

Investigative Reporting – JMC 46007

Fall 2018, Rm 117 Franklin; 2:15 – 3:30 Monday/Wednesday

Professor Karl Idsvoog

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Office Hours: M/T/W/R 10-11

Other times by appointment

Text (Readings to be assigned in class):

Investigative Reporters Handbook, by Brant Houston

https://www.amazon.com/Investigative-Reporters-Handbook-Documents-Techniques/dp/0312589972/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1534518929&sr=8-1&keywords=Brant+Houston



Access with Attitude is suggested, not required. What's key is you will need to



be conversant with public records law.

https://www.amazon.com/Access-Attitude-Advocates-Freedom-Information/dp/0821419390/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1534519026&sr=1-1&keywords=Idsvoog

NOTE: If it is important, do not use EMAIL. Call me.

Your first assignment is to read this entire syllabus before next class

Cell Phone/email/Internet Policy

You'll be using your cell phone for various in-class assignments. With the exception of those assignments, your phone should be turned off. Unless we're having a specific phone assignment, anyone checking or using her/his phone during class will lose 2% of her/his class grade. The 2% grade deduction will be assessed for each infraction. Why should there be such a penalty? Ask yourself one question: do you want to learn more or learn less? The research is clear. You can't multitask. Be sure to watch this BEFORE next class.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJuXV6AD93s> and also watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YNeyBANrTI>

Expected Learning Outcomes

1. To improve your ability to find and develop sources
2. To improve your ability to find and focus stories that will have impact
3. To improve your planning ability in all aspects of producing journalism that matters. Planning means writing it down, not keeping it in your head. You plan your research, interviews, video, pictures, audio, graphics, script and edit.
4. To improve your interview strategy and subsequently the effectiveness of your interviews
5. To improve your ability to go after and obtain public records
6. To improve your videostype/facetime interviews with experts anywhere in the world

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Youngstown, Ohio is a small television market. It's an excellent starting market for new graduates. For a reporting job, despite being a small market, it's a highly competitive market. As WFMJ news director Mona Alexander says, when she posts a job she gets from 100 to 200 applicants. She makes a powerful point every single one of our broadcast news students should note.

"If you load your resume with a bunch of feature stories, you're out."

In my Advanced Broadcast News class, we do a project called The Station Call Project. Each student has to pick three markets, call news executives and go through a list of questions about what they look for when hiring and what mistakes they see applicants make. A common complaint is summarized by Curtis Hancock, a news director in another small market, Columbia, Missouri.

"Too many fluff stories and a lack of real journalism"

News executives are pressed for time. Hit play and the first shot is blue or the audio is off, there's no reason to watch more. Hit play and the first narration is poorly written, there's no reason to watch more. Hit play and it's boring, there's no reason to watch more. As Kymberly Wyatt, the news director at WEAR, ABC 3 in Pensacola, Florida says,

"If I don't see their best work within 30 seconds, I stop watching."

This is a class where you should be able to produce work that will make people watch, make people read, make people scroll because you've produced a compelling piece of work. This is a class where you should be able to produce work that differentiates you from the competition. Here's an example from a

student whose first job within days of graduation was with ESPN. As Jason Kostura will tell you, this story is one of the reasons he got the interview at ESPN. Be sure to watch this before next class and be ready to address the following question: what are the most compelling facts in Jason's piece and why?

Athletes Missing Class

By the way, this piece wasn't Jason's first cut. The first version had multiple problems. He revised and recut. He revised and recut again. If you're leaving Kent with nothing but your first cut, first draft stories with all the problems, that's not wise.

In this class, there will be great flexibility. If you want to work on an individual project, you can do that. If you want to team up on a project, you can do that. Either way, what is crucial is PLANNING.

I NEED YOUR HELP – YOU MUST TELL ME IF YOU'RE NOT SATISFIED WITH WHAT WE'RE DOING. YOU MUST TELL ME IF YOU'RE RUNNING INTO PROBLEMS. YOU MUST BE PROACTIVE. DO NOT REMAIN SILENT.

The first portion of the course is dedicated to source development and finding stories worthwhile to produce. In the second portion of the course, you'll be applying what we've practiced and producing investigative projects. Format?

Again, there's individual flexibility. One thing we won't do is a story that is only text. There are no TV reporters. There are no print reporters. They ceased to exist years ago. We're all multimedia reporters.

We must have multimedia elements in every project.

Every project must have a Facebook/Twitter component. And that's significantly different than your full report.

Every student will do at least one expert interview with an expert from another state via Skype or Facetime.

