



MEJO 553 ADVANCED REPORTING

Spring 2024 | Professor Erin Siegal McIntyre

Instructor: Erin Siegal McIntyre, esm@unc.edu (Professor Mack or Erin, she/her/hers)

Time & location: Monday; Wednesday at 3:30 p.m-4:45 p.m. in room 0301 of the Curtis Media Center / Zoom when applicable due to COVID-19

Office Hours: By appointment Mondays/Wednesdays

MEJO 553 Advanced Reporting Slack workroom: <https://mejo553.slack.com>

Teaching assistant: N/A

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. We will be working as a collaborative professional newsroom supporting a project intended for publication.

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 and our professional project leads. Students may be expected, at times, to present to the class on assigned course content and will also produce reporting memos, critical analyses, and complete 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 from the Hussman School to cover your \$25 student membership fee and \$50 conference attendance):
<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 (open-source, 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 (open-source, no cost)
5. “[Chasing the Truth: A Young Journalist's Guide to Investigative Reporting](#),” by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey (Kindle version \$10; old-school book around \$15)

Course Format and Assignment Expectations

We will typically meet as a class on Mondays and have a lab/newsroom work

time on Wednesdays. Attendance is mandatory. You are required to check our Canvas site and weekly lesson updates to stay informed about changes, deadlines, and assignments.

Assignments

All assignments are due by deadline via Canvas submission, including original stories, exercises, and reporting / reflection memos. Late work is not accepted without pre-approval.

Every Friday at 5:00 p.m., you must submit your weekly memo. This memo should be no shorter than two pages and no longer than three pages in length. The memo consists of two key parts: a reporting update and your reflection/ critical response to the week' s readings.

The reporting section must contain the following:

1. Concise summary of the week' s reporting, including a source list of three new sources you' ve interviewed (per week). Explain how your reporting advanced. Include names, titles, and phone numbers of all sources.
2. Detail any reporting challenges or surprises encountered, including any questions you might have.
3. Your plan for next week: what you hope to accomplish, why, and how.

The reflection section of your memo should include the following:

1. A creative written consideration / interpretation of the week' s assigned reading.
2. Questions, concerns, or critical feedback in response to the material.
3. Your key takeaways / ideas that stuck with you or are particularly relevant to your project/ story.

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. We will 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 including weekly memos must adhere to the following filename conventions:

LASTNAME_FIRSTNAME_DAY-MONTH-YEAR.

That means an assignment filename submitted by student Mrs. Juan Doe on December 10, 2021 would correctly look like this:

Doe_Juan_12-20-2021

Please note: If you ignore follow file-naming conventions, your assignment will be reduced by -25 points each time your work fails to meet standards.

Communication

This class will use Slack, and I will use whatever preferred email address you provide for Slack access. Work-life balance is important; mute notifications as often as necessary. All class documents, readings, tip-sheets, etc. will be housed in Canvas. Please feel free to text, call, or email me with any question or concern related to the class, including iterative feedback. It helps me improve as a professor, and helps our class, too.

Please limit communication to working business hours of 8-5, M-F. We will not be checking or responding to class-related communication on the weekend; please plan accordingly.

If there's an emergency or you find yourself in crisis, don't hesitate to reach out at any time.

Wait... Canvas? What's Canvas?

This semester, we are piloting Canvas, the backend content management system that will be replacing Sakai at UNC in the coming months. We are piloting together, and will proceed with grace as we all learn how to use the platform. Do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns. It's rumored to be a lot more user-friendly than Sakai.

The UNC Canvas help webpage is our key resource: <https://canvas.unc.edu/training/>

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 [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 will not be penalized. We must care for each other. Please rest and advise both myself and your group as soon as possible to coordinate make-up work. Communication is key. Don' t worry about your grade. We' ll figure out a plan.

UNC has certain protocols in place for those who test positive for Covid. The main source for information from the University are the following websites:

Campus Health: <https://campushealth.unc.edu/services/covid-19-services>
Carolina Together:: <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/>

If you are a student and you test positive, here's what to do:

Students who test positive must isolate until they meet criteria for ending isolation (i.e., 10 days from onset of symptoms or day of positive test, as well as no fever or symptoms for 24 hours). Campus Health will contact any positive student with isolation instructions. Those who reside on-campus will be instructed on relocation to dedicated isolation space on campus.

Students and post-docs living off or on campus who test positive for COVID-19 somewhere besides Campus Health should message a nurse through the patient portal or call 919-966-2281 as soon as possible after receiving your result.

