

# **MEJO 759: Public Life Reporting-2**

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## **Spring 2024 Syllabus**

### **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

**Class schedule:** Wednesdays, 4:45-7:30 p.m.

338 Carroll

**Instructor:** Allen H. Johnson

**E-mail:** [ahjo@unc.edu](mailto:ahjo@unc.edu).

**Office hours:** After class and by appointment

## **DESCRIPTION**

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This semester we'll delve into racial, social, ethnic and economic disparities in public policy and how to cover these topics over the years, for better and for worse. Students will critique local and state coverage of some of these topics individually and in small groups. Among the areas we'll explore:

- Public safety, including use of force and access to police video footage.
- Education, including book bans, resegregation and the racial achievement gap in public schools.
- Homelessness and the affordable housing crisis.
- Growth and economic development.
- Gender and sexual orientation.
- The criminal justice system.
- Health and social services (hospitals, community and public health programs, including Medicaid expansion and managing COVID).
- The environment (policy, regulation, pollution, sustainability and waste management).
- Transportation (public transportation, highways and roads).
- Politics and elections (redistricting, gerrymandering and voter access).
- How the expanding footprint of news deserts affect coverage of underserved populations.

## **OBJECTIVES**

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Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- See beyond bureaucracies and meetings to the real-world impact of public policy on communities and individuals.
- Broaden their sourcing to paint a more complete and realistic picture of the issues they cover.
- Use effective storytelling techniques to make complex concepts more relatable, compelling and understandable to readers.
- Develop a deeper understanding of the historical roots of social inequality.
- Apply public records laws appropriately and effectively.
- Recognize their own biases (we all have them) and how they can affect the quality and completeness of their reporting.

- Effectively use the Maynard Institute of Journalism Education's Fault Lines as a tool to sharpen their reporting skills.

## TEXTBOOK AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

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### Required textbook

- *Beyond Innocence: The Life Sentence of Darryl Hunt* by Phoebe Zerwick (Atlantic Monthly Press; March 8, 2022; ISBN: 978-0-8021-5937-3).
- Other readings specific to each lesson will be listed on Canvas. They may include:
  - Juan Gonzalez and Joseph Torres. *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media*, 2012.
  - *The Investigative Editors and Reporters Journal*. First Quarter 2020.
  - Gary Orfield, Susan E. Eaton and The Harvard Project on School Desegregation, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, 1996.
  - Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till*.
  - Clint C. Wilson, Felix Gutierrez and Lena M. Chao, *Racism, Sexism and the Media: Multicultural Issues into the New Communications Age*, 2012.
  - Sally Lehrman, *News in a New America*, Knight Foundation, 2006. Sue Ellen Christian, *Overcoming Bias: A Journalist's Guide to Culture and Context*, 2011.
  - Maurianne Adams, et al. *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, 2013.
  - Patrick Lee Plaisance, *Media Ethics: Key Principles for Responsible Practice*, 2009.

### Other required texts and resources:

- Every student in this class will need an AP stylebook. (Two points will be deducted for each style error in your writing assignments.)
- Students also should follow the Hussman School of Journalism and Media stylebook, which is required for this class: <https://jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu/>
- NLGJA Stylebook on LGBTQ Terminology: <https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/>
- National Association of Black Journalists: <https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide>
- Asian American Journalists Association: <https://aaaja.org/2020/11/30/covering-asia-and-asian-americans/> [The Diversity Style Guide](#)
- <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com> The NAHJ Cultural Competence Handbook:
- [A Journalist's Guide to Covering Homelessness](#)
- Transjournalist Style Guide: <https://transjournalists.org/style-guide/> SPJ Diversity Toolbox: <https://www.spj.org/diversity.asp>
- Richard Prince's [Journal-isms](#)

### Other resources:

Supplemental (e.g., videos, graphics, articles, blogs, etc.) may be assigned for the class. They will be made available through Canvas/course reserves.

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## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & RUBRIC**

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### **Attendance/Participation**

Don't just come. Come to play. Questions and informed discussion are welcome and encouraged.

### **Grading breakdown**

Article #1: 10%

Article #2: 10%

Article#3: 10%

Public meeting critique: 10%

Individual project: 20%

Group projects: 20%

Final enterprise article: 20%

### **Grading scale**

**Graduate students do not carry a numerical GPA.**

Grading at the graduate level is intended to offer feedback to students on their performance.

Graduate students must receive one of the following grades.

- H (high pass) indicates clear excellence. It should be reserved for truly outstanding work and given rarely.
- P (pass) indicates entirely satisfactory graduate work and is the most common grade, one students should be proud of.
- L (low pass) indicates inadequate graduate work and is cause for concern.

### **Numeric scale**

93 - 100 High pass

74 - 92 Pass

63 - 73 Low Pass

63 and below F

### **How to do well in this class:**

- Come.
- Participate.
- Do the readings.
- Follow your passions.
- Use me when you need me. That's why I'm here.
- Be willing to challenge your preconceived notions.
- Sweat the details.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change, as warranted)**

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### **WEEK 1 (Jan. 10)**

#### **Introduction**

Review syllabus, become better acquainted and discuss why we're here and where we're headed.

