

Investigative Reporting-Fall 2013

J339F/J395-30

(07335, 07950)

Classes: MW 9:30-11, CMA 4.146

Lab: F 9-12, CMA 4.152

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Independent Inquiry

This course carries the Independent Inquiry flag. Independent Inquiry courses are designed to engage you in the process of inquiry over the course of a semester, providing you with the opportunity for independent investigation of a question, problem, or project related to your major. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from the independent investigation and presentation of your own work.

Writing

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Course Description:

Students will focus on the role of investigative reporting in a democratic society, the public's right to know, shining the light on truth. Workshop-style training will be led by the instructor with input from professional reporters and editors.

This class is offered in direct partnership with *The Dallas Morning News*.

A veteran investigative editor and reporter from *The Dallas Morning News* will be working directly with students each week.

The class will be akin to a newsroom experience – we will be working, regularly, on an ongoing investigative project.

The investigative project is intended for consideration for publication in *The Dallas Morning News*, *Reporting Texas* and/or other news venues.

Objectives/Goals:

- Think critically about what investigative journalism is.
- Grasp the mechanics of investigative stories.
- Develop and hone investigative techniques.
- Examine issues of ethics, fairness, diversity and accuracy.
- Examine “neglected” or “under reported” stories
- Have each student in the class contribute to a multi-part investigative project worthy of being published in *The Dallas Morning News* or other publications, including *Reporting Texas*.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able to demonstrate an initial understanding of and competence in identifying enterprising investigative stories. They will be able to gather and report investigative news in an accurate, fair, comprehensive and clear manner as required to practice effectively as a professional in print or digital journalism.

Class Format:

Students will form reporting teams of 2 or 3 students.

Each team will work on stories that will become part of an investigative project/package.

Project/package topics will be introduced by the instructors and shaped, guided, by student input.

All stories will be overseen by the instructor and a veteran investigative editor from *The Dallas Morning News*. The goal is to produce a project that *The Dallas Morning News* or other news venues will want to publish.

Work:

Each student team will submit the following:

- One 1,500-2000-word investigative story. At least 5 sources will be quoted in the story; at least 10 sources will be interviewed.
- At least one multimedia element – photography, audio, video, Sound Slide, data visualization – must accompany the story.
- **EACH PERSON IN THE CLASS** will keep a reporter's log that is no longer than 4 typed, double-spaced pages. This is diary/log/journal in which you chronicle – in brief descriptions – the reporting you did on the days that you worked on your story. You might list people you telephoned or emailed, documents you sought, places you visited, articles you read, etc. This is a calendar-style log of the work you have done. It will note what days you have done work and what you did on those days. The instructors will be able to tell, from the log, how much work each student has contributed over the semester. HERE IS A MADE-UP EXAMPLE: *“Oct. 12, 2013: I met with Mike Smith, an investigator for the Lower Colorado River Authority in Austin. He gave me statistics he has been compiling on people “siphoning” water from Lady Bird Lake.”*

Grades

Will be based on:

1. Class participation: Investigative journalism is predicated on interaction with sources, colleagues, editors. Frequent participation with our guests is encouraged. You will also be asked to describe your work, defend your work and comment on the work of your colleagues. **Attendance**, of course, is required in class and labs. Miss four days without alerting the instructors or TA and you can drop one grade level.

2. Evaluation of the investigative story:

- Needs minor editing and minor additional material (facts, quotes, sources, etc.), grade of A.
- Needs major editing or major additional reporting (**but not both**), grade of B.
- Needs both major revision **and** major additional reporting, grade of C.
- Some effort at writing or reporting, grade of D.
- No serious effort at writing or reporting, grade of F.
- University policy allows use of “plus” and “minus” grades.

3. Evaluation of the reporter’s log: It must show consistent effort and an unfolding pattern of reporting and research.

4. Deadlines: Miss your deadlines and your highest potential grade can drop one grade level at each of these benchmarks: 15 minutes late, 12 hours, 24 hours.

5. Multimedia: You must incorporate it in your story.

Grade Grid:

Grades will be tallied according to the following percentage guidelines:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| ▪ Investigative story | 60 percent |
| ▪ Reporter’s Log | 20 percent |
| ▪ Class participation/lab work | 20 percent |

Required Texts:

The Investigative Reporter’s Handbook, latest edition

Suggestions & Tips:

Study and examine these sites for ideas, inspiration, and guides:

Investigative Reporters and Editors: <http://www.ire.org/>

Center for Public Integrity: <http://www.publicintegrity.org/projects/>

ProPublica: <http://www.propublica.org/>

National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting: <http://data.nicar.org/uplink/>

International Consortium of Investigative Journalists:
<http://www.publicintegrity.org/investigations/icij/>

Religious Policy:

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for observance of a religious holy day should inform instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

<http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance>

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. 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).

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

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:

Do not plagiarize, make up quotes or make up facts. 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 University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. The Standard for Academic Integrity:

http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

The University 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.

Course Schedule (*subject to changes; please note guest speakers are working journalists and their scheduled appearances must remain tentative):

Aug. 28:

- Introductions: Instructor, students, Ed Timms, editor/reporter with *The Dallas Morning News* (via Skype). Mr. Timms will be in person, in lab, most Fridays.
- Review of syllabus.
- Introduction of prospective class project.
- What do you think investigative journalism is? What drives your own investigative impulse?
- **Assigned:** Investigative Reporter's Handbook, pages 3-52.

Aug. 30:

- Lab: We develop, define, the lineup of investigative stories. Investigative units form. Students begin settling on the specific story they will work on for the semester.
- Reminder: Start keeping your Reporter's Log.

Sept. 2: No class

Sept. 4:

- Basic investigative principles, techniques, ethics
- Investigative Reporter's Tool Kit

Sept. 6:

- Lab: Discussion, what story each student team will pursue. Meet Mr. Timms in person – again, he will be here most Fridays.

Sept. 9:

- What's the story hiding in plain sight? (Tentative: Dave Mann, executive editor of *The Texas Observer*, the oldest independent investigative news magazine in Texas. His work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, etc. He is a winner of the James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism and a 4-time first place winner in *The Association of National Newsweeklies*).

Sept. 11:

- Editorial Budget Meeting: What is your plan of attack?

Sept. 13:

- Lab: Reporting, sleuthing, digging.

Sept. 16:

- Questioning authority figures (Jordan Smith, Austin Chronicle, Los Angeles Daily News, Salon, The Dallas Morning News, etc. Winner of Investigative Reporting National Award from The Association of Alternative Weeklies).

Sept. 18:

- Editorial Budget Meeting.

Sept. 20:

- Lab: Reporting, sleuthing, digging.

Sept. 23:

- Questioning state elected officials, appointed officials, state agencies, organizations (Emily Ramshaw/Brandi Grissom The Texas Tribune)

Sept. 25:

- When no one will publish your investigative story – publish it yourself (Ken Martin, founder and editor of one-man, nonprofit, Austin-based investigative site funded by the Knight Foundation).
- Looking for local stories, things on your block, your neighborhood.

Sept. 27:

- Lab: Work on story

Sept. 30:

- Editorial Budget Meeting

Oct. 2:

- Filing records requests & riding herd on big, sprawling investigative stories and packages (Brad Tyer, nationally acclaimed investigative journalist/editor/author - and managing editor of The Texas Observer)

Oct. 4:

- Lab: Work on story

Oct. 7:

- Editorial Budget Meeting: Logjams, Problem Solving, Crises

Oct. 9:

- Connecting the dots from the street to the highest government levels. How to draw a line from grassroots problems to the highest elected officials in the land (Jay Root, Agence Presse France, Associated Press, The Texas Tribune)

Oct. 11:

- Lab: Work on story.

Oct. 14:

- Editorial Budget Meeting

Oct. 16:

- Diversity issues in investigative reporting; avoiding stereotypes, media bias, cultural-gender objectifications (Melissa Del Bosque, Texas Observer, UTNE Reader, TIME, national-award winning investigative reporter)

Oct. 18:

- Lab: Work on story.

Oct. 21:

- Editorial Budget Meeting
- Wikileaks, Whistleblowers and The Dangers Therein

Oct. 23:

- Multimedia elements in investigative projects: New York Times, Washington Post, National Public Radio – tentative, Mose Buchele, KUT and National Public Radio

Oct. 25:

- Lab: Work on story.

Oct. 28:

- Investigating race, race relations, “minority” affairs – possible Skype-in with Susan Smith, editor and publisher of *The Chicago Reporter*.

Oct. 30:

- **DUE: FIRST DRAFT OF YOUR 1,500-2,000 WORD-STORY. THIS SHOULD BE YOUR BEST, WRITTEN, WORK-IN-PROGRESS. WE WILL SPEND THE REST OF THE SEMESTER EDITING, HONING, REFINING, ADDING AND SUBTRACTING TO YOUR STORY.**
- Please note: You do not have to Turn in Your Multimedia Element on This Date.

Nov. 1:

- Lab: Full-dress presentations, reviews, of your first drafts. What do your colleagues think of your work?

Nov. 4:

- **DUE: Your Multimedia Work-in-Progress**
- Critiques

Nov. 6:

- Capstone Lecture: (Tentative: Gayle Reaves, Pulitzer Prize winner for her work on women & violence). Why Investigative Work Will Always Matter.

Nov. 8:

- Lab – additional, final reporting.

Nov. 11:

- Putting the human face on your investigative story: Now that you have all the data, how do you make the story even more compelling and persuasive?

Nov. 13:

- Editorial Budget Meeting.

Nov. 15:

- Lab: Filling final holes. In-lab editing sessions, side-by-side with editors.

Nov. 18:

- Present latest draft of your story/multimedia so your colleagues can find the holes in it.

Nov. 20:

- Present latest draft of your story/multimedia so your colleagues can find the holes in it.

Nov. 22:

- Do not report to lab – use this for off-campus, final, reporting.

Nov. 25:

- Making a living doing investigative work
- Professional organizations, support groups

Nov. 27:

- Do not report to classroom. Work, outside of classroom, on any last, final, tweaks to your story.

Nov. 29:

- No lab -- holiday

Dec. 2:

- Status reports from possible publications: Dallas Morning News, Reporting Texas, etc.
- **DUE: Your Reporter's Log**

Dec. 4:

- Course Instructor Survey
- Goodbyes

Dec. 6: *No lab*

APPENDIX I

Assessment Grid for Investigative Reporting

Evaluating your work, the instructor will use the following framework:

1. The story reveals new facts, new information.

0 1 2 3 4

2. The work shows enterprise reporting – creativity, persistence and critical thinking in the investigative process.

0 1 2 3 4

3. The work is accurate and fair

0 1 2 3 4

4. The work has multimedia components

0 1 2 3 4

5. Grammar, spelling and punctuation are correct

0 1 2 3 4

6. The work provides necessary number of sources & source contact information

0 1 2 3 4

7. The work has BOTH intimate details and a larger “sweep,” context or perspective

0 1 2 3 4

8. The theme, premise and news value are clear and readily identified

0

1

2

3

4