Office hours: Tuesday-Thursday, 10-noon and by appointment

Course Description: J339 F is a news and writing course for journalism majors. It emphasizes the skills needed to determine what an investigative story is, to pursue and investigate stories, and to produce such stories.

Prerequisite: Journalism 310F (or 320D) and 311F (or 321C) with a grade of at least B- in each. requirement.

Course Aims and Outcomes

As a previous instructor of this course wrote in his syllabus, this class is a hands-on, participatory, collaborative exercise in learning how to be an investigative reporter. This class will operate like an ad-hoc projects team for a news organization, relying on individual and group effort to discuss, explore, find and produce stories.

To do so we'll spend the semester learning about our topic and placing any issues in the right historical and news context; we will use data and numbers; we'll interview authorities and experts, and we'll interview real people whose voices are rarely heard. Then we'll use the multimedia skills you've developed in previous classes to tell stories that need to be told. We may tell these stories through a website we build, written stories, audio and visual stories, animation and/or data visualization.

Class project: Female veterans in Texas. We're not going to assign an issue to this project (medical benefits, educational benefits, PTSD, military sexual trauma) until we understand history and context, examine data and talk to female veterans.

Class goal: The main class goals are learning how to deeply report and deeply listen and how to turn that information into enlightening stories.

We're going into this semester not knowing what our big investigative issue is – which is scary and exciting. We could produce a dynamite investigative piece that identifies bad guys and gals and brings them to their knees. Or we could end up with a lot of data and information on our hands, and a series of well-researched, well-written newsfeatures. I'm happy with either result. This class focuses as much on the process as the end result.

Required Texts

- “The Investigative Reporter’s Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques,” by Brant Houston and Investigative Reporters and Editors. Fifth Edition.
- Daily and steady reading of local, state and national news, including The Austin American-Statesman, The Dallas Morning News and Houston Chronicle and The New York Times and Washington Post.
- Books to be distributed in class

Recommended Membership: IRE, <https://www.ire.org/>. Nifty information and resources.

Grading: This is not a typical class in which you report, you produce a story, you get a grade. It is collaborative, which means it involves some group projects (and team dynamics). In addition, some project members are graduate students, including at least one working on her final project; others are taking this course in lieu of an upper-level course, and a few have just started their journalism career. I will try my best to be equitable in assigning and evaluation work, but understand we’re juggling many curriculum goals.

Assignments

REPORTING:

GENERAL PARTICIPATION (20 points):

POST A FACT (2): On Canvas, post a fact (not hearsay or personal), statistic or data on why investigating female veterans is worthwhile and newsworthy. It can be short; provide a link. 10 points

DISCUSSION (10)

READINGS (8): You'll be required to report on a book or a long article and post how it will contribute to our project as background or context 50 points.

WEEKLY JOURNALS (20 points). You have to post a weekly journal on the progress of your assignments. You will explain your pitches, the reporting and production you're doing in the group and individual projects, your interviews, your successes, your failures

INTERVIEWS (20 points). You are required to interview four or five identifiable female veterans (depending on your academic status). These interviews must be recorded on audio or video, and you need to have publishable art of the source. You must submit the transcript of the interviews.

You will be graded on following the interview guidelines, the interview media, transcripts and the miniprofiles based on the interviews.

GROUP PROJECT: 20

- 1) PITCH: 10
- 2) REPORTING: 40
- 3) PRODUCTION: 50

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT: 20

- 1) PITCH: 10
- 2) REPORTING: 40
- 3) PRODUCTION: 50

Spring Semester: As the semester continues, we'll complete this calendar

W1 Jan. 18 Wednesday Lecture: Introduction

W2 Jan. 23-25-27: Why the project matters

W3 Jan. 30-Feb. 1-3, Lecture:

Feb. 2, Panel discussion: "Journalism in the Age of Trump," 5:30 p.m.

W4 Feb. 6 Lecture: Learn about covering numbers

Feb. 8 Wednesday Lecture: Mandatory grammar session

W5 Feb. 13 Lecture: Interviewing sources

Feb. 15 Lecture:

W6 Feb. 20 Lecture: Learn about covering government/Legislature

Feb. 22 Wednesday Lecture: FOIA lecture

W7 Feb. 27 Lecture:

March 1 Lecture: Will announce whether there's a lecture on this day

Feb. 2, Panel discussion: "Journalism in the Age of Trump," 5:30 p.m.

W8 March 6-8-10: Learn about diversity

- March 8, New Yorker's Evan Osnos, "Age of Ambition: Truth, Faith and Fortune in China"

SPRING BREAK: Week of March 13

W9 March 20-22-24: Rough drafts dues

March 22:

W10 March 27-29: Final projects due

- **March 30**, Hearst Lecture: New York Times' Amy Chozick

W11 April 3-5-7: Group and individual

W12 April 10-12-14: Final editing and rewriting

W13 April 17-19-21: Final project presentation

W14 April 24 Lecture: Fall Expectations

April 26:

W15 May 1-3-5: Final presentations

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Usually in journalism we stress avoiding conflicts of interest – in which you have a vested interest in the people, groups, events or organizations that you might cover – and what could be perceived as conflicts of interest.

This class is different in that some of you may be veterans or be related to veterans. Please identify potential conflicts of interest. Without my prior permission, you can't interview or cover anyone you already know. Potential conflicts of interest include (but are not limited to): instructors, professors, administrators and fellow majors in the School of Journalism; friends, family members and friends, roommates, suitemates, boyfriends and girlfriends and former boyfriends and girlfriends, sorority/fraternity sisters/brothers, bosses and former bosses, co-workers and former co-workers; people you are suing or have sued you ...

When in doubt about a potential conflict, ask me as soon as possible. Failing to do so will result a major points deduction for assignments.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading

information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate UT rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from UT. For details see: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.

In regard to journalism and this course, academic dishonesty includes:

- Plagiarizing or using someone else's material, another media source, student work or even yourself (in part or in whole) and representing it as new for this class.

You can't turn in a story or media project from a previous class without the instructor's permission.

- Making up quotes, sources and facts.
- Not interviewing people who appear in your stories.
- Not giving appropriate attribution or citation of a source or background information. In this class, you will learn how to properly attribute information.
- Cheating during a quiz or an assignment

GENERAL GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES

Canvas:

This class uses Canvas, a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <http://canvas.utexas.edu/>. You can find support in using Canvas at the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. or with online tutorials at <http://edutech.ctl.utexas.edu/students/>

Using Email for Official Correspondence to Students:

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your email for university and course-related information and announcements. You are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your e-mail address. You should check your e-mail regularly and frequently—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. You can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating your e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

Documented Disability Statement

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).

Students with Disabilities Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities.

<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's

behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Emergency Evacuation Policy

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- * Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- * If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- * In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors.

Do not re-enter a building unless you're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department or the Fire Prevention Services office. <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/preparedness/>

Q drop Policy: The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6).

Resources for Learning & Life at UT Austin

In addition to the Moody Writing Support Center, the University of Texas has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning, including: The UT Learning Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/> Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/> Counseling & Mental Health Center: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/> Career Exploration Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/careercenter/> Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency>