

MEJO 754.1 Advance Reporting  
Fall 2022; MONDAY/WEDNESDAY 12:30 PM-1:45 PM

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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.

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 Focus and Interest Treatment**—a two-page description of what your project will focus on, why it is important, your interest, and the impact it may have.
2. An **Introduction or Overview** of your project explaining the project's focus, how it will be achieved, and what you hope to encounter or find.
3. **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. In your thesis defense, you must defend with deep knowledge of your topic or area of interest. Your literature review will show your committee members you understand in depth and with breadth the issue you are examining.
4. **Deliverables Description.** What will your deliverables look like? Will they be three written stories, a podcast and how many, a short documentary film? What will you be presenting to your defense as a journalistic work to your chair and committee.
5. **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. It is also the outlines and description to the articles you are going to write.
6. **Budget.** A budget for how you will afford your methodology to complete your project.

7. **Limitations or Challenges Section.** An account of the challenges that lie ahead to complete your project and how you plan 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 section seeks to plan for trouble you may encounter on your investigation and acknowledges these obstacles.
8. **Abstract.** 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.
9. **Table of Contents** draft.
10. **Title Page.** A title page and listing of your Committee Chair and Members.

### **Deadlines:**

August 31-WEDNESDAY: Treatment. A two-page outline of your project, its focus, purpose, some history, and reason for being.

September 7-WEDNESDAY: Introduction. 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.

OCTOBER 5-WEDNESDAY: LITERATURE REVIEW, CAPTIONS, FOOTNOTES. 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 be 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 19-WEDNESDAY: DELIVERABLE DESCRIPTION. An overview or outline of what you will be presenting for your defense in April 2023.

NOVEMBER 2-WEDNESDAY: METHODS SECTION AND BUDGET. A description of how you plan to execute your deliverables for your project. This is the blueprint for finalizing what you will be defending in April 2023.

NOVEMBER 16—WEDNESDAY: LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES. A description of the challenges you will encounter while reporting and editing your project and what may trip you up. By casting ahead some of the pitfalls you may encounter while reporting you can prevent a bad situation in your defense and even allow you to pivot to something more successful.

NOVEMBER 23—THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS.

NOVEMBER 28-MONDAY—ABSTRACT DUE.

NOVEMBER 30-WEDNESDAY: TABLE OF CONTENTS AND TITLE PAGE DUE OF YOUR PROPOSAL AND ALL COMPONENTS. LAST DAY OF CLASS.

DECEMBER 5, 12:00—MONDAY—EXAM TIME

**Scheduled Discussions:**

August 15: Come prepared to talk about your story and thesis ideas, and we will walk through potential, and pitfalls of each. Will discuss thesis calendar. LECTURE: MASTERS THESIS FORMAT

August 17: Continue to fine tune your project and its requirements. Discuss the Thesis committees and chairs. Must lock these in now. LECTURE: FROM TOPIC TO PROJECT

August 22: Continue to hone down your project. Discuss what the Introduction of your thesis project proposal will look like. LECTURE: PROJECT IDEAS

August 24: Workshop your Treatment. Let's see what this looks like.

August 29: Discuss calendar. LECTURE: THESIS INTRODUCTION. Discuss format for this Section or your Proposal. Discuss format for Introduction to your project thesis. Lecture. What to put in this document and the function of this section to your proposal.

August 31: Check in on Thesis Committee members and chairs. Turn in TREATMENT Everyone presents their idea to the class and we discuss.

September 5: NO CLASS—LABOR DAY

September 7: TURN IN INTRODUCTION. PRESENT IN CLASS. DISCUSS.

September 12: LECTURE: LITERATURE REVIEW

September 14<sup>th</sup>: One on One editorial meetings and your individual projects.

September 19: LECTURE: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

September 21: WORKSHOP. WHERE ARE YOU IN YOUR RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

September 26: Go over research needs and plans for projects FOIA requests, citations needed and style. Citations. Footnotes. Endnotes.

September 28: Discussion on Charts, Tables, Graphs, Pictures for your Literature Review. Talk about format and style and captions

October 5: LITERATURE REVIEW SECTION DUE. DISCUSS IN CLASS.

October 10: The Three-Story Format for Projects. Go over this particular series of stories used to tell a larger story. Go over audio and video projects and how to set them up. Class discussion on their deliverables.

October 12: One on One editorial meetings on deliverables and check in.

October 17: Outlining your First Deliverable. Progress report on your first deliverable. Where are you in the process? Source list development? If you are working on film or audio—outline of first script.

October 19: DELIVERABLE DESCRIPTION DUE.

October 24: Lecture and 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 26: One on One editorial meeting on your METHODS SECTION.

October 31: Lecture and Discussion on your METHODS BUDGET.

November 2: METHODOLOGY AND BUDGET SECTION DUE.

November 7: Workshop with everyone and see where every one is on their proposals. Discussion on Limitations and Challenges section

November 9<sup>th</sup>: One on one editorial meetings to discuss your proposals.

November 14: If needed, continue one-on-one editorial meetings to discuss proposal and deliverables.

November 16: LIMITATIONS SECTION DUE.

November 21: Discuss ABSTRACT section.

November 23: THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 28: ABSTRACT DUE. Discuss Table of Contents page, Title page, format. Wrap up discussions of proposal and Bibliography. Outline of Bibliography.

November 30: LDOC; TABLE OF CONTENTS, TITLE PAGE, ALL SECTIONS OF PROPOSAL DUE.

December 6: 12:00 pm. EXAM MEETING.

### **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.

## **FURTHER ATTENDANCE:**

### **University Policy:**

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

### **Class Policy:**

*Instructors may work with students 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), instructors determine their own approach to missed classes and make-up assessments and assignments. Please provide your approach on the course syllabus.*

Please communicate with me early about potential absences. Please be aware that you are bound by the [Honor Code](#) when making a request for a University approved absence.

(source: <http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/>)

### **HONOR CODE:**

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean C. A. Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

### **Syllabus Changes**

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.



## **ARS**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email [ars@unc.edu](mailto:ars@unc.edu).

(source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

## **Counseling and Psychological Services**

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

## ***TITLE IX***

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – [titleixcoordinator@unc.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvs@unc.edu](mailto:gvs@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](https://safe.unc.edu).

## **POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION**

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at [safe.unc.edu](https://safe.unc.edu)) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

## **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve; I appreciate any suggestions. More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](#) with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on [prohibiting harrassment and discrimination](#). In summary, 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. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies.

## **MASK USE**

All enrolled students may wear a mask covering your mouth and nose in our classroom. This is to protect our educational community -- your classmates and me -- as we learn together.