## **WEEK 2 (Jan. 17)**

### **First impressions/reactions to "Beyond Innocence"**

**Loaded language:** Words matter. News media style and inclusion. Reading: Poynter Institute: Newsrooms updates to style guide entries related to race are heartening, but far from comprehensive. <https://www.poynter.org/ethics-trust/2020/newsrooms-updates-to-style-guide-entries-related-to-race-are-heartening-but-far-from-comprehensive/>

## **WEEK 3 (Jan. 24)**

**Who are we?** A demographic overview of our community and the implications.

Guest speaker: TBA

Assignment: Attend and critique a public meeting (How effectively it was conducted and how responsive it was to citizens' concerns?) as well as media coverage of that meeting (How balanced, accurate and complete was it? Did the reporter see and hear what you saw and heard?).

## **WEEK 4 (Jan. 31)**

### **The search for reason in an era of noise and division**

Guest speaker: John Hood, the John Locke Foundation

## **WEEK 5 (Feb. 7)**

**The public square:** Critiques due. Discuss our impressions of public meetings in class.

## **WEEK 6 (Feb. 14)**

### **Lessons from the tragedy of Darryl Hunt.**

Guest speaker: Phoebe Zerwick, author of "Beyond Innocence"

## **WEEK 8 (Feb. 21)**

**Me? Biased?** Yes. And here's what to do about it.

Assignment: Profile a speaker of color from or audience member from the public meeting you attended.

## **WEEK 9 (Feb. 28)**

### **Storytelling techniques: a review.**

**Guest speaker:** Writer/journalist Jeri Rowe

## **WEEK 10 (March 6)**

**Other voices:** The role of minority media.

Guest panel TBA.

## **WEEK 11 (March 13)**

## **Spring break**

### **WEEK 12 (March 20)**

Groups and multimedia group project topics discussed and assigned.

### **WEEK 13 (March 27)**

**Race and public education:** Book bans, critical race theory, poverty, discipline and safety, the achievement gap and resegregation.

Assignment: Listen to the “This American Life” podcast, “The Problem We All Live With,” Parts 1 and 2

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/562/the-problem-we-all-live-with-part-one>

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/562/the-problem-we-all-live-with-part-one/act-two-5>

### **WEEK 14 (April 3)**

**Marginalized communities and higher education.**

**Guest speaker:** David Rice, Higher Ed Works

### **WEEK 15 (April 10))**

**Discomfort zones**

**How to use unease as an opportunity**

Guest speaker: TBA

### **WEEK 16 (April 17)**

**News deserts:** Existential struggles for some local media and what that portends for coverage of underserved communities.

### **WEEK 17 (April 24)**

**Course review**

**Final projects due**

## **HONOR CODE**

**All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the Honor Code.**

Each student should understand and follow the conduct of the UNC honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity this code demands. You are expected to produce and submit only your own work in this course. If you have any questions about the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Heidi Hennink-Kaminski, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students. All sources used for information must be properly cited. The ideas and content within your materials must be original and not copied from others. In our industry, we are expected to be original and creative all of the time. If you have any questions about whether your use of reference material is appropriate, please see me.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

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- **Communication with Instructor:** M-F: Please email, call or text from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. On weekends or for immediate assistance, please call. P: 336-912-2255 E: [allen.johnson@greensboro.com](mailto:allen.johnson@greensboro.com). A note about texting: If you text, please let me know who you are.
- **Policy on Syllabus Changes:** This syllabus is subject to change based on a number of factors including progress of the class, news events and/or guest speaker availability.
- **Reporting Guidelines:** Stories will not be accepted after the deadline dates (exceptions may be made for family emergencies and other extenuating circumstances). They must be grammatically correct and follow AP Style. They must carry a dateline.
- **Class values:** Conversation is an integral part of this class. So is healthy debate. Disagreements will occur. Please be kind and respectful to one another, even if you do not agree with an opinion.
- **Communication:** In journalism, communication is at the core of what we do. Please communicate in a timely fashion with the instructor if you have a challenge.
- **Technology:** This class requires a laptop. Please bring it to class as required. If you have a technology issue, please tell the instructor as soon as possible.
- **Cellphones:** Cellphones should not be used in this classroom unless they are part of an in-class assignment. If your call or text is important, please excuse yourself from the classroom until you can return without distraction.
- **COVID-19:** If you are experiencing this or any other health issue, please let me know as soon as you can so we can discuss accommodations.
- **REMOTE ACCESS:** If health emergencies or other circumstances warrant, we may hold class remotely using Zoom.

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES**

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### **Accessibility Resources and Services**

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).

### **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. A CAPS counselor will be available in the School. Or you may go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building 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 ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://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](http://safe.unc.edu)) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.