

TOPICS: INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING (ENGLISH 402)
ALLEGHENY COLLEGE
FALL 2010
T/TH 3-4:15 P.M. ODDFELLOWS 206

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COURSE OUTLINE, RESPONSIBILITIES AND POLICIES

Course Objectives. This course will teach you the practical skills and ethical principles of investigative reporting. We will learn the fundamentals of investigation: choosing subjects, identifying sources, conducting research and interviews and organizing large amounts of material in an interesting and fair way. While we will focus on learning practical skills, you should also develop a better understanding of the history and application of the First Amendment and the role of the investigative journalist in American society, culture and politics. By the end of this course you should:

- Understand how and where to access important investigative documents including property records, court records, search warrants and police reports
- Be able to use interviewing skills to obtain sensitive information
- Endeavor to organize large amounts of information into a coherent news narrative
- Comprehend the First Amendment and how it applies to investigative journalists
- Have the ability to write an investigative piece through your own research

Course Materials. We will be using *The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques* by Brant Houston, Len Bruzzese and Steve Weinberg to augment the work we do in this course. In addition to case studies, which I will distribute to you via email, *Shadow Divers* by Robert Kurson is also required for our work in this course. The *Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* (2009 or 2010 editions are acceptable) is optional but is highly recommended. You may find it helpful to have a flash drive, reporter's notepad, a reliable pen and possibly a voice recorder on hand during class and for your out-of-class reporting assignments. While you won't be tested on it, you should endeavor to read the Sunday edition of a major metro daily (*The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post* are all good options) to absorb tips on writing and structuring stories.

Deadlines. Journalism is a deadline-oriented business. As a professional, if you miss a deadline, you should expect to clear out your desk sooner rather than later. As a student in this course, I will hold you to a similar standard. Meeting deadlines in this course is mandatory. If you don't turn in an assignment on time, you will NOT receive credit. Zero. Nada. Zilch. By meeting this course standard you will inevitably grow not only as a journalist, but also as a person.

Attendance. Please come to class on time every scheduled class day. If you miss a class, you will miss in-class participation points, which you cannot make up. If there is a circumstance

above and beyond your control that may force you to miss class, please email me or see me so we can discuss your alternatives. If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to get notes from classmates.

Electronic Devices. You will quickly discover that cell phones and unapproved computer use in class are my biggest pet peeves. If I see you fiddling with your phone, I will ask you to leave the classroom. You will find this course to be infinitely more rewarding if you are “present” both physically and mentally.

Email. Many course materials will be distributed to you via email. You are responsible for checking your email on a daily basis.

Participation. Successful people, especially journalists, know how to ask questions – lots of questions. Come to every class prepared to participate in our discussions. Those who refuse to be a part of the discussion will see that reflected in a lower final grade. Please note that there is a difference between quality of participation and quantity of participation.

Course Writing Guidelines. Any assignment that you turn in must be typed, stapled, double-spaced and physically handed in to me during class on the day it is due. (Unless I’ve asked you to do otherwise). All assignments should conform to AP Style and be free of spelling or grammar mistakes. I do not accept late assignments.

Accuracy. Any assignment turned in that misspells a person’s name, has an inconsistent spelling of a person’s name, a major factual error, an inexact quotation or fictional quotes will receive a zero for the assignment.

A Disclaimer. This syllabus and the due dates contained therein may (and probably will) change as we progress through the semester. I will announce any changes well in advance.

Disabilities. Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at (814) 332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please do this as soon as possible.

Grades: Your course grade is calculated out of 500 total points and will be decided as follows:
200 pts Investigative project and presentation
150 pts Field assignments
100 pts Group reading discussions
50 pts Participation and attendance

Grades are determined on the following solid percentage scale:

- A 90-100%
- B 80-89%
- C 70-79%
- D 60-69%
- F 0-59%

CLASS SCHEDULE (ASSIGNMENTS/READING DUE ON MONDAY)

WEEK 1 (8/31) The investigative process and its history; Group reading discussion 9/2 (Read Houston Ch. 1; Kurson Ch. 1-3)

WEEK 2 (9/7) Primary and secondary sources; Group reading discussion 9/9 (Read Houston Ch. 2-3; Kurson Ch. 4-6); Field assignment #1 due 9/9

WEEK 3 (9/14) Interviewing; Group reading discussion 9/16 (Read Houston Ch. 5; Kurson Ch. 7-9)

WEEK 4 (9/21) Using databases and CAR; Group reading discussion 9/23 (Read Houston Ch. 4; Kurson Ch. 10-12); Field assignment #2 due 9/23

WEEK 5 (9/28) Organizing an investigation; Group reading discussion 9/30 (Read Houston Ch. 6; Kurson Ch. 13-sources)

WEEK 6 (10/5) Ethics of investigative reporting (Read Houston Ch. 7); Article pitches due 10/5

WEEK 7 (10/12) *No class 10/12 for Fall Break*; Ethics of investigative reporting cont.

WEEK 8 (10/19) Case study: Federal records and FoIA; Group reading discussion 10/21 (Read Houston Ch. 8 and handout); Field assignment #3 due 10/21

WEEK 9 (10/26) Case study: Legislative and voter records; Group reading discussion 10/28 (Read Houston Ch. 9 and handout)

WEEK 10 (11/2) Case study: Court records; Group reading discussion 11/4 (Read Houston Ch. 10 and handout)

WEEK 11 (11/9) Case study: Law enforcement; Group reading discussion 11/11 (Read Houston Ch. 11 and handout)

WEEK 12 (11/16) Case study: Pharmaceutical and health care; Group reading discussion 11/18 (Read Houston Ch. 13 and 16 and handout)

WEEK 13 (11/23) *No class on 11/25 due to Thanksgiving Break*; Topic and reading TBA

WEEK 14 (11/30) Individual meetings for investigative projects

WEEK 15 (12/7) Work days

FINAL EXAM (12/11) 2 p.m. (Group B) Investigative projects and presentations due