**JOUR 374: Investigative Reporting**

Spring 2016

Medill School of Journalism

Northwestern University

Mondays, 10 to 11:20 a.m., Fisk 306  
Fridays, 10 to 11:50 a.m., 303 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 1600, Classroom 1624.

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Investigative reporting possesses a privileged civic role: it brings to light truths that would otherwise remain hidden. The investigative reporter reveals official secrets, cracks conspiracies of silence and writes about powerful people and institutions who do not want their transgressions revealed. Investigative reporting is, as the journalist Alma Guillermoprieto puts it, “the bone structure without which the journalistic body collapses.”

In this course, you will explore the history, issues, ethics and challenges of investigative reporting by analyzing and discussing outstanding and controversial examples of this journalism while you work on a real-world investigative project led by members of the Chicago Tribune’s Pulitzer-Prize winning investigative projects team. You will learn the uses and limits of commercial people-tracking data-systems, deploy Freedom of Information requests, research court and property records, and conduct sensitive interviews. Expect to spend significant time outside of class working on this project.

The primary purpose of your reporting for this class is educational; you will deepen your knowledge of the power, shortcomings and moral complexities of this kind of work as you encounter its struggles and joys firsthand. Ultimately, the goal of this course is to equip you with the tools that will enable you to investigate urgent, relevant and diverse issues; to hone your critical thinking, reporting and writing skills; and to enrich your understanding of the communities and concerns that surround us.

**READING TEXTS & COURSE MATERIALS**

All reading, listening and viewing materials will be posted on Canvas or made available in class.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

This class combines the intellectual challenges of a seminar with the practical demands of a newsroom and your assignments will draw upon both set of skills.

Discussion is a vital element of this course. Please complete required readings before the class during which they’ll be discussed so you can contribute in a meaningful way. Expect our seminars and discussions to be sparked by those readings, not to regurgitate them. In class, be prepared to develop and express your own understandings of investigative journalism and its role in social change. Look for connections and contradictions, patterns and anomalies. Our purpose is to pose questions and spark meaningful discussion, not issue easy answers. Analyses, questions and random notions that challenge conventional wisdom are encouraged. Quality of contribution is more important than quantity.

In the lab, as in a real-world newsroom, you will produce periodic story memos and field reports. You will be evaluated on your resourcefulness, your willingness to correct flawed assumptions and methods, and your ability to collaborate and contribute. We ask that you print out, organize and turn in your notes and files in *paper*form, unless we decide that specific files should be uploaded to a shared website. The best students aren't those who come up with the most spectacular findings, but those whose newsgathering can be relied upon and reproduced. Above all, this work should reflect your honesty.

Our project may take unexpected detours if promising leads emerge. Your work likely will not be published by the end of the quarter and subsequent students will continue your efforts but your contribution will be recognized when publication occurs and appreciated throughout.

You are responsible for three primary sets of assignments:

1. Conducting research and reporting, both in the field and in the classroom, for our class investigative project.

2. Producing periodic field reports and memos summarizing that work. At the end of the quarter, you will turn in all of your files and newsgathering work product in paper form, unless otherwise specified. This includes: field notes, government reports, contact lists and anything else you may have collected. You must do this to pass the class.

3. Writing a final paper that analyzes an investigative reporting project of your choice and delivering a short presentation on your findings. As part of the process of researching your project, you will interview the reporter(s) who worked on your chosen project and produce a short written report about your discussion.

Details and deadlines of the assignments will be listed on the class schedule.

**GRADING**

An assignment will be marked down one letter grade for a missed deadline; any assignment more than one day overdue will receive an F. Some assignments may be graded pass/fail.

Your participation, professionalism and improvement grade will be based on exactly those qualities. Repeated tardiness, unexcused absences, inattention in class, lack of teamwork and other poor behavior will result in a lowered grade.

Your grade will be determined as follows:

Participation, professionalism and improvement: 20 percent

In-class work, story memos and other assignments: 40 percent

Paper (interview report and final version): 40 percent

Grading scale:

100—93.34 A; 93.33—90 A-; 89.99—86.67 B+; 86.66—83.34 B; 83.33—80.00 B-; 79.99—76.67 C+; 76.66—73.34 C; 73.33—70.00 C-; anything lower is an F.

**ATTENDANCE & CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS**

Students are required to attend all classes and be on time. If you must miss class, please e-mail or text in advance. Unexcused absences or multiple late arrivals will result in a reduced grade. Unless you are specifically instructed otherwise, assume that laptops, tablets and phones should not be used during class. Phones should be set on silent. Violations of this policy will result in a lowered grade.

**RECORDING, SOCIAL MEDIA & CONFIDENTIALITY**

Audio/video recording of the class is not permitted without prior permission. Please keep in mind that we are working on an investigative reporting project for a major media organization and do not discuss details of that project outside the classroom, in either your real or virtual lives.

**PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Northwestern University works to provide a learning environment for students with disabilities that affords equal access and reasonable accommodation. Any student with a verified disability requiring special accommodation should speak to the course instructors and AccessibleNU at (847) 467-5530 as early as possible, preferably before the quarter begins, or at the latest within the first two weeks of the quarter. All discussions will remain confidential. [http://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu//](http://www.northwestern.edu/disability/)

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

You are responsible for knowing and upholding Medill's Integrity Code, which can be found here: <http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/student-life/academic-integrity-policy>. Fabrication, plagiarism, cheating and other violations of the code will not be tolerated and may lead to dismissal. You are also held to all policies and procedures outlined in the Northwestern University Student Handbook. A copy of the Northwestern University Student Handbook may be obtained online: [www.northwestern.edu/handbook](http://www.northwestern.edu/handbook).