Assignments and Completed Projects on the Nexis

Saving Your Work: Save your work to **your** personal project folder on the Nexis. We'll review procedures on that today. Keep copies of your work. Twice the NEXIS has crashed deleting everything there. So you need to protect your work.

Your user name for the NEXIS is your Kent State email address prior to the @ symbol. My Kent State email is kidsvoog@kent.edu so my user name on the NEXIS is kidsvoog. Your password is the last 4 digits of your banner number. When you sign on to NEXIS, you should have three folders show up for this class: INV_Proj_Complete, INV_Share, and your personal folder, INV_yourusername

All assignments, handouts and video exercises will be in the share folder. The Share folder is READ ONLY. You can copy material and import material from the Share folder. You can't put anything there.

What's the difference between investigative reporting and feature reporting? In your text, Brant Houston describes some differences. I would submit there is no basic difference. Here's a wonderful feature piece that was the cover story for [Sports Illustrated which became a national embarrassment for the magazine because it forgot how to do journalism.](#)

Manti Te'o's Dead Girlfriend Isn't Real, And Everything Else You Need To Know About One Of The Craziest Sports Stories Ever



Here's a football player with a tragic tale about how his girlfriend died. If you're doing a feature story you do the exact same thing as when you're doing an investigative piece. **VERIFY AND CONFIRM. GET YOUR FACTS. GET SPECIFICS. FOCUS. PLAN YOUR RESEARCH. PLAN YOUR INTERVIEWS. PLAN YOUR PROJECT.**

With the poor dead girlfriend, the feature reporter would want to read the obituary. Oh, there isn't one? How can that possibly be? The poor girl has a terrible car accident. The feature reporter would want to get a copy of the accident report because in all reporting you need specifics. The football player doesn't remember where this accident happened? Wow, another huge red flag. If Sports Illustrated had remembered how to do journalism 101, the reporter would have run into a news story on the way to his feature story. Instead Sports Illustrated published a national embarrassment.

Rolling Stone also forgot how to do basic journalism in its story on a gang rape that did not happen. [And that mistake cost the magazine 1.65 million dollars.](#) As a reporter, you don't believe anyone. Your job is to verify and confirm. If journalists had done that, we never would have had a war in Iraq.

Unfortunately, in the run up to the war, the New York Times and the Washington Post and the networks forgot how to do journalism and played cheerleader. [This report from Bill Moyers is worthwhile for every journalist to watch.](#) In case you didn't get an electronic copy of the syllabus, here's the URL for the Moyers' piece. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KzYL6e3sV0>

In class today, we showed a commentary. For next class, your assignment is simple: describe a commentary you would like to do. Explain why. And describe where this commentary (either print or video) will run. In other words, who is the targeted audience? Are you producing this for a Cleveland TV station, Huffington Post, the Akron Beacon Journal or Kent Wired? This is an embedded assignment. Your first assignment was to read the syllabus. This is your second. Put this in a Word document that you'll put on the Nexis at the start of next class. In the upper left corner of your document put:

your name
commentary
slug for the commentary

In the first few weeks, we'll develop a class-wide reporting project and will go through the basic reporting protocol that when applied to your work will improve your ability to efficiently produce a solid piece of journalism. Each student will produce his/her piece and the resources for that piece will be everything collected by the reporting done from everyone in this class.

The fact that you are in this course indicates you want to produce stories that matter, not blather that doesn't. **If you're not having fun in this course, please come and see me.** Do not delay.

Grades

The news business runs on time. The 6:00 news starts at 6:00. So if you're late to class, you lose 1% of your grade. If you're one second late, that is late. The 6:00 news starts at 6:00.

I use a 5 point grading scale. A=5, B=4, C=3, 2=D, 1=F. You'll be graded on multiple elements. For a text piece, you'll be graded on the headline, your lead, story structure, quotes, pictures, documents. For a video story, you'll be graded on your anchor lead, videography, graphics, editing, narration, lighting, etc. Each project will be different.

If you have any questions about a grade, **it is YOUR responsibility to see me.** If you have any questions about an assignment, **it is YOUR responsibility to see me** to clarify the assignment. If you have a complaint about the course or an assignment, let me know what it is. Don't be silent. Don't delay. Address the problem or concern. You need to conduct yourself like a professional.

IMPORTANT

Always bring your reporting/production notes to class! Notes on your recent interview sitting in your dorm or apartment are useless when we're working on a story. **Bring your reporting notes to every class.**

There are several skills you should be developing and improving that are directly relevant to the professional curriculum required of an accredited journalism program. The official description from JMC is below, and I've boldfaced those items we will be stressing in this class.

