

J339F
Investigative Reporting
Unique number 07890
Spring 2016

Tues., Thurs. 3:30-5 p.m.
CMA 4.152

Instructor

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Office hours

Wednesdays, 9 a.m.-11 a.m.
Thursdays, 1 p.m.-3 p.m.
Other times available by appointment.

Course Description

J339 F is a news and writing course for journalism majors. Its emphases are on defining and understanding investigative journalism, and on finding, reporting and writing investigative stories.

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

This course may be counted toward the Writing Flag and the Independent Inquiry Flag requirement.

Course Aims and Outcomes

This class is a hands-on, participatory, collaborative exercise in learning how to be an investigative reporter. We will, as a class and as individuals, pursue an investigative project that focuses on a Texas state agency. Our goal: By the end of the semester, each student will have reported and written a story of publishable quality.

We'll have a special emphasis on learning the basic tools of investigative reporting—how to pursue information, where to find essential documents and the ways to use state and federal public records laws. We'll explore how to find crucial information on individuals, businesses, non-profits, court proceedings and government agencies. We'll also learn other essential skills, such as dealing with sources, ensuring accuracy and “bullet-proofing” a story.

The class will operate in the same way that a projects team at a news organization works. Although each student will report and write his or her individual story, we will collaborate and exchange advice, questions and information throughout.

Required Text

The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques, by Brant Houston and Investigative Reporters and Editors. Fifth Edition.

Expectations

Individual participation toward a collaborative goal is an essential element in the success of this class. We'll be working as a team to find necessary records and data for our story. We'll also be conducting group interviews with state officials and others.

Grading

Class participation: 25 percent. Attendance is mandatory. Each unexcused absence will result in a loss of 5 points on your participation grade. Two unexcused absences could result in the loss of a letter grade for the course.

Daily quizzes or short writing assignments: 25 percent. Most class sessions will include a very brief quiz on the assigned reading for that day's class. If you've done the reading, the quizzes will be quite easy.

Story memos: 25 percent. Through the course of the semester, you'll be filing 3-4 memos on the progress you're making as you work on your final story. These memos serve two purposes—to keep the instructor informed, and to let the student engage in self-assessment and find the holes in the story. We'll discuss these in class, much as a projects team in a newsroom would.

Final story: 25 percent. Although pursuing this project will be in part a group effort, each student will write his or her own investigative story of approximately 1,000 words. The goal is for every student to have an investigative story that can be offered for publication in a newspaper, magazine or news web site. The story draft will be due on April 14. I'll edit the drafts and return them to you for revisions. The final version will be due on May 3. There will be no final exam.

Religious Holy Days

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen 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, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Q Drop Policy

If you want to drop a class after the 12th class day, you'll need to execute a Q drop before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Under Texas law, you are only allowed six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. For more information, see: <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>]

Student Accommodations

Students with a documented disability may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

- Please request a meeting as soon as possible to discuss any accommodations.

- Please notify me as soon as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible.
- Please notify me if any of the physical space is difficult for you.

Academic Integrity

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code:

“As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.”

This means that work you produce on assignments, tests and exams is all your own work, unless it is assigned as group work. I will make it clear for each test, exam or assignment whether collaboration is encouraged or not.

Always cite your sources. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must make that clear otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course.

You are responsible for understanding UT’s Academic Honesty Policy, which can be found at the following web address: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php]

University Resources for Students

The university has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning. Use these to help you succeed in your classes.

The Sanger Learning Center

More than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance. All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center’s classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

The University Writing Center

The University Writing Center offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT student, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Consultants help students develop strategies to improve their writing. The assistance we provide is intended to foster students’ resourcefulness and self-reliance. <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling and Mental Health Center

The Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) provides counseling, psychiatric, consultation, and prevention services that facilitate students’ academic and life goals and enhance their personal growth and well-being. <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Student Emergency Services

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

ITS

Need help with technology? <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

Libraries

Need help searching for information? <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

Canvas

Canvas help is available 24/7 at <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/student-tutorials>

Important Safety Information

BCAL

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.

Evacuation Information

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when an alarm or alert is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside, unless told otherwise by an official representative.

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency

