MEJO 754.1 Specialized Reporting

Fall 2019 Tuesday/Thursday 11:30 AM-12:45 PM

REMOTE

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CA 216

Office Hours: 11am—1 pm T,TH, F.

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**Prerequisite**: MEJO 753 Reporting and Writing News

**Course Description:**

Throughout the course of a journalists’ career special projects will present themselves because a select few stories require a more in-depth examination of events, their causes, and a greater understanding behind the reasons why something is happening and its impact on individuals or society. These stories may begin from an event, an interview, a leak by an important source, a whistleblower, or from creating an analysis of documents that reveal something newsworthy. The journalist is confronted with doing a deeper analysis and examination. These “projects” can take the form of an investigative project with many interviews, document requests, a database of figures, or can be deeper dives into the story behind an issue or event bringing forth and revealing a broader understanding of the human condition.

Projects therefore are deeper examinations by the journalist that can take any number of forms. The platform, or platforms are not the focus of the project but are the transportation to this unique and undiscovered territory. As part of your experience here, you are required to dive deep into a story or stories to complete a master’s thesis, or special project. But to complete your thesis or special project, you must first complete its proposal for acceptance by your thesis committee. This is no different than completing a non-fiction book proposal, long-form magazine piece or pieces pitch, or podcast, or documentary film pitch. All projects begin with a proposal. Think of your proposal as a railway signal with your objective obtaining a green all clear signal to proceed ahead. In this class, we will work together to help you achieve a greenlight.

This course will provide you the structural framework for writing or producing a project on deadline, an opportunity to synthesize your MEJO coursework, and a means to focus your professional track. Your thesis proposal must be approved by your committee chair by mid-January and should be completed before the winter holiday.

Your proposal will include the purpose of the project and its description, its rationale, a literature review or background history or context section, a design or conceptual framework, a section on challenges you may encounter in the investigatory stage, and a bibliography. You will use all your skills as a journalist to finish a written story sample of your project regardless of your platform.

**Reading, Consuming Content:**

Reading long-form journalism by the best journalists today is paramount in understanding how to compose and execute a special project. Thus, as part of this course, each student is responsible for reading one non-fiction book selected in conjuncture with me and writing a brief (1- to 2-page) response and reporting your impressions to the class in a 15- to 20-minute presentation.

Readings for the class will include: The New York Times special projects, The Washington Post special projects, REVEAL.com, ProPublica, The Center for Public Integrity, and other nationally recognized deep reporting publications and content providers. Books will be assigned as needed.

For your thesis proposal, you must use either the Chicago Manual of Style (see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>) or American Psychological Association (APA) style (see <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocAPA.html>). No other citation styles are accepted.

**Deliverables:**

This class will require the following assignments to be completed under deadline to be graded by me. These assignments will help you to prepare your thesis proposal and should be as close to a finalized version of sections of your proposal as possible.

1. Project description or Overview. An opening to your proposal on what you plan to examine, why you are selecting this topic, and why it is important in expanding our general knowledge of a topic or issue. It will also establish the deliverables of your project—written long-form stories, podcast, website, documentary film, etc.
2. Literature Review Section. A comprehensive and thorough review and examination on everything about your issue or topic framing the story through history and news and setting up the context of your project. This section is an extremely important part of your project as it will demonstrate your knowledge and mastery of this topic and issue to begin your examination and investigation.
3. Methodology or Design. This is the section that provides the framework as to how you will execute the investigation, the reporting, the interviewing, sources, documents needed, analysis you plan to create, infographics to the project, websites to be built, podcasts to be recorded, film to be edited.
4. Budget. A budget for how you will afford your methodology to complete your project.
5. Challenges. An account of the challenges that lie ahead to complete your project and how you plant to overcome them. In some cases, you will need to outline access to sources, or lack of access, the difficulty of obtaining documents, travel, budget, being an outsider or stranger to the community you’ll be reporting on and being sensitive, this deliverable seeks to plan ahead of trouble you may encounter on your investigation and acknowledges these obstacles.
6. Bibliography draft.
7. Sample Story. A sample of your story or writing to help prepare you for one of your articles for your thesis. A sample is exactly that. A sample of the style, tone, focus, and angle of your story for your thesis. It’s a leg up on what you may ultimately deliver in the Spring.
8. Your non-fiction Book Review: Brief presentation on a topic that relates to your project.

**Deadlines:**

August 18th: Outline of Overview Section of Proposal. A two-page outline of the opening of your proposal, its focus, purpose, some history, and reason for being.

August 25th: Overview Complete. Final version of the opening to your proposal. A clear description of your topic or issue, the focus of your investigation, how you plan to execute it and deliver it.

September 10: Outline of Literature Review turn in.

September 24th: Final Background or Literature Review. The historical context of your project and topic presented broadly. This is a significant part of your proposal and shows mastery of the topic you will be reporting on. Most literature review sections are multiple pages with references and citations that have to meticulously crafted for clarity and accuracy. The deadline for this section is advanced enough to allow you to complete it in time. You should begin on this section the first day of class.

