



MEJO 553 ADVANCED REPORTING

Fall 2020 | Professor Erin Siegal McIntyre

Instructor: Erin Siegal McIntyre

Contact: 646-239-7307 Email: esm@unc.edu Twitter: [@ESMcIntyre](https://twitter.com/ESMcIntyre)

Location: Online

Time: Tuesday; Thursday – 1:15-2:30 p.m.

Office Hours: Required and by appointment. Please book here: https://calendly.com/e_s_m

****Living syllabus:** A hyperlink will be emailed directly to each student before the first day of class; the schedule is subject to change. Please check this document frequently. It is your detailed guide to coursework.

Course description:

This course will give you skills needed to produce the kind of groundbreaking journalism that matters. Serving the public good is essential tenet of our industry, and by focusing on accountability reporting and investigative projects, MEJO 553 will provide a foundation for young reporters to develop story ideas, find and cultivate sources, adopt a document mindset, and execute stories that illuminate a little-known or underreported topic in a clear and compelling way while adhering to the highest standards of accuracy and fairness.

Objectives:

Upon leaving MEJO 553, students will be well-equipped to identify and execute in-depth enterprise stories and investigative projects. We will benefit from the generosity of various journalist and expert source guest speakers. Students will be expected, at times, to lecture on assigned readings and produce regular weekly reporting memos, reflection memos, and complete assigned skill-building reporting exercises on deadline.

This semester, students will gain:

- A deep understanding of investigative reporting and its role in society
- The ability to organize and execute journalism that holds those in power accountable
- Skills for cultivating, nurturing, and protecting sensitive sources and whistleblowers
- Sharper instincts for digging deep enough into an issue or topic to generate leads that expose wrongdoing, problems, or negligence
- Knowledge how to develop and pitch enterprise accountability stories related to specific beats
- Skills for identifying and evaluating potential human sources, open access document sets, and “closed” information
- A robust reportorial toolbox including reporting guides and tip-sheets that can be used professionally for years to come
- The experience of attending and participating in the 2020 IRE (Investigative Reporters and Editors) conference (to be held virtually this year due to Covid-19)
- The critical thinking capacity to envision how best to tell stories across multiple platforms for maximum impact
- Experience engaging in peer review and participating in a collaborative team environment

Required reading / course materials:

- Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Student Membership (\$25 annual or \$10 per semester): <http://www.ire.org>
- “[Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists](#),” by Mark Lee Hunter with Nils Hanson, Rana Sabbagh, Luuk Sengers, Drew Sullivan, Flemming Tait Svith and Pia Thordson
- *The Associated Press Stylebook Online*
- Various other films, documentary broadcast clips, audio stories, and clips per weekly schedule

Course Format and Assignment Expectations:

We will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays at the regularly scheduled class time via Zoom. You are required to check the living syllabus weekly to stay informed of all changes, deadlines, and assignments.

The Investigative Project

For MEJO 553, your capstone project will be deeply reported throughout the semester using the skills you gain both inside and outside of class. All story pitches will be submitted and approved in advance. You will submit a first, second, and final draft. If the class decides to work collaboratively, we will break into groups of 3-4 to execute our investigations. Your final project will be reviewed by both the instructor and your peers for critical feedback. Final projects will be between 1500-3000 words.

Assignments

All assignments are due on time, including your weekly reporting memos, and should be turned in via Google Docs. Please share them with both my UNC and Gmail email (see top of syllabus) and ensure that I am granted editing privileges in your settings. Late work is not accepted without pre-approval. Weekly reporting memos are due at 5:00 p.m. every Friday. They are to include the following three subheadings:

1. **SUMMARY:** A concise summary of the week’s reporting, including detailed lists of all human sources interviewed, documents reviewed, databases used, and websites visited, and how your reporting advanced. Include names, titles, and phone numbers of sources.
2. **CHALLENGES:** Detail and reporting challenges encountered, including any questions you might have about tackling them.
3. **REPORTING GOALS:** In this section, please detail your plan for the following week, what you hope to accomplish, and how. Include names, titles, and phone numbers of sources.