As an accredited member of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, we are committed to developing a curriculum designed to meet twelve professional competencies. This course, as part of a larger program, contributes to our development of:

THOUGHTFUL, PROFICIENT COMMUNICATORS...

- ♦ ***write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.***
- ♦ ***demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.***
- ♦ ***understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information. (How do you bring the data to life; how do you humanize the data?)***
- ♦ ***apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.***

...WHO ARE CREATIVE, CRITICAL THINKERS...

- ♦ ***think critically, creatively and independently.***

...TRAINED TO UNCOVER AND EVALUATE INFORMATION...

- ♦ ***conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.***
- ♦ ***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.***

...WITHIN A LEGAL AND ETHICAL FRAMEWORK...

- ♦ ***Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press in the United States, 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 professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.***

♦
...IN A DIVERSE AND GLOBAL SOCIETY.

- ♦ ***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 people and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.*

To be sure I don't miss any syllabi statements required by the department, I'm including them here. The first one on diversity is incredibly important. As journalists, it's essential to examine issues from a range of viewpoints. Watch the Sunday morning talk shows, and they're rather disappointing as they go back to the same sources time and time again.

JMC Syllabus Statements and One Question:

(How do you check if an organization's dedication to diversity is more than just words? This would be a worthwhile project for someone in this class)

School of Journalism and Mass Communication Diversity Statement

The Kent State University School of Journalism and Mass Communication (JMC) recognizes the importance of a diverse faculty, staff and student body and embraces the concept that diversity will foster the acknowledgement, empowerment and inclusion of any person.

JMC teaches the history, culture, values and notable achievement of persons who represent the world's diverse community. The mission of the school is to offer a strong curriculum, enriched by a legal and ethical foundation, which recruits, retains, promotes and hires from this diverse community.

JMC believes that the highest levels of success, knowledge and progress arise when we learn from others who are not of our own national origin, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender identity, gender expression, physical and mental ability and social class. We welcome the many opportunities to examine challenges that may arise from differences.

College of Communication and Information Diversity Statement

Kent State University defines diversity as "the presence of difference." The College of Communication and Information (CCI) affirms that diversity

enriches the teaching, study, research and criticism of the principles and practices of communication and information. Further, the faculty, staff and students maintain that communication and information can be understood fully and practiced effectively only when ideas from all people and perspectives are voiced and valued. CCI's culture intentionally fosters an inclusive environment, and CCI commits itself to being an academic unit in which all individuals feel empowered to participate fully.

JMC Statement on Cheating and Plagiarism

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication deals in publishable works and educates its students for various aspects of publishing and other communications professions. Within this framework, every student must be aware of the following rules and definitions while in school or on the job:

Fabrication is, in phrasing first used by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, the cardinal sin. Faking quotations, faking "facts", reporting things that did not happen are not only reprehensible; they could be actionable in court.

Plagiarizing, as defined by Webster, is "to steal and pass off as one's own the ideas or words of another". It is unethical and, in cases involving creative work, usually illegal. One of the worst sins a communications practitioner may commit is to plagiarize the work of another – to steal his/her words, thought, or outline and pass them off as his/her own.

Cheating includes the submission of work in which you have received material and substantive assistance from others, or copied the work of others, when the assignment was intended to be completed by you alone. Unless specifically designated as a group project, all assignments for this course are intended to be the result of your individual efforts.

Duplicating work is defined as submitting the same work to more than one instructor (or publication) without the prior knowledge and agreement of both.

Commission of any of these offenses while in school is grounds for disciplinary action. If the complaint is upheld, a variety of punishments may be imposed, from a reprimand to a lowered or failing grade in the course to dismissal from the university.

Please refer to Kent State University's Policy Register Section 3-01.8 regarding plagiarism -
http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/policydetails.cfm?customel_datapageid_1976529=2037779

Note for this class: If you plagiarize, you flunk the course. If you fabricate, you flunk the course. If you lie to me, you flunk the course. I don't expect any of that to happen.

Student Accessibility Services

The SAS statement is below. SAS asks this be included in **every** syllabus and read aloud to students the first week of class.

University policy [3342-3-01.3](#) requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit www.kent.edu/sas for more information on registration procedures).

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Schedule – scroll down

Investigative Reporting

This is a tentative schedule. It will change.

If you miss a class, it is YOUR responsibility to check for any and all assignments. Remember, if it's important call. Do NOT use email for any important communication. Communicate with your team. Without question, this schedule will change. Readings from the text will be assigned in class. There will be readings assigned not indicated on this syllabus.

