News Reporting Workshop
JOU3117 – Spring 2016
ACII/258 – Tuesday/Thursday, 9-10:50 a.m.

Professor Neil Reisner
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Prerequisites: MMC3104C, JOU3003

DESCRIPTION
JOU-3117 teaches the fundamentals of reporting, interviewing, writing news, public records and arithmetic for journalists, the basic skills required for any sort of journalism.

OUTCOMES
After completing this course, students will:
- Be able to judge what makes an event or circumstance news and how to best shape it into a story.
- Know how to write effective ledes and nut graf and how to use essential story structures, such as the inverted pyramid and the martini glass.
- Know how to report and write basic stories – meetings, crime, speeches, news conferences, profiles, obituaries – with precision and detail, based on available facts.
- Know how to write budget lines and use them to pitch stories.
- Use interviewing skills appropriate for reporting by phone, on the street and in long-form sit-down interviews.
- Know how to research stories using the Internet, proprietary databases, electronic and public records.
- Know how to use a spreadsheet and the basic arithmetic journalists are likely to need.
- Understand how to avoid conflicts of interest and overcome ethical challenges.
- Know the essentials of Associated Press style and how to use the AP Stylebook.

REQUIRED TEXTS
- The Sun-Sentinel, The Miami Herald, The New York Times are required reading. You might also pay attention to NPR and any other news outlets that attract you. Quiz material will be drawn from top news stories of the week.

STRONGLY RECOMMENDED
POLICIES

- **Attendance:** Attendance is required and I will take roll. Arrive on time or you will be marked late. Arrive more than 15 minutes after the beginning of class and you will be marked absent. It is worthwhile to attend even if you are late to avoid missing important material. If you miss a quiz or arrive after a quiz has begun, you cannot take the quiz.

  **All Excuses Are Not Created Equal.** The university recognizes documented illness, the death of immediate family, religious holidays and other specific cases as circumstances that call for excused absence. **In the case of illness, you need a doctor’s note that says you COULD NOT ATTEND class, not a note saying you went to a doctor. In the case of a death, you need to provide a funeral program or obituary documenting the death and your relationship to the deceased.**

  **The university does not recognize as excused absences** such things as scheduling a routine doctor’s appointment during class time, scheduling a grammar exam during class time, taking dad to the airport, a business trip, an assignment in another class, a student organization meeting or traffic. Miami traffic and Shuttle delays are no secret so plan ahead.

- **Deadlines** are sacred and papers must be turned in at the start of class the day they are due. Papers will not be accepted by email or fax and in any format other than that described below. Grades on late assignments will be reduced.

  Rarely, the unexpected happens and emergency situations may arise causing you to miss turning in graded work on deadline. Please contact me **WITHIN 24 HOURS FROM THE START TIME OF THE MISSED CLASS** if you encounter such a situation. It is your responsibility to communicate promptly and directly. If you can prove the legitimacy of your absence or tardiness with documentation, you **MAY** be able to make up or turn in the work late.

- **Personal Electronics:** Use of personal electronic devices for any purpose during class is prohibited. Turn your cell phones off before class starts. Don’t send or read text messages, answer e-mail, IM, listen to your iPods, play online games, surf the Web or check Web sites I mention in class. **The first time you violate this rule, I will warn you; the second time, I may ask you to leave, the third time, I may ask you not to return for the balance of the semester.** If you are caught using your cell phone or any other banned device during a quiz or exam, you will be in violation of the university’s policy on academic dishonesty. Lectures may not be recorded without prior approval.

- **Tablets and laptop computers** may be used to take notes with permission of the instructor. Anyone found to be using their tablets or laptops to do anything not related to the class discussion – **this includes going on line to check a site or fact mentioned in class** – will be asked to stop. A second occurrence will mean the student will not be allowed to take notes on their device. The instructor reserves the right to ask students to show what they’re doing on their tablets or laptops.

- **Courtesy Counts:** Class is a place to learn. It is not a place for casual conversation or a lounge for taking naps or a place where rudeness is acceptable. Disrespect for fellow students or the professor will not be tolerated.

- **Special needs:** If you need accommodation based upon a disability under the terms of the Americans with Disabilities Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, please discuss your needs with me before the end of the second week of the semester.

**JOU3117 ONLINE**

We will conduct much of our class business online via one or more online venues, including:

- **Emails to the entire.** I’ll use emails to assign or explain work. Please “Reply All” to ask about questions, to seek assistance if you run into trouble on any technique, to help out your fellow students; use it to continue the conversations we will have in class.

  The mailings are also **places to share observations, relevant articles or broadcasts or anything else of interest.** It is **not the place** to solicit participation in charitable activities, forward e-mail oddities or anything not directly related to class.

  Posting your thoughts or observations on the listserv counts as participation in class. Merely asking questions about assignments does not.
Make CERTAIN that the subjects of your emails are connected to the content of your emails. Do NOT simply hit “Reply” to a random message about a homework assignment when you want to talk about your grade. Questions about assignments, class discussions or general journalism topics should be posted to the mailing list and not sent to me personally.

- **A Google Docs folder** where you will find class readings, assignments and other material. You have all received invitations to the class folders.

- **Email:** Please address emails to me only to my FIU email account, *reisnern@fiu.edu*. Likewise, per FIU policy, I will only communicate with you via your FIU emails.

**ASSIGMENTS**

- **Class work** will consist of discussion, reporting and writing exercises, guest speakers, presentations by the instructor and/or students and quizzes on the text, AP style and the news. Missed class work, quizzes, etc., cannot be made up.

- **Homework** will be based on class work and will include both short exercises and reporting assignments. Class work must be turned in at the beginning of class and in the proper format, as explained below. Work will NOT be accepted except at the beginning of class. Please make certain your printer works and has sufficient ink or toner. Printers are also available at school and may be used before class.

