JRN 444W Investigative Reporting  
Fall 2015  
Wed 6-9 p.m.  
Bunnell 106  

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Associate professor, Journalism  

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Hours: Tues. Thurs., 2-4 p.m  
& by appointment  
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Course description: Advanced reporting of news with emphasis on public affairs. Develops sophisticated news judgment, writing and investigative reporting skills for print and electronic media.  

Learning goals: Students develop investigative mindsets, gaining expertise interviewing and backgrounding subjects, mining public records, authoritatively sourcing complex reporting projects. Class discussions revolve around Public Service journalism, providing historic context for the investigative reporter’s mission in society.  

Writing intensive: This is an upper-division W-designation class. Writing assignments account for most of the graded work. Early on you will produce an ungraded writing sample that will help me gauge your general writing ability. Down the stretch, I will meet with each of you individually to discuss your progress and areas for improvement.  


Other designated articles and documents as assigned.  

What to Expect: Students will systematically research and write one individual IR story, including at least one rewrite, and contribute a piece of a larger class reporting project on an assigned aspect of the Hartman Murder case.  

Students are expected to contact at least three sources per week pursuing their individual IR story assignments. All contacts will be documented in source logs. Brief story memos noting results and follow-up steps are due weekly.  

All interviews for the Hartman Justice Project must be recorded and, if warranted, transcribed.
From time to time, the class will take field trips to crime scenes and the courthouse.

**Grading:**
Final grades calculated using UAF's plus-minus, 10-point scale, applying this weighting:
- IR stories: 50 percent
- Story memos: 20 percent
- Source logs: 10 percent
- Reading quizzes: 10
- Final: 10 percent

*Note: Writing assignments make up approximately 70 percent of each student’s overall grade.*

_EXTRA! EXTRA!_ Students who earn an IR story byline in the News-Miner, or other commercial outlets, receive extra credit. Publication of class assignments in the Sun Star, or any other student publication, may also qualify for a bonus. Effort above and beyond what's expected in the class projects may also merit extra credit.

**Standards and expectations:**

**Deadlines:** Assigned reading must be completed before class Tuesday. Weekly logs and story memos are due Wednesday nights by 9 p.m., enabling me to digest them in time for class discussion Thursday. Late work is penalized at least one-half grade and may be rejected.

**When I say tape Hartman Project interviews, I mean it.** Use your cell phone video. Buy batteries for audio reorders on the way.

**If I request a full or partial transcript, do it.** The stakes are high. Nobody keeps perfect notes. Transcripts often hold clues of belated significance.

**How to succeed in JRN 444:**
Investigative reporting is the hallmark of journalists who won’t settle for less than the full story about events, issues, trends or personalities influencing society. This class is about reporting and writing complex stories. Continuing effort trumps sporadic attention. Aim high pursuing stories of consequence. Be bold tracking down sources and diligent writing up story memos and logging sources while the material is fresh. Take note of the investigative techniques applied by others as you read the product of their efforts.

**Factual errors:** Check and double check proper names, job titles, dates and all other facts before turning in assignments. There’s no excuse or errors in IR rewrites. The smallest flaw undermines credibility, tainting otherwise solid reporting and captivating prose.

**Ye olde BOILER PLATE warnings:**

**“DANGER, DANGER WILL ROBINSON!”**
Plagiarism is appropriating someone else’s words and presenting them as your own.
It's fair game for a reporter to quote newspapers, magazines, TV reports or material obtained from credible Web sources. BUT it's plagiarism to do so without proper attribution and appropriate quote marks. Evidence of plagiarism will result in a "F" on any assignment. Further sanctions are possible.

Fabrication is making up a quote, a source or an event; in other words presenting as real something that did not occur or does not exist. This is a firing offense, a likely career ender, warrants an "F" for the course and possible expulsion from the UAF Journalism program.

**Attendance is mandatory:** Baring a documented emergency, illness or prior arrangements with the professor, missed quizzes and other in-class work cannot be made up.

**Copy:** Double space and e-mail as MS WORD or Open Office documents. If appropriate, include supporting photos, audio or graphics. Submit source logs as spreadsheets.