Assigned reflection memos are for you to creatively interpret at will- reflect on whatever you want, but please do so in a thoughtful manner.

Instructions and due dates for all other exercises and skills labs are contained online on the MEJO 553 living syllabus. You are expected to complete every assignment and to complete all scheduled reading, viewing, and listening assignments before coming to class. There is no way to succeed without planning and preparation; you cannot leave reporting or project work to the last minute. Please manage your time accordingly. We will



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discuss time and project management at length to help ensure your success, but at the end of the day, the responsibility for execution is yours and yours alone.

Filename conventions

All assignments must adhere to the following filename conventions: LASTNAME_FIRSTNAME_MONTH_DAY_YEAR and must be placed in the correct assignment folder corresponding to the course's weekly schedule in Google Drive. If you do not follow these directions, your assignment will be reduced by a full letter grade.

Communication:

This class will use Google Groups, and I will use the preferred email address you previously provided. All class documents, readings, tip-sheets, etc. will be housed in a Google Drive folder for this class. Please feel free to email me with any question or concern related to the class, including iterative feedback. You are required to book at least one 15-minute session of office hours each month; use the following link for scheduling: https://calendly.com/e_s_m

Attendance policy:

Regular class attendance is an obligation. Students are responsible for all of their work, including assessments, exercises, skills labs, and assignments. As your instructor, I will work with you to meet attendance needs that do not fall within University approved absences. For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview or club activity), we will collaboratively determine an approach to missed classes and make-up assessments and assignments. Students are encouraged to communicate early about potential absences and are reminded that they are bound by the [Honor Code](#) when making a request for a University approved absence. For more information on University attendance policies, [please see here](#).

COVID-19

If you are feeling unwell, do not attend class. You are required to rest and focus on regaining your health.

Community Agreements:¹

- One mic, one diva
- Respect for all
- Challenge the idea, not the person
- Commit to being comfortably uncomfortable
- Be OK with silence
- Be as present as possible with audio, video, and chat
- Take care of yourself
- Leave with more questions than answers
- Have fun!

¹ Courtesy Raja Bhattar, <https://www.rajabhatar.com>



Grading:

Grading scale

A = 93-100%, A- = 90-92%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 83-86%, B- = 80-82%, C+ = 77-79%, C = 73-76%, C- = 70-72%, D+ = 67-69% D = 60-66%, F = 59% or below. *The University does not recognize an A+ or D-

Grading rubric

Participation: 20% Assignments: 30% Final Project: 30% In-Class Exercises: 20%

Final project grading will be based on assessments by both the instructor and your fellow peers in the following categories. Numeric rubrics will be provided:

1. Originality of topic
2. Difficulty of topic
3. Use of documents and sources
4. Story organization
5. Writing quality and improvement through revision processes
6. Execution of reporting / Determination to persevere and overcome obstacles
7. Overall impact of story

Honor code:

The Honor Code (<https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/>) forms a bond of trust among students, faculty, and administrators. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill operates under a system of self-governance, as students are responsible for governing themselves. As such, our University is transformed into a powerful community of inquiry and learning. The Honor Code embodies the ideals of academic honesty, integrity, and responsible citizenship, and governs the performance of all academic work a student conducts at the University. Acceptance of an offer of admission to Carolina presupposes a commitment to the principles embodied in our century-old tradition of honor and integrity.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism and fabricating sources/information/quotes results in automatic failure.

Seeking help:

If you need individual assistance, it is your responsibility to meet with me. If you want to improve your performance in the course, seek help as soon as possible— whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness. I am available to you from 9-5 Monday through Friday, never hesitate to call or email. We will make it work.

**Diversity:**

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined on the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office's webpage (<https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/>). 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 Resources & Services site at <https://ars.unc.edu/>.

