MEJO 553 ADVANCED REPORTING

Spring 2021 | Professor Erin Siegal McIntyre

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Instructor: Erin Siegal McIntyre (Professor McIntyre, she/her/hers)
Contact: 646-239-7307 Email: esm@unc.edu Twitter: @ESMcIntyre
Location: Online
Time: Monday; Wednesday, 3:30-4:45 p.m.
Office Hours: By appointment: https://calendly.com/e_s_m
MEJO 553 Advanced Reporting Slack workroom: https://mejo553.slack.com.
Please bookmark and check in frequently for course updates.

Course description

This course will give you skills needed to produce the kind of groundbreaking journalism that matters. Serving the public good is an essential tenet of our industry. By focusing on accountability reporting and building an investigative skillset, MEJO 553 provides 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 organize investigative projects. We will benefit from the generosity of guest speakers. Students will be expected, at times, to present to the class on assigned readings and will also 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/or 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 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

1. Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Student Membership (apply for Curtis Fund backing to cover your $25 student membership fee): http://www.ire.org
2. "Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists," by Mark Lee Hunter with Nils Hanson, Rana Sabbagh, Luuk Sengers, Drew Sullivan, Fleming Tait Smith and Pia Thordson, 2011 (no cost)
3. *The Associated Press Stylebook Online* and *The UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media Style Guide* (no cost)
4. The Diversity Style Guide by Rachele Kanigel, Wiley-Blackwell, 2019 (no cost)

Course Format and Assignment Expectations

We will typically meet as a class on Mondays, and in breakout groups on Wednesdays at scheduled class time via Zoom. Attendance is mandatory. You are required to check the syllabus weekly to stay informed about changes, deadlines, and assignments. Throughout the semester, we will have editors Byard Duncan, Reporter and Producer, Collaborations and Engagement, and Sumi Aggarwal, Head of Collaborations at Reveal, joining us for certain classes. We will be collaborating with one of the nation's top investigative outlets, Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting. Please familiarize yourself with RevealNews.org, their staff, and their reporting work.

The Investigative Project

For Spring 2021, our collaborative project with Reveal will be reported throughout the semester using skills gained both inside and outside of class. All story pitches will be submitted and approved in advance. In some cases, you are required to submit revisions of your work that incorporate editorial feedback.

Assignments

All assignments are due on time, including original stories, exercises, and reporting and reflection memos. Please share them via Google Docs and grant editing privileges in your settings. Late work is not accepted without pre-approval. Weekly reporting and/or reflection memos are due at 5:00 p.m. every Wednesday. They are to include the following, and should not be longer than two pages maximum.

Reporting memos:

1. 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 all sources.
2. Detail and reporting challenges encountered, including any questions you might have about tackling them.
3. The next steps of your reporting plan: what you hope to accomplish and how.

Reflection memos:

1. A written consideration of the week's assigned reading. Creatively interpret the assigned prompt at will
2. Any questions, concerns, or critical feedback in response to the material
3. Reflect on whatever you want, but do so thoughtfully.

Instructions and due dates for all other exercises/skills labs are demarcated below in the weekly schedule. 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 your project work to the last minute. Please manage time accordingly.

<u>Filename conventions</u>

All assignments must adhere to the following filename conventions: LASTNAME_FIRSTNAME_DAY-MONTH-YEAR and must be placed in the correct assignment folder corresponding to the course's weekly schedule in Google Drive.

Sample assignment filename submitted by Juan Doe on December 10, 2020: Doe_Juan_12-20-2020

<u>Please note: If you do not follow these directions, your assignment will be reduced by a full letter grade.</u>

Communication

This class will use both Slack integrated with Google Drive, and I will use whatever preferred email address you provide. All class documents, readings, tip-sheets, etc. will be housed in a Google Drive folder for this class linked to our Slack workroom. Please feel free to email me with any question or concern related to the class, including iterative feedback.

Attendance policy

Please approach this class as you would a job. Regular class attendance is mandatory; two unexcused absences are permitted. Any and all excused absences must be arranged in advance. We are doing a lot of work collaboratively this semester, and you will be letting others down if you aren't present, on time, and engaged. Students are bound by the <u>Honor Code</u> when making a request for a University approved absence. For more information on University attendance policies, <u>please see here.</u>

COVID-19

If you are feeling unwell, do not attend class. Please rest instead and advise both myself and your group as soon as possible to coordinate make-up work.

Community Agreements

- 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!

