

JOU 6118 Investigative Reporting Techniques

Spring 2017

Wednesdays 6:25 p.m. – 9:05 p.m.

Academic 2- 242

Instructor: Mercedes Vigón, Ph.D.

vigonm@fiu.edu or 305-919-5628

Office: AC2 230

Office hours:

M. 9:30-10:30 am & 1:30-2:30 pm

W 9:30-10:30 am & 1:30-2:30 pm

W 5:30 pm - 6:10 pm

This syllabus is your contract with the instructor for the course:

Please read it carefully and ask questions if anything is unclear to you

Course participation signifies your acceptance of this contract

Course Description:

This course provides training in investigative reporting, teaching students how to go beyond the day-to-day journalism. The course will emphasize problem solving in developing stories from conception to finished product. The course is practical and., at the same time, directs students to think deeply about the stories they do and why they do them. It will include lectures, discussions, independent work in class, out-of class reporting and writing and conferences with the instructor.

This course will focus on mastering online research; finding and using public records; learning to use spreadsheets and database managers to identify original stories and report them right. You will learn how to follow paper trails, background people, and base your questions on these findings.

Objectives:

- Identify story topics and formulate hypotheses for in-depth investigation.
- Learn how to gather information by using documents and databases, by interviewing and by getting out into the field.
- To learn research and analytical methods and to make sure that your findings are true.
- To learn how to analyze information and base your questions on that analysis.
- Write compelling stories that cover not only the who, what, when and where, but also the why, the how and the "so what?"
- Develop interviewing techniques.
- Improve journalistic values, including accuracy, fairness and ethics.
- To practice "excellence" in your stories: analyzing and practicing precision, clarity, wholeness and fairness.

Measurable Outcomes:

- Fundamentals of "boomerang" searching.
- Proficiency in online and off-line research and data mining techniques.

- Basic understanding and functional knowledge of Microsoft Excel.
- By the end of the semester the student will be able to do:
 - o A basic investigative report, applying the digital age verifying techniques
 - o She or he will be able to identify an original idea for the professional project or thesis investigative report.
 - o Present enough research to guarantee the project viability
 - o Establish the work calendar, with the missing data and interviews needed

Professional Values and Competencies:

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world

Method:

Because each story will be different, this is a class in which the instructor's one to one coaching will be essential. Nevertheless, students will learn from each other's achievements and mistakes.

Stories and drafts will be discussed in class. Through this method you'll get an instant grasp of the effect of your story on the audience, what works and what doesn't work

The course will emphasize problem solving in developing stories from conception to finished

Standards:

- Do not miss class. Call ahead of time if you must be away: Class attendance, preparation and participation are 20 % of your grade. There will be penalties for any unexcused absence. They will result in deduction of points from your final grade. Do not arrive late. Arriving late more than twice and your grade will be reduced by one letter.
- No late work! We will operate under the same rules as any newspaper regarding deadlines. All ideas and reports must be submitted by assigned deadline.
- Always number and staple the pages. Write in double space.
- On top of the first page write your name, title and number of the assignment, course name and date.
- Always keep a printed copy of your assignments and save them in a diskette and in your e-mail account.
- [Click here](#) to find your e-mail address.
- Please read the [university statement on academic misconduct](#). Note that all students will be bound by the [FIU Honor Code](#).

Grading Policy:

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| Attendance | 5% |
| Participation and preparation | 10% |
| Assignments, projects (presentation - first draft final project) and quizzes | 50% |
| Final project | 35% |

Grading Scale:

A = 92 - 100% (your work is good enough to be well received in an editorial meeting or to be published)

A- = 90 - 91% (your work is good but requires some clarification -rethinking- to be well received or some editing to be published)

B+ = 87 - 89% (your work is good enough but requires more documentation to be received in an editorial meeting or and more editing)

B = 82 - 86% (your work requires more planning and documentation to be presented, and a fair amount of editing)

B- = 80 - 81% (your work requires more planning and documentation to be presented, and a lot of editing)

C+ = 77 - 79% (your work requires sources, and planning to be presented, and heavy editing)

C = 72 - 76% (your work does not fulfill the minimal professional requirements)

D = 62 - 66% (your presentation, reporting and /or writing work lack quality)

F = 0 - 59%

Office Hours:

1. Office hours:

M. 9:30-10:30 am & 1:30-2:30 pm

W 9:30-10:30 am & 1:30-2:30 pm

W 5:30 pm - 6:10 pm

2. By appointment: 305 919.5628

3. My ["e-mail"](mailto:vigonm@fiu.edu) is vigonm@fiu.edu

Suggested Readings:

(Some of these books are available in the bookstore; others can be checked out from the library)

- Berry, Stephen J. [Watchdog Journalism. The Art of Investigative Reporting](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Houston, Brant. [Computer-Assisted Reporting – A Practical Guide](#), New York: St. Martins Press, 2004.
- Adams, Joe. [Florida Public Records Handbook](#), Tallahassee: The First Amendment Foundation, 2003.
- Covarrubias, Jorge. [Manual de Técnicas de Redacción Periodística](#), Associated Press, New York, NY. 1996.
- Gerardo Reyes, [Periodismo de Investigación](#), Editorial Trillas, 1996.

Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, [All the President's Men](#).

Steve Weinberg, [The Reporter's Handbook, an Investigator's Guide to Documents and Techniques](#), Bedford/St Martin's, 1996.

Other required reading:

- [The Miami Herald/El Nuevo Herald](#)
- The [New York Times](#)
- Listen [NPR](#) "Morning Edition" (6am-10am), "Fresh Air" (8 pm) and "All Things Considered" (4 pm-6 pm) 91.3 FM.