Accreditation:

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media'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://hussman.unc.edu/accreditation>. 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. The values and competencies associated with this course include being able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientations and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- 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 tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions.

Weekly class schedule:

Please refer to the living syllabus (detailed class guide) posted online for all readings, class assignments, deliverables, instructions, etc. Bookmark it. That living syllabus will evolve alongside our reporting progress and account for unexpected hurdles and challenges resulting from where our investigations take us and how the pandemic unfolds this fall. The below outline is the general course framework.

- Week 1:** **August 11:** Introduction, course expectations; implicit bias.
- August 13:** What is investigative journalism? Why is it done? Why should we do it? Beat discussions, source relations, outcomes. Developing a max/min story; proposal FAQ.
- Week 2:** **August 18:** Cross-cultural reporting; best practices for engaging with multi-marginalized sources; retaliation, government surveillance and watchlists. Guest speaker Nicole Ramos of Al Otro Lado, Tijuana.
- August 20:** Developing a hypothesis, methods for testing, discussion of proposals, how to choose a story, how to develop a reporting strategy. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 3:** **August 25:** Project proposals finalized and selected in class. Verification, open source strategies, using open sources/data from libraries, government agencies, regulatory filings, court systems. Basic backgrounding and mapping methodology.
- August 27:** FOIA lab/ in-class workshop. Guest speakers FOIA super-nerds/First Amendment attorneys Geoffrey King of Open Vallejo and Andrew Free. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 4:** **September 1:** Using human sources, source mapping, motivating confidence, whistleblowers, interrogating intent, protection and the law, making contact, setting relationship goals, choosing your role, interview tactics.
- September 3:** Park Librarian Stephanie Willen Brown will discuss Park Library research, databases, and resources. Discussion on advanced internet searching. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 5:** **September 8:** Organizing your reporting, creating a master file, document connectivity, creating a database, safe backups, defining and storing sensitive material.
- September 10:** Writing and pre-writing investigations, narrative order, project design, form and function, scene construction, incorporating the master file, seeking out models. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.

- Week 6:** **September 15:** Class discussion on project progress.
- September 17:** Compositional technique analysis, #IRE2020 prep discussion and expectations. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 7:** **September 22-24:** 2020 Investigative Reporters & Editors Conference (held virtually; attendance mandatory).
- Week 8:** **September 29:** Post-IRE presentations; recaps and reflections.
- October 1:** Editing the investigation; quality control technique. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 9:** **October 6:** Ethical issues in newsgathering, visual reporting, using multimedia to report, dilemmas and quagmires.
- October 8:** First drafts of project due. Discussion: objectivity, bias, and inclusivity. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 10:** **October 13:** Safety and risk assessment, best practices to mitigate danger in fieldwork; access to HEFAT, working in conflict zones, trauma-informed reporting, self-care for journalists.
- October 15:** Covering protests and demonstrations. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 11:** **October 20:** Investigating the social web, using datasets from social media.
- October 22:** Second draft of reporting project due. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 12:** **October 27:** Verification, libel, bullet-proofing, and fact-checking. processes.
- October 29:** Disinformation and “fake news,” special guest Brooke Binkowski, former managing editor of Snopes.com. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 13:** **November 3:** Class discussion on project progress; facing challenges and overcoming obstacles.
- November 5:** Multimedia design; matching platform to project. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.
- Week 14:** **November 10:** Pitching, publishing, promotion, and defending work. Media perils policies, handling threats, assessing the economic feasibility of investigations.
- November 12:** Jenn Sipe from Career Services will discuss career planning, resumes, and job opportunities. Weekly reporting memo due Friday at 9:00 a.m.



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Week 15: **November 17:** Final projects due. In-class peer workshop.

November 19, 12:00: Final Exam period: In-class presentations on strengths and weaknesses of projects, self-assessment and evaluations.