October 22nd: Methodology/Design: Your written plan on how you will achieve your project goals and examination.

November 5th: Challenges. Short description of the possible pitfalls you have already encountered with your reporting or may encounter in the Spring. Turn in your description and discuss in class.

November 17th: LDOC. Bibliography done.

November 23: Sample Story or outline first piece. Your final deliverable will be a mini-presentation by you to the class. You will describe your story, read from it, and talk about your project. This is our final exam for the class. It meets at 12:00 noon.

Open Dates: Your Book Presentation based on a sign-up list of dates. Scheduled on Wednesdays.

**Scheduled Discussions:**

August 13: Come prepared to talk about your story and thesis ideas, and we will walk through potential, and pitfalls of each. We will also walk through the requirements of your thesis project and committee responsibilities and deadlines. Be prepared to discuss all this on both days.

August 18: Outline of Overview Due. Discuss Big Stories and how to get them greenlighted.

August 20: Discussion on interview techniques and finding sources. Workshop in class to help others with questions on where to begin reporting and finding information.

August 25: Immersive reporting. Discussion on going deep in a story and immersing yourself within the story. Read chapters from Ted Conover’s book, Immersion and discuss themes.

August 27: One on one editorial thesis meetings on the 24th. Schedule times for meetings on the 27-28. Discuss Overview assignment.

September 1-3: Discussion of Literature Review or Background Section of Proposal. Go over research needs and plans for projects.

September 8-10: Discussion of Literature Review or Background Section of Proposal. Go over research needs, FOIA requests, citations needed and style. Setting up requests now for Spring 2020. Turn in outline of Literature Review needs and plans on 10th. 1 page outline due!

September 15-17: Discussion on Data Driven Journalism or Computer Assisted Reporting. Guest appearance by Ryan Thornburg. Discussion on document retrieval.

September 22-24: One on One Editorial meetings on the 22nd, 23rd. Discuss and turn in Literature Reviews, Backgrounds to your project.

September 29-October 1: Discussion on your Methodology. Opening long-form stories, investigative stories. Writing for a long-form project or investigative project. Narrative writing or storytelling. Readings to be assigned.

October 6-8: Discussion on Methodology of your project. How to plan a project. How to budget your time and money on a project. Handling notes. Laying out a plan to get things done. Sectioning, dividing your project to be manageable.

October 13-15: Turn in an outline of your Methodology. One on One editorial meetings with me to discuss your Methodology from your project.

October 20-22: Final discussion on Methodology. Turn in final Methodology section on 22nd.

October 27-29: Discuss pitfalls to your project, obstacles encountering, etc. Discuss committee issues and deadlines.

November 3-5: One on One editorial meetings. Turn in Challenges section of proposal and discuss in class.

November 10-12: Wrap up discussions of proposal and Bibliography. Outline of Bibliography.

November 17,: LDOC. Discuss final proposal and status. Turn in Bibliography.

November 23: Exam Day. 12:00 pm Noon. Turn in Sample Story to project. Presentation & Discussion.

**Attendance**

As graduate students, you are aware of the benefits of attending class and are prepared to accept the consequences should you decide not to attend. Arriving to class or conferences habitually late will adversely affect your grade. You are expected to arrive to class or conferences having completed the assigned reading and ready to discuss the material.

We will be doing lots of WORKSHOPPING of your Proposal. Your attendance helps your fellow students in designing their proposal and finalizing it. Attendance is required to achieve this. Please be respectful of your fellow students.

Since a goal of the course is to foster independent reporting skills, I may set aside class time to allow you to work on your projects, particularly as we near the end of the semester.

**Grading**

You are encouraged to write stories that have the potential to be published in one of our local newspapers or magazines, and I am happy to help you identify appropriate venues -- but stories will not receive higher grades or extra credit for being published.

You will be graded on attendance/participation, your research, reporting and writing skills. Since you’ve had reporting courses or the equivalent, I expect you to write clear, concise and accurate stories and to edit them according to AP style.

*Late assignments will not be accepted*.

The instructor follows the grading system adopted by the UNC Graduate School:

H = 94 and above  
P = 80-93  
L = 70-80  
F = <70

**Honor Code** <http://instrument.unc.edu/instrument.text.html>.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated – this includes plagiarism, cheating or any false means of obtaining a grade – conduct that will result in failure of the course, suspension or expulsion. If I suspect academic dishonesty, I am obligated to report it to the School’s Associate Dean, the Student Attorney General, or the judicial programs officer in the Dean of Students’ office for further action.

**Diversity:**

The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

**Special Accommodations:**

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

**Accreditation:**

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication’s accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program.  Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas.  In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies in the link above and bullet points below with a special emphasis on the last seven bullet points.

* Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press 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 tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.