Grading

Participation & Assignments: 70%
Final Project: 30%

Grade scale
- A (90 and above) - Could be published with little to no major editing
- B (80-89) - Could be published with moderate editing
- C (70-79) - Requires significant editing to be punishable
- D (60-69) - Not publishable -- poorly conceived, written, or sourced
- F (below 60): Did not complete, or completed with major factual or ethical problem

Grading rubric

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

Evaluation Grid for Investigative Projects & Stories
1. Use of documents and sources
2. Story organization; grammar, spelling and punctuation
3. Reveals new facts, new information
4. Enterprise reporting – creativity, persistence and critical thinking
5. Writing quality and improvement through revision processes
6. Multimedia components
7. Accurate and fair
8. Necessary number of sources & source contact information
9. Theme, premise, and news value are clear and readily identified
10. The work has intimate details and a larger "sweep," context or perspective

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, or 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.

Success

Remember these wise words from my old friend Al Stewart, a.k.a The Arkansas Kid, who was a member of The Federation of Black Cowboys until his homegoing in 2010. A proud Army vet and former drill sergeant, Uncle Al always said: "Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance." Don't forget the five P's.

Diversity and Anti-Racism

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.

Additionally, it is important to understand expectations around class conduct and discussion for all course participants, including instructors, guests, and collaborators. This is in accordance with the main purposes of both academia and journalism: to distinguish between valid and invalid knowledge and judgments, and to broaden our perspective on the world and the experiences of others. Advanced Reporting students must strive to:

- Refrain from judging individuals according to the collective groups they may belong to (e.g. race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability status, etc.)
- Assess ideas and arguments according to the evidence and not based on the identities of the individual who created them
- Acknowledge and seek to better understand the historical and contemporary systems of racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism that have created real disparities in people's lives, how they see the world, and the opportunities that are available to them

Institute of African American Research- Student Learning to Advance Truth and Equity

Along with many other courses offered at UNC, this course is participating in an important initiative by the Institute of African American Research called Student Learning to Advance Truth and Equity. IAAR-SLATE

seeks to increase undergraduates' understanding of race, racism and racial equity. All courses, like ours, in the program will include at least six required activities that explore this topic. By enrolling in this course, you are also committing to joining in all of the assigned activities for the program, some of which are in-class and some of which take place outside of our class time. We will discuss some material together in our class, but we will also have opportunities to meet and learn from people whose work or lives help us understand race, racism and racial equity better. In some of the activities, you will also be able to dialogue with students in other courses who are also participating in the same required activities.

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.

MEJO 553 WEEK BY WEEK*

Week 1:	January 20	Introduction, course expectations; implicit bias.
Week 2:	January 25	Introduction to Reveal/American Rehab, backgrounding
	January 27	Ethics, intersectionality, implicit bias, trauma-informed reporting, cross-cultural journalism, and best practices for reporting on and with traditionally marginalized communities
Week 3:	February 1	Editorial meeting with Reveal
	February 3	Source-building, whistleblowers, acquiring/using data, the document mindset
		Verification, open sources/data, government agencies, regulatory filings, court systems
Week 4:	February 8	Guest: Stephanie Willen Brown on research methodology, tips, and tricks. Editorial budget meeting
	February 10	Public records, developing a hypothesis
Week 5:	February 15	FOIA lab with Reveal editors
	February 17	Source mapping, interrogating intent, protection and the law, making contact, setting relationship goals, technique
Week 6:	February 22	IRE prep, advanced reporting technique and toolbox
	February 24	Editorial meeting with Reveal
Week 7:	March 1	IRE presentations
	March 3	Editorial meeting
Week 8:	March 8	Ethical issues in newsgathering, visual reporting, using multimedia to report, dilemmas and quagmires
	March 10	Editorial meeting
Week 9:	March 15	Editing the investigation; quality control technique
	March 17	Editorial meeting with Reveal
Week 10:	March 22	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
	March 24	Covering protests and demonstrations.
Week 11:	March 29	Editorial meeting
	March 31	Investigating the social web, using datasets from social media.
Week 12:	*April 5*	*UNC WELLNESS DAY*
	April 7	Verification, libel, bullet-proofing, and fact-checking
Week 13:	April 12	Editorial meeting with Reveal
	April 14	Multimedia design; matching platform to project
Week 14:	April 19	Pitching, publishing, promotion, and defending work
	April 21	Editorial meeting
Week 15:	April 26	Jenn Sipe from Career Services will discuss career planning
	April 28	Media perils policies, handling threats, assessing the economic feasibility of investigations
Week 16:	May 3	Editorial meeting with Reveal
	May 5	Editorial meeting
EXAM PERIOD	May 14, 4:00 p.m.	Details to come **Dates subject to change*