Advanced News Writing
JOU3300 – Spring 2016
ACII/258 – Tuesday/Thursday, 5-7 p.m.

Professor Neil Reisner
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Prerequisites: Acceptance into SJMC upper division, MMC3104C, JOU3117

DESCRIPTION
JOU-3300 teaches the fundamentals of reporting and writing “in the wild,” covering stories as they happen in the courts, in local government and in the world. It also covers such essential topics as interviewing, public records and arithmetic for journalists.

OUTCOMES
• know how to report and write compelling stories based on available facts and information, much of which may be gathered through the reporter’s own enterprise.
• know how to report beyond the usual sources to get the story behind the story.
• understand how to develop sources and story ideas.
• know how to use public records and other sources to acquire in advance the background needed to adequately report a story.
• know AP style and how to use the AP Stylebook.

REQUIRED TEXTS
• The Sun-Sentinel, The Miami Herald, The New York Times and the South Florida Times are required reading. You might also pay attention to NPR and any other news outlets that attract you.

STRONGLY RECOMMENDED
• A good journalism textbook to use as a reference when writing various types of stories. Use one you already have or try The Process of Writing News, Brian Richardson, Pearson, 2006, ISBN: 0205454402. It’s out of print, but you can find it at https://processofwritingnews.wordpress.com.
• Writing Tools – 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer, Roy Peter Clark, Little Brown, 2006, ISBN: 0316014990, among the best -- and most readable -- volumes of its kind, written by one of the top writing coaches in the business.
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.

**JOU3300 ONLINE**

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

- A listserv, or Internet mailing list, JOU3300@FIU.EDU A listserv provides an easy way to exchange information via e-mail. Any mail sent to the class listserv will go to me and everyone else in the class.

  Use the listserv to ask questions about class or assignments, to seek assistance if you run into trouble, to help out your fellow students; use it to continue the conversations we will have in class.
The listserv is also a place 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 which I will share with you.
- 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.

ASSIGNMENTS

- You will be required to produce at least three major stories.
- There will be numerous exercises and other assignments in addition to the major stories.
- Each major assignment will be graded on reporting and writing, 100 points for each.
- You may optionally raise your grade by up to 20 points on a major assignment by doing additional reporting or by rewriting, as required.
- Spelling and grammar count. So does AP style. Misspell a name and you’ll receive an F on the paper. Every AP style error will reduce your writing grade by 1 point. Rewritten stories that simply correct these errors will not be eligible for extra points.
- There will be occasions when you are released from class for reporting or writing. You must produce documentation that shows you used the class time for these purposes.
- Stories and homework are due at the beginning of class unless special arrangements are made in advance. Your grade may be reduced by 5 points for every day a story is late.
- 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.
- You learn by critiquing your own and others' work and we will often put stories up on the video screen and review/edit/critique them together. Your stories must at all times be available in electronic format. You must upload your work to google docs so we can look at them in class. Failure to do so will affect the grade on an assignment.
- Always keep copies of your assignments in a place where you can get at them from any computer, preferably on Google Documents or some other cloud-based location. 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.
GRADING

Grades will be calculated according to the following schedule:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>72-76</td>
</tr>
<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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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82-86</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>62-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-81</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-61</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 writing, but the following rules will be applied when judging your work.

- An “A” means the work is excellent and merits publication as it is. It is well researched, well reported, imaginative and original.
- An “A-” means the work is very good, but requires some editing.
- A “B+” means the work could be published but requires editing or more reporting.
- A “B” means that the work could be published but requires a fair amount of editing, investigation and reporting.
- A “B-” means the work could be published after considerable editing and re-writing.
- A “C+” means the work is a good draft, but requires more reporting, research and heavy editing.
- A “C” means the work fulfills the minimal requirements.
- A “C-” means the work barely fulfills minimal requirements.
- A “D” and “F” are different evaluations of insufficient quality, writing or reporting.

Semester grades will be based on:

- **Attendance/Participation:** Classroom discussion and exercises will comprise a major part of the class. Participation in class counts. 10 percent
- **Ungraded assignments** will let you practice new skills and will be marked as completed. 10 percent
- **Major Assignments:** Three assignments intended to allow you to utilize skills you develop over the course of class. 50 percent.
- **AP Style Quizzes:** Writing in proper AP style is critical to your future. Style quizzes will be announced. 20 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, the New York Times or the South Florida Times. The fifth will be a wild-card in which you’ll describe another news event of import. 10 percent.
ACADEMIC HONESTY
There is only one rule regarding plagiarism: Don’t. There is only one rule regarding honesty/ethics: Be honest and ethical.
Ethics, integrity and honesty are the qualities that lets journalists do their jobs.
The School of Journalism & Mass Communication therefore commits itself and enforces the highest ethical standards.
Violations of academic honesty, include but are not limited to plagiarism, collusion, deception, conflict of interest, misuse of university computers or other equipment or taking or photographing exams or any other material that is not to leave the classroom and theft, are not tolerated and can lead to severe penalties.
Violations professional ethical standards are no less important. We are journalists representing an important part of South Florida's media community.
As such we must, among other things, never misrepresent ourselves, deceive those whom we cover, accept gifts or inappropriate favors.
Refer to the Code of Ethics published by the Society of Professional Journalists to review the ethical standards of our profession.
I simply do not tolerate dishonesty or violations of professional ethics 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, as well as the Dean of the School.