  You learn by critiquing your own and others’ work. **YOU MUST BRING IN HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS IN THE PROPER FORMAT AS EXPLAINED BELOW AND ALSO POST THEM TO THE CLASS SITE ON GOOGLE.** That way your work can be projected so we can analyze and critique it. Failure to post an assignment will result in a 2-point reduction in its grade. **Always keep copies of your assignments in a place where you can get at them from any computer.** Files get corrupted, USB drives get lost and paper copies disappear. I once lost the only copy I had of a major profile when muggers grabbed my briefcase. Sending it as an email to yourself works. So do OneDrive, Google Docs or other cloud storage locations.

  **Spelling and grammar count. So does AP style.** Misspell a name and you’ll receive an F on the paper. More than two serious grammar/spelling/AP style errors — including typos — and your grade may be reduced by five points.

**POYNTER INSTITUTE NEWS UNIVERSITY**

We will make use of the Poynter Institute’s News University, [www.newsu.org](http://www.newsu.org). The Poynter Institute, which also owns the Tampa Bay Times, is a school whose seminars and classes help journalists, teachers and students learn how to enhance their skills. Please register an account at NewsU.

**EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY**

Extra credit will be awarded for up to four stories you publish or broadcast during the semester. Doing stories for publication or broadcast is the best way to dive into journalism; there’s no substitute. The Beacon is always looking for reporters and there are many freelance opportunities in the greater Miami area. The amount of extra credit will be based on the complexity of the story.

**FORMAT**

- All assignments must be formatted in **12 point Times New Roman, with at least 1.5 line spacing and printed out**. If your printer inserts minimal space at 1.5 spacing, increase the measure large enough for me to write between the lines. Handwritten assignments will not be accepted.

  **Leave half a page blank at the top of each assignment’s first page. This will be used for comments.**

  **Each page** of each assignment must be clearly labeled with your name, the assignment, the date, the page number and the total number of pages. All assignments **must be stapled**.

  Assignments that do not conform to these formats will not be accepted.

- You may download a template in the correct format from the Class Documents in the class OneDrive folder.
GRADING POLICY
Grades will be calculated according to the following schedule:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>72-76</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-71</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>82-86</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80-81</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
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Grades are not an exact science when we talk about reporting and writing, but the following rules will be applied when judging your work.

- An “A” means the work is excellent. It is well researched and well reported, imaginative and original. Reporting assignments could be used to write a publishable story; stories could be published (almost) as is.
- An “A-” means the work is very good, but requires some additional reporting or rewriting.
- A “B+” means the work is good but requires additional reporting, sources or rewriting.
- A “B” means the work requires substantial additional reporting, sources or rewriting.
- A “B-” means the work requires a large amount of additional reporting, research, sources or rewriting.
- A “C+” means the work goes little beyond scratching the surface of a reporting or story assignment.
- A “C” means the work fulfills minimal requirements.
- A “C-” means the work barely fulfills minimal requirements.
- A “D” and “F” are different evaluations of insufficient quality or reporting work.

These are general rules. You have to take into consideration that grades are not an opinion on but a judgment on the quality of a specific paper. Elements like a creative approach, an interesting idea or an active pursue of sources will play a part in the final grade.

You can ensure a good grade by thinking critically and inquiring deeply, by backgrounding yourselves on an issue before you start reporting, by going to more than one source and by speaking with sources who go beyond the obvious, scholars, for example. Use proper grammar and punctuation, stick to AP style and make sure every word is spelled correctly. Other factors include completeness, precision and news judgment. There is no magic to good reporting; it’s the result of a lot of work developing sources, researching, interviewing and other reporting. But ultimately, grades reflect quality not effort.

Students will be graded on:

- **Attendance/Participation:** Classroom discussion and exercises will comprise a major part of the class. Participation in class counts. *7.5 percent*
- **Reporting and writing exercises and assignments:** There will be two types of assignments, graded and ungraded.
  - **Ungraded assignments** will let you practice new skills and will be marked as completed. *10 percent*
  - **Graded assignments** will show you have learned the skills you’ve practiced and will be assigned letter grades. *45 percent*
- **News Quizzes:** Journalists must keep up on the news. There will be five-question news quizzes, usually once a week on any day class meets. Four questions will come from the front pages and local front pages of the Miami Herald, the Sun-Sentinel and the New York Times. The fifth will be a wild-card in which you’ll describe another news event of import. *10 percent*
- **Textbook Quizzes:** These are intended to encourage you to complete assigned reading. *7.5 percent*
- **AP Style Quizzes:** Writing in proper AP style is critical to your future. *20 percent*
ACADEMIC HONESTY

There is only one rule regarding plagiarism: Don’t.
The School of Journalism and Mass Communication prepares students for careers in a field in which ethics are paramount. Such a mission demands the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Violations of academic honesty, including but not limited to plagiarism, collusion, deception, conflict of interest and theft, are not tolerated and can lead to severe penalties. Disciplinary actions are outlined in your student handbook. I simply do not tolerate dishonesty and will seek to impose the harshest punishment available if you are caught.

FIU outlines your responsibilities as follows:
Florida International University is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellent teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly to demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct, which demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University. All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for academic misconduct, they will be subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Handbook.

Misconduct includes: Cheating – The unauthorized use of books, notes, aids, electronic sources; or assistance from another person with respect to examinations, course assignments, field service reports, class recitations; or the unauthorized possession of examination papers or course materials, whether originally authorized or not. Plagiarism – The use and appropriation of another’s work without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student’s own. Any student, who fails to give credit for ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is responsible for plagiarism.

Any students who fail to meet these expectations will receive an “F” for the course grade and will be reported to the Chair of the Department and the Dean of the School.