**Style:** The AP Stylebook is our guide.

**Communications:** E-mail is best for submitting assignments or asking questions. Use descriptive subject lines. And don't expect an immediate response

**CELL PHONE FREE ZONE:**
Turn off phones and other messaging devices during class. No texting. No kidding. If you must, take it outside the classroom as unobtrusively as possible.

**Newsroom etiquette:** Candor and informality is encouraged, not mean-spirited jabs, profanity or off-topic tangents. Students who exceed the bounds taste will be curbed.

*Anyone uncomfortable with the nature and direction of class discussions should contact the professor privately.*

**SPECIAL NEEDS?**
**Take advantage of UAF’s free support services:**
I can make reasonable accommodations for individuals with documented disabilities, for example, arranging for an in-class note taker or providing a quiet test-taking environment. See Disability Services for a letter recommending the kind of assistance you need to be successful. More options are open early in the semester. Notify me about possible special needs within the first two weeks.

**Disability Services**
e-mail. fydso@uaf.edu
tel. 907-474-5655
tty. 907-474-1827
Whitaker Building Room 208
www.uaf.edu/disability
Any student I suspect may benefit will receive mandatory referrals.

The centers provide this and more:
The Speaking Center is a student-oriented service that helps preparing public presentations. Assistance areas include refining topics, organizing material and practicing presentation. The Center makes it possible to digitally record and to watch one's practice presentation, receiving constructive feedback from a Speaking Center coach.

The Writing Center, a student-staffed, student-oriented service of the English Department, assists with any phase of the writing process -- planning, drafting and revising. Discover ways of improving grammar, mechanics, and punctuation.

More options are available early in the semester, so don’t be shy.

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Personal mission disclosure: The race is on!

Some 35 years ago I set sights on making my mark as a roving photojournalist. The summer of ’79 that ambition led me to Cairo where I landed work as a UPI stringer.

My images of a harried President Anwar Sadat, Egyptian-Israeli summits and other breaking stories turned up in papers around the world. I was on my way--doing exactly what I dreamed.

And it proved disappointing.

Everywhere I trained my lens, I saw stories that demanded fuller, richer context. In those days, a photographer seldom initiated assignments, particularly anything involving reporting in depth.

I was in Alexandria shooting peace talks when a free call home—courtesy of ABC news—brought word that my father, then 48, had suffered a massive stroke.
His eyes signaled awareness when I reached the hospital room, but aphasia had stripped my dad of speech, pervasive right-side paralysis rendered him essentially helpless. Patrick C. O’D, leading Labor lawyer, national counsel for the pipefitters, iron workers and elevator mechanics unions, among others… died within 10 weeks.

Back in the states, I broadened my approach, writing stories to go with my photos for alternative weeklies in D.C., Baltimore and New York. By 1985, I had added a MA in broadcast journalism from New York University to my camera bag.

A staff job as a reporter/photographer at the Frontiersman in Wasilla brought me to Alaska in time to witness effects of crashing oil revenues. I began experimenting with larger issue stories through “Million Dollar Milk,” a series exploring Alaska’s ill-fated Point MacKenzie dairy project. Over time, I developed expertise in investigative reporting, tackling ever more complex stories at the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner and Anchorage Daily News. I suffered the travails of managing special projects involving other reporters, and experienced what it takes to finish and publish books.

What I knew about IR came through trial and error. In 2002, I discovered Investigative Reporters and Editors, an organization of reporters and editors dedicated to news stories providing context, “the best available truth,” as Carl Bernstein puts it, about important, often messy issues of importance to the public.

My innate sense of journalism’s mission benefited from IRE’s research tools and storytelling strategies. Everything I’ve learned since is reflected in my ongoing Hartman Justice Project. The stakes are huge: No Justice for the hapless teen victim, four other young lives ruined, a community’s faith shattered, truth held legal hostage, all of which points to broken legal system that’s only now paying attention because of UAF Journalism’s contributions in the court of public opinion.

It’s not enough to make headlines. Public Interest needs watchdogs willing to go beyond identifying institutional failures, forcing government to deliver on its constitutional promises.

My own inspiration to keep going where others quit—chasing elusive documents or finishing a stormy Iditarod—reflects urgency. Our time here is finite. Make yours count.

--Brian Patrick O'Donoghue

That file you need lurks in the one folder left to check, count on it.