Vaccines are available through the Student Stores Pharmacy and Campus Health Pharmacy from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday and no appointment is needed. Any student, faculty, staff or community member 12 years old or older is eligible for a vaccine at these locations at no cost.

Wellbeing

These are stressful and unprecedented times, and paying attention to and understanding your own personal wellbeing is key to your academic and professional success. Everyone responds to stress differently. Some people find utilizing mediation and mindfulness apps like [Headspace](#) or [CaIm](#) helpful. Others, like your professor, prefer consuming Ben & Jerry' s New York Superfudge Chunk ice cream and lying on the floor staring at the ceiling. Some like to run... bless their hearts.

The university has a number of counseling services available to students. These include UNC Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) <https://caps.unc.edu>. To reach CAPS, please email caps@unc.edu or call [919-966-3658](tel:919-966-3658). CAPS is available at all hours 24/7 for urgent concerns. The CAPS office is located in the James A. Taylor Building, 3rd Floor, 320 Emergency Room Drive, CB# 7470, Chapel Hill, NC 27599.

The UNC Student Affairs website also lists resources on their Student Wellness page: <https://studentwellness.unc.edu/resources>. To reach the Student Wellness team, please email studentwellness@unc.edu or call (919) 962-WELL (9355)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website also hosts a resource page on managing pandemic-related stress:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Community Agreements

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

None of this matters if you're not ok. And we want you to be more than OK; we want you to thrive. Let us know how we can help (seriously). If you're dealing with screen exhaustion, tell us. If you need a break, tell us. If you have an idea about something that can be done differently over the course of this class to decrease stress, by all means—tell us!

Grading

Quizzes (reading quizzes): 15%

Assignments: 75%

Final project: 10%

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

Grades will be entered in Canvas throughout the course; you will be able to see where you stand as we proceed through the semester.

Grading rubric

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

Overall Considerations for Evaluation

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 school expects 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 Dixon-Green; you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.



Carolina Covenant Scholars

If you are a Carolina Covenant scholar, let me know! I am a Carolina Covenant mentor here at the Hussman School, and would love to be of service.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism and fabricating sources, information, or quotes results in automatic failure.

University Policy on Attendance:

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).

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. I am available from 9-5 M-F; don't hesitate to call or email. We will make it work.

Recordings

At times, this class may be recorded for educational purposes only, and the recordings may only be made available to students enrolled in this class. Any use of a recording of this class by a student shall be for educational purposes only. These recordings will be shared only with students enrolled in the course for purposes of academic instruction only. Your instructor will communicate to you how you may access any available recordings.

Unauthorized student recording of classes on personal devices or on any other format is prohibited. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact Accessibility Resources & Service. Any violation of these prohibitions or restriction on the making, use, copying, or distribution of recording of classes shall constitute an honor code violation.

Flexible Format

As long as it is possible to do so safely, we will meet in person this semester. If I need to change the format of the course temporarily due to outbreaks of illness or due to another circumstance, I will announce this via email and the course Canvas site.

Syllabus Changes

All Hussman professors reserve the right to make changes to syllabi, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

General Success

Remember these wise words from my dear friend Al Stewart, a.k.a The Arkansas Kid, who was a member of The Federation of Black Cowboys in NYC until his homegoing. A proud Army vet and former drill sergeant, Uncle Al always said: “**Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.**”

This is true! Don’ t forget the five P’ s.

Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (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.

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

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), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Diversity and Anti-Racism

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) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

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

The Hussman school says that it strives to make classrooms inclusive spaces for all students and has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](#) with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on [prohibiting harassment and discrimination](#). In summary, UNC says it 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.

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 Breakdown of MEJO 553 for Spring 2024

SUBJECT TO CHANGE, PLEASE SEE WEEKLY MODULES ON CANVAS

Week 1: Introduction to Advanced Reporting

Week 2: The beat

Week 3: Story ideas, generation, pitches

Week 4: Backgrounding

Week 5: Interviewing

Week 6: Courts & Public Records

Week 7: FOIA

Week 8: Triangulation

Week 9: Bulletproofing

Week 10: Structure & Narrative

Week 11: Editing

Week 12: Workshop

Week 13: Workshop

Week 14: Pitching and Placing

Week 15: Digital Dimension

Week 16: Project publication

Last Day of Classes: April 29, 2024

Reading Day: May 1, 2024; May 8, 2024

Final Exam: Thursday May 9, 2024, 4:00 p.m. ([link to UNC schedule](#))