

COMM 332-201 — Main

Investigative & Public Affairs Reporting

Spring 2024

Wednesday 4:15 - 6:45 P.M.

Loyola University Chicago

School of Communications, Room 013

Instructor: Frank Main

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Office Hours: After class, email, phone 630-487-0310

DESCRIPTION

The best investigative reporting spotlights societal wrongs: Corruption in politics, unfairness in the justice system, safety and health problems, cover-ups of sexual misconduct in schools and religious institutions, and more. This course values investigative journalism over advocacy journalism. Investigative journalism begins with a question. Interviews and data seek to answer that question. Advocacy journalism begins with the answer. The best investigative journalists don't bat 1.000 – often, their reporting leads to an answer that isn't particularly newsworthy, and they move on to the next idea.

In this course, you'll learn the value of developing knowledgeable sources who can help you narrow the focus of your reporting and guide you toward the information you need to answer your questions. You'll learn how to obtain public records and analyze them. The curriculum includes readings from a textbook, lectures by me and a classroom presentation that you'll give after you analyze a published piece of award-winning investigative journalism.

But your No. 1 priority will be managing and writing your own investigative story, which you will work on throughout the semester. Each team of two students will choose a topic to investigate and write a piece worthy of publication. Your course grade will largely depend on the quality of your project, which you'll submit toward the end of the semester.

A word of warning: Investigative reporting is difficult. You will run into obstacles. People won't return your calls. Government agencies will reject your requests for public records. You'll have trouble analyzing mountains of data on spreadsheets. And you'll write lots of drafts until your thesis and supporting information are clear to the reader.

You must organize your project from the day you decide what you're going to investigate. You should use a Google Drive file to store your recorded interviews and transcripts, photos and videos, graphics, news reports and public documents. You'll need to keep a calendar with dates for the goals you want to achieve in the various stages of your project. And you'll need to evaluate your project early to decide whether you need to pull the plug and focus on something else.

If you are a self-starter and are organized, like to talk to people, enjoy digging into data and write well, this course is for you.

REQUIRED RESOURCES

Textbook: *The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases, and Techniques*, Sixth Edition, ISBN: 1319102845, bookstore or [here](#).

Associated Press Stylebook, 56th edition, ISBN: ISBN: 978-0-917360-70-1, bookstore or here: <https://www.apstylebook.com/>

Optional: Investigative Reporters & Editors student membership, \$25, here: <https://www.ire.org/join-ire/register/>

COURSE DETAILS

1,000 Total Points Available

Final writing project (350 points)

You'll spend the semester reporting and writing an investigative story that will serve as your final grade in the place of a final exam.

NOTE: I will always be available via email/phone to offer you reporting and writing suggestions and review your drafts as you are progressing with your projects.

NOTE: You will work with another student as a team on your investigative project. The same teams are listed at the bottom of this syllabus for a separate classroom presentation that you will do together.

Pitch (25 points)

- Before the second class, you'll submit a **pitch** about the subject of your story. Your idea is subject to the approval of the instructor. Don't worry, this pitch will probably radically change over the next few classes and you might even switch topics completely.

Story memos (25 points x 2) = 50

- You'll submit **two comprehensive story memos** during the semester to explain the progress of your reporting. The memos will help you stay organized and keep the instructor apprised of your work.

Story draft (50 points)

As stated above, you may consult me throughout the semester before you submit the draft. This draft will help you identify holes in your writing and reporting as well as the progress you have made.

Student presentation (225 points)

You'll read and analyze a professional investigative piece. Your presentation should provide some background about the reporters and the publication; the types of data the reporters used in their story and any information you might find about how they obtained it; how they presented their story graphically; and whether the story led to any reforms, policy changes or had any other type of impact.

Treat this like your own investigation: You should try to contact the reporters who wrote the award-winning stories to do short interviews about their work; speak to journalism and/or ethics experts at the Poynter Institute or other institutions or universities including Loyola or Northwestern; talk to the subjects of the stories for their reactions to the reporting, etc.

Your presentations will be scheduled based on the alphabetical order of the student roster. I have assigned each of you a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative story listed below. You can analyze that story or choose another one that you pick on your own, with my approval.

I would expect your presentation to take somewhere around 10-15 minutes to complete. You will probably want to deliver your presentation in a PowerPoint format or some other electronic format and include photos and even short video clips.

Quizzes (75 points x 2) = 150

Two quizzes based on the readings, including fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice questions.

STANDARDS FOR WRITTEN WORK

A: Publishable work with no spelling, grammatical or punctuation errors.

B: Minimal spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors; minimal missing information and source information; and minimal problems with the first paragraph and organization.

C: Notable number of the above errors.

D: Significant problems with the work.

F: Misspelled proper names; other major spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors; an almost total lack of information and sources; and severe problems with the first paragraph and organization.

*** Here's my pet peeve on punctuation: a quotation mark goes after a period or comma like this: "Wow," he said. Not, "Wow", he said. (See the AP Stylebook).**

FORMAT FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Please submit hard copies of assignments in Times New Roman, 12 point, double-spaced in paragraph form with name, date, name of assignment and word count in the top right corner. Please provide one-inch margins on the sides. Print on one side only. Staple your papers.

CLASS EXPECTATIONS

You also are expected to keep abreast of the news. Read the Chicago Tribune or Chicago Sun-Times or Block Club for local news and the New York Times, Washington Post or USA Today for national news. Watch the evening news on TV.

Focus on the investigative reporting in those outlets.