Week of August 27

- Class 1 Assignment – Story Proposal**
Accountability: Aramark Contract
Asking the question that needs to be asked
Importance of Press: Commentary
Passion – what do you care about?
Read chapters 1-2 IRH (Investigative Reporter's Handbook)
- Class 2 Source/Story Development**
Basic Research Steps - handout
IRE
Networking with reporters
Is it happening here?
Assignment: find a University Investigation that's been done elsewhere on a topic of interest to you.

Week of September 3

- Class 1 Labor Day – no class**
- Class 2 Source/Story Development – Advocacy Groups**
Planning the communication
The question you ask everyone
How do you sound?
The importance of your opening line
Research prior to phone contacts
Email do's and don'ts

Week of September 10

- Class 1 In-class planning practice**
topic selection: legislative or mandatory arbitration
the reporting hypothesis
applying the protocol – who would know?

planning initial research – planning initial calls
Reading: Houston chapter 9

Class 2 **Story Proposals Due – 1 page**
Oral Story Pitches: these will be recorded on camera.

Week of September 17

Class 1 On-camera Story Proposal Review
Importance of FACTS and FOCUS when pitching a story
Review – planning your communication
Check of preparation for your committee calls
In-class phone calls: The Legislative Reporting Project

Class 2 Group reporting project update
Keeping your notes – what maximizes your efficiency
Questions driven by your notes

Week of September 24

Class 1 Writing the Public Records Request
Review v copy
The \$21,000 request (why would state legislators object?)
State/Local v FOIA
Ohio Court of Claims (Aramark)
Requesting contracts (attachments/amendments/exhibits)
Review Access With Attitude: chapters 1-5

Class 2 Reporting Project Update
Planning the story elements
Facts
Documents
Data
People
Format
Logistics
STRATEGY – WHAT STEPS IN WHAT ORDER?
Houston – ch 3 & 4

Week of October 1

Class 1 In-class calls, research (Except for the beginning 5 minutes, you'll have this entire period to simply work on your stories. I'm here to watch you work, for consultation and to help you work. To help, I need to see how you're working.
Rustavi 2: How you work – turning a 2 week project into a 5-day mess.

Class 2 Finding Data
Meth Labs
Grades
Train Accidents

Week of October 8

Class 1 Source/Story Development – Federal
Census
DOT
EPA
OSHA
Assignment: Final Project Proposal (individual or teams of two) If you want a team of more than two, please see me in advance.

Class 2 Basic Excel Review – Are you using this?
Kent Grades
Salaries
The equation – sum, average
Sorting
Filtering

Week of October 15

Class 1 **Legislative Reporting Project due.**
This may quite possibly change
The Facebook version
The Twitter version

Class 2 Getting sued.
Investigative safeguards – notes, video, stakeouts, certified letters & Fed X v email
Unethical Management – protecting yourself against the corporation

Week of October 22

Class 1 **Final Project Proposal due – the final project is due the 1st class of the last week of classes.**

Class 2 In class work on final projects

Week of October 29

Class 1 Producing the Facetime/VideoSkype interview

Call Recorder
Quicktime recording
Assignment: Facetime/Videoskype interview
Topic selection

Class 2 Class time to produce Facetime/Videoskype

Week of November 5

Class 1 Class time for editing expert interview
Facebook text/video
Twitter post

Class 2 Expert interview review (video & social media versions)

Week of November 12

Class 1 **Veteran's Day – no class**

Class 2 Possible Guest lecture: Charles Lewis or
Final Project update
Checking/Adjusting your Backward Planning Sequence
Legal Review – what's your exposure
Assignment: Be sure to read Houston, chapters

Week of November 19

Class 1 Court Records
Court of Claims Ohio v Other States
Reviewing the docket – key items
Court exhibits
Police Records – getting the narrative of the incident report.
Reading: Houston chapter 10 & 11
Reading: Access With Attitude chapter 6 & 9

Class 2 No class – Thanksgiving Break

Week of November 26

Class 1 Final project update
problems, key facts, storyline

Class 2 **Guest Lecture**

Week of December 3

Class 1 Final Projects Due - Presentations
Top projects – what needs to be fixed

Class 2 Class summary.

Week of December 10

Final Exams (TBD – we may use this time to review final projects.)

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE FOR MONDAY CLASSES

For Monday Classes Beginning at: The Final Examination Period is:

2:15 p.m. 12:45 - 3:00 p.m. Fri. Dec. 14

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