

J339F Investigative Reporting, Spring 2017
Unique number 08153

Monday-Wednesday (occasional Fridays), 2-3 p.m., BMC 4.204

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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 such stories, and to produce such stories.

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

Course Aims and Outcomes

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

We'll spend the semester learning about our topic and placing any issues in the right historical and news context; we'll use data and numbers to make sure we're on solid footing; 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.

We're starting this semester not knowing our big investigative issue—a scary and exciting prospect. We might 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.

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 interview female veterans.

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 for only \$25.

Grading: This is not a class in which you report, produce a story and get a grade. It’s collaborative, which means group projects (and group dynamics) and individual effort. 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 are just past their intro journalism classes. I’ll try my best to be equitable in assigning and evaluation work, but understand we’re juggling many curriculum goals.

The class is graded on point totals, many given on a complete/incomplete basis:

A: 94-100 points	B+: 89-87 points	C+: 79-77 points	D: 69-60
A-: 93-90 points	B: 86-83 points	C: 76-73 points	F: 59 and below
	B-: 82-80 points	C-: 72-70 points	

ASSIGNMENTS (AND THEIR POINTS):

I. PARTICIPATION (20 points): Asking, reading, sharing, pitching, discussing, even debating – these are necessary for a good investigative reporting environment. That’s why you’re graded on being part of the class and part of a team. The assignments include:

- **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. Due Jan. 23
- **BACKGROUND ANALYSIS (8):** You’ll be required to report on a book or a long article and post how it might contribute to our project as background or context. This assignment will be graded on a scale. Due Jan. 30.
- **SHARING REPORTING (5):** This is a group project in which we share reporting, data, etc. Failure to do so will affect your grade and, worse, our project. This information will be posted in a place we can all access.
- **DISCUSSION (5):** Because we’re usually off on Friday, *attendance is mandatory*. Participate in class discussions and exercises; don’t let other group members down – it will get back to me. These points are at my discretion.

II. INTERVIEWS FOR OVERVIEW STORY (20 points). You’re 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 must take publishable art of the source. You must submit interview transcripts. You’ll be graded on following interview guidelines, the interview media, transcripts and miniprofiles based on the interviews. In addition, everyone in the class is expected to help write, edit, photograph or produce the overview story.

III. JOURNALS (20 points). You have to post a narrative journal on the progress of your assignments and reporting. You will write weekly, even if the posts aren't due weekly. You'll explain the processes behind your pitches, the reporting and production for your projects (especially your group projects); your interviews; your successes and your failures. These will be graded (one worth 8 points, the three others worth 4 points apiece).

IV. INDIVIDUAL AND/OR GROUP PROJECTS (A TOTAL OF 40 POINTS)

Details TK on individual and group projects. Some of you might only be doing a group project; a few might only be doing an individual project; many will be doing a mix. You will know your project assignments by mid-February.

PROJECT CONTRACT (required): This is the project assignment(s) we agree upon.

GROUP PROJECT:

- 1) PITCH
- 2) ROUGH DRAFT (due date tk)
- 3) PRODUCTION

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT:

- 1) PITCH
- 2) ROUGH DRAFT
- 3) PRODUCTION

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory. Three unexcused absences will result in a letter grade lower than your point total.

University-accepted exceptions

Only medical emergencies authenticated with a doctor's note or family bereavement confirmed by a signed letter from one of your parents are excusable absences. Notes/letters must be presented upon return to class.

If you will miss a lecture or lab for reasons of religious or military observance, you must let us know **WELL IN ADVANCE**, not the day before. You will still need to get assignments in a day before or after the due date. Plan ahead.

Religious Holy Days

By UT Austin policy, you must notify your instructor of your pending absence at least **14 days** prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time before or after the absence if you give the required advance notification.

Absence for Military Service

In accordance with section 51.9111 of the Texas Education Code, a student is excused from attending classes or engaging in other required activities, including exams, if he or she is called to active military service of a reasonably brief duration. The maximum time

for which the student may be excused has been defined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as “no more than **25 percent** of the total number of class meetings or the contact hour equivalent (not including the final examination period) for the specific course or courses in which the student is currently enrolled at the beginning of the period of active military service.” The student will be allowed a reasonable time after the absence to complete assignments and take exams. Policies affecting students who withdraw for military service are given above.

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

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Usually in journalism classes, 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. That’s OK and even welcomed. But please be up front and 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 in a 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 electronically 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>.

J339F: Spring 2017 Semester Calendar

A rough outline of the semester. Expect due dates to change. Professional speakers are included so you can ask them questions.

W1 Jan. 18 Wednesday Lecture: Introduction

Jan. 20 No class, but information sheet due by Friday

W2 Jan. 23, Houston, Chapters 1 and 7. Due: why project matters (discussion).

Jan. 25: Tips for survey interviewing. Houston, Chapter 5.

Jan. 27: Class meets: finalize survey questions.

W3 Jan. 30 Houston, Chapter 2. Book/articles reports due, discussion starts.

Feb. 1: Finish discussing books/articles

- **Feb. 2**, Panel discussion: “Journalism in the Age of Trump,” 5:30 p.m.

W4 Feb. 6-8 Houston, Chapters 3 and 4. Mining data and statistics.

W5 Feb. 13-15: Houston, Chapter 8; more data mining; data assignment due.

W6 Feb. 20: Interviews and transcripts due. Begin work on interview data.

Feb. 22: Finish interview data

W7 Feb. 27-March 1: Writing overview story as group project. Chapters 6 and 21.

March 3: Formulate group and individual projects

W8 March 6: Individual and group project pitches due

March 8: Finalize individual and group projects pitches

- **March 8**, The New Yorker’s Evan Osnos, “Age of Ambition: Truth, Faith and Fortune in China”

SPRING BREAK: Week of March 13

W9 March 20 and March 22. Work on group and individual projects in class.

March 24: No class but Journal 1 due. Not only do you outline work on your projects but also include (1) a synopsis of another chapter in Houston’s guide you consider helpful for your projects as well as two or three recent news stories or statistics you think others in the class should know about. This journal is worth twice as much as the other two.

W10 March 27-29: Work on projects in class. Journal 2 due at end of week.

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

W11 April 3-5-7: Rough draft due for individual project due on Monday

W12 April 10-12-14: Deadline for individual projects on Monday.

W13 April 17-19-21: Deadline for group projects. Journal 3 due.

W14 April 24-26-28: Professional editing and reworking of projects

W15 May 1-3-5: Project presentations. Journal 4 due.