Students are expected to act in a professional way as if this were a job. That means attending class regularly, arriving on time, being prepared for class, and participating in lectures.

Surfing the web or checking your email and Facebook accounts won't get you very far in this class.

If you expect to be absent or late, please call at 630-487-0310 or email me at fmain@suntimes.com and fmain@luc.edu.

DEADLINES

Late assignments will drop one letter grade each day they are filed past deadline. No in-class work may be completed out of class due to an absence unless the instructor excuses the absence.

I expect you to print out your assignments and turn them in to me before class. Remember to follow the format above. I grade with comments handwritten on your printed assignment.

Finally, please upload your work in the assignments section of Sakai and email me your assignment at fmain@suntimes.com so that I have an electronic record of it.

GRADING SCALE

A: 100-94
A-: 93-90
B+: 89-88
B: 87-83
B-: 82-80
C+: 79-78
C: 77-73
C-: 72-70
D+: 69-68
D: 67-63
D-: 62-60
F: 59-0

MANAGING LIFE CRISES AND FINDING SUPPORT

Should you encounter an unexpected crisis during the semester (e.g., securing food or housing, addressing mental health concerns, managing a financial crisis, and/or dealing with a family emergency, etc.), I strongly encourage you to contact the Office of the Dean of Students by submitting a CARE referral (<https://www.luc.edu/dos/services/coordinatedassistanceresourceeducationcare/>) for yourself or a peer in need of support. If you are uncomfortable doing so on your own, please know that I can submit a referral on your behalf – just email me or schedule a meeting with me during office hours. The phone number for CARE is 773-508-8840.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY POLICY

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. Cheating includes, but is not limited to:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled exam without the consent of the teacher.
- Providing information to another student during an exam.

- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an exam.
- Using any material or equipment during an exam without the consent of the instructor, or in a manner that is not authorized by the instructor.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the stealing of ideas, language, work or intellectual property of another, either by intent or negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources. One example: lifting an entire passage from Wikipedia and using it as one's own.

Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism.

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes, even in different semesters.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor assigning an F to the assignment or exam. The instructor may impose a more severe penalty such as a grade of F for the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication.

A complete description of the School of Communication's academic integrity policy is at [http://www.luc.edu/media/lucedu/soc/pdfs/resourceforms/School of Communication Statement on Academic Integrity.pdf](http://www.luc.edu/media/lucedu/soc/pdfs/resourceforms/School%20of%20Communication%20Statement%20on%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf)

INSTRUCTOR PRESENTATIONS

I will upload each of my PowerPoint presentations to the resources section of Sakai after class.

THE CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change)

WEEK 1, Jan. 17

- Course overview, introduction to the instructor and discussion of investigative journalism.
- How to write a story pitch.

READING FOR WEEK 2: Chapters 1-3.

WEEK 2, Jan. 24

Story pitch is due before class. Submit your pitch in the assignments section of Sakai, email me the pitch and print out a copy that you will hand me in class.

- Gathering documents
- FOIA request demonstration.

READING FOR WEEK 3: Chapter 4.

WEEK 3, Jan. 31

- Using databases.
- Special presentation by Jared Rutecki, an investigative reporter with WTTW-Channel 11.

READING FOR WEEK 4: Chapter 5.

WEEK 4, Feb. 7

- Human sources, class discussion.
- **Story memo 1 is due** (submit in assignments in Sakai, email and print a copy to give me in class).

NO READINGS.

WEEK 5, Feb. 14

- **DO NOT COME TO CLASS:** Student meetings. Teams will meet with me on Zoom for up to 15 minutes in the time slot you have selected between 4:15 p.m. and 8 p.m.

READING FOR WEEK 6: Chapter 6.

WEEK 6, Feb. 21

- Writing a compelling investigative story.
- **Quiz.**

READING FOR WEEK 7: Chapter 7.

WEEK 7, Feb 28

- Ethics of investigative reporting & 'bullet-proofing' a story.

READING FOR WEEK 8: Chapters 8 & 9.

SPRING BREAK (March 4-9)

WEEK 8, March 13

- Government (executive & legislative).
- Campaign finance report demonstration.
- Student presentations.

READING FOR WEEK 9: Chapters 10 & 11.

WEEK 9, March 20

- Police & courts, court search demonstration.
- Student presentations.

READING FOR WEEK 10: Chapter 20.

WEEK 10, March 27

- Property taxes & real estate records.
- Student presentations.
- **Story memo 2 is due.**

NO READINGS.

WEEK 11, April 3

- **DO NOT COME TO CLASS:** Student meetings. Teams will meet with me on Zoom, for up to 15 minutes, in the time slot you have selected between 4:15 p.m. and 8 p.m.

READING FOR WEEK 12: Chapter 12.

Week 12, April 10

- Education.
- Guest speaker, Lauren Fitzpatrick, investigative reporter, Chicago Sun-Times.
- Student presentations.
- **Story draft is due.**

READING FOR WEEK 13: Chapters 13 & 14.

WEEK 13, April 17

- Businesses & nonprofits.
- Tax Form 990 demonstration.
- Student presentations.

NO READINGS.

WEEK 14, April 24

- **Quiz.**
- Work on final projects in class.

WEEK 15, May 1

- **Your final project is due before class begins at 4:15 p.m. Submit your project in the assignments section of Sakai and to me via email. Please allow a week before I grade your project and post your final grade.**

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE:

Each team will choose one of the two Pulitzer-winning projects to research. You will work together to create a presentation that you will deliver together in class.

(See above for under COURSE DETAILS for instructions. Also, I will post instructions on Sakai in assignments).