CAPSTONE SEMINAR IN JOURNALISM

COMM **720-002**
Mon/Wed **5:30 - 8:40 p.m.**
Summer **2020**

PURPOSE

This course represents the culmination of your graduate level work in journalism. The purpose is for you to complete an individual reporting project that showcases the skills and knowledge you have developed throughout your time here. You will conceive, pitch, plan, execute and publish a multimedia web-based product all in six weeks.

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Please identify yourself with first and last name when emailing or texting.

OFFICE HOURS
Zoom, by appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of professional and ethical journalistic principles.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communication professions they serve.
- Critically evaluate their own work and the work of others for clarity, accuracy and fairness.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the need for diversity in the work they produce.
- Produce work that is accurate, fair, and uses appropriate style and grammatical correctness.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This class will be a combination of lecture, class discussion, in-class exercise and — primarily — independent work. **Most of the work will be completed out-of-class**, individually, as you tackle your reporting projects. I will use much of our class time to meet with you one-on-one to develop your work and help you execute your reporting plan.

You **must be self-driven** to successfully complete your project. I will serve more as your editor and less as an instructor in the traditional sense. The final project will be due the last day of class and will make up **40 percent of your grade**. Students are expected to attend class/meetings ready to show their progress and tackle challenges together.

The course schedule is subject to change, depending on how we are progressing through the weeks. Assignments are paced to help you complete the final project by the last day of class.

Despite the ongoing pandemic and moving this class online, I am doing my best to provide you with an appropriate capstone experience. We'll have many virtual check-ins, sometimes one on one, sometimes in small groups and sometimes as a full class. If anything, err on the side of over-communication with me regarding your projects, how you're doing in the class and attendance of virtual meetings.

MATERIALS

- Online readings, assignments and resources will be posted on our class website at **aucapstone.com**. We'll refer to this site regularly.
- Camera kits, tripods and mics rented as-needed from the Media Production Center. *There is a chance we can ship you equipment.*
- Access to Adobe Premiere. *See me if you don't already have remote login.*
- Google Drive, for assignment submission and file management.
- WordPress, Squarespace or similar content management system to publish your project.
- YouTube, Vimeo, Soundcloud or other sites, as-needed, depending on your multimedia.

This class revolves around creating an individual, high-quality reporting project. The final project makes up 40 percent of the final grade. Most class assignments are related to the final project and are designed to be milestones toward project completion. Full details about each assignment will be posted on the class website. Short descriptions are below. **No late assignments will be accepted**. (See Deadlines, below.)

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

Short Critiques: You will write short critiques dissecting two projects of your choice. These projects should be representative of the type of work you aspire to do, both in subject and display.

Idea: You will submit a 1-page document detailing your final project idea. It should explain why this story matters now and what new information you'll be reporting.

Reporting Memo: You will submit a 2-page document detailing your reporting plan. It will include background info on the story, a possible narrative arc, interview sources and contact info, a clip search, data sources, multimedia opportunities and potential access issues or other roadblocks.

Outline, Lead & MM: After some initial reporting, you will sketch out a rough outline of how your story will unfold. You will attempt a few different leads for your story. You will also show me unedited multimedia that you've captured as part of your reporting.

Draft 1: You will have a written story and edited multimedia. It doesn't have to be published to a content management system, but it does have to be readable/watchable.

Draft 2: After feedback, you will polish a second draft and produce it in a content management system. This draft should simulate what the final, reported story will look like, including multimedia.

Final Project: The Final Project will be a portfolio-worthy long-scroll reporting piece that has a 10-15 minute experience time. (That includes time to read and interact with multimedia.) You will use written reporting combined with audio, video, photography, data or other interactives to tell a compelling story. You will present your work as part of a pre-produced video, livestreamed during our final session.

DEADLINES

Journalists live and die by deadlines in the newsroom. So, this is simple: **nothing late will be accepted**. Failure to complete an assignment on time or demonstrate reporting progress for an individual meeting will result in a grade of zero for that particular item. You are responsible for backing up all files and projects. Loss or corruption of files will not be an acceptable excuse for late assignments. If we need to adjust deadlines, given the ongoing pandemic, you must **clear them with me in advance**.

ATTENDANCE

This course is scheduled to meet twice per week — but some of our time is reserved for individual, one-on-one meetings. You **must** show up (or call in) for your scheduled meetings with me, on time, ready to show me your progress. Failure to do so **will be counted as an unexcused absence**. If a medical problem, illness, religious observance or personal emergency requires you to miss class or a meeting, let me know by email or text message beforehand. (It's best to talk with me as soon as you know you'll be missing class.) Any unexcused absence will result in a loss of all 50 points for Participation/Attendance/Professionalism.

Assignments are still due when they are listed despite any absence. Again, late assignments **will not** be accepted.

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT INTEGRITY

Specific to this class, it is a violation of the Integrity Code to manufacture information — such as scripting quotes for an interview, making up names or other information or staging video to represent any news event. **No reenactments are allowed**. Other potential violations include using someone else's video, audio, photography, data or reporting as your own.

All work for this class **must be original** and must be completed **specifically for this class**. No duplicate work will be accepted. You may not use any previous work from other classes, internships or jobs. Simply: all work submitted for academic credit must be original for this class and done by you, the student. If there is ever a question, please ask me before you hand it in.

GRADING GUIDELINES

I will provide detailed guidelines for each assignment, on the website. Primarily, I grade on accuracy, writing, grammar, AP Style and how polished the multimedia is. Points are deducted based on the severity of any problems.

Minor Problems
Small layout issues with text and embedded media, small producing issues with multimedia, wordy writing, missed leads.

Somewhat Significant Problems
Over/underexposed video or distracting audio, shaky video, spelling errors or grammatical mistakes, missing attributions, insertion of opinions, inaccurate quotes, sloppy writing.

Major Problems
Disorganized layout, missing/poorly captured audio or video, jump cuts and gaps in video, factual errors, disorganized/incomplete story budgets, incoherent writing.

GRADES

50 pts	Short Critiques
50 pts	Idea
50 pts	Reporting Memo
100 pts	Outline, Lead & MM
150 pts	Draft 1
150 pts	Draft 2
400 pts	Final Project
50 pts	Participation / Attendance / Professionalism
1000 pts	Total

A
High-quality professional work that's suitable for publication on a reputable media channel/site. Or professional quality work with insignificant, minor errors.

A- 90-93.9   A 94-100

B
Good quality work but some minor problems exist. Or work that meets assignment requirements but needs some corrections before publication.

B- 80-83.3   B 83.4-86.6   B+ 86.7-89.9

C
Incomplete work that does not meet portions of the assignment and has significant or major problems. Could not be published.

C- 70-73.3   C 73.4-76.6   C+ 76.7-79.9

D
Incomplete work that has excessive problems, indicating a lack of effort and attention to the assignment.

D 60-69.9

F
Incomplete work that missed assignment deadline or had major errors.

F 59.9 and below

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

In light of the ongoing pandemic, the traditional academic support available to you has shifted. Please refer to AU's COVID-19 resource site for more information, specifically the section on academic support:

https://www.american.edu/coronavirus/faq-academics.cfm#support

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Please don't even think about cheating on your work. Plagiarism is to present any information or language that was prepared and written by someone else as if it were your own work. This would include copying and pasting information from the Internet without attributing the source. It would also include passing off another student's work ask your own. For this course, plagiarism also includes using photos, audio, video or code from the Internet that you are presenting as original work. In other words, don't do it.

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur.

The Academic Integrity Code includes but is not limited to: plagiarism; inappropriate collaboration; dishonesty in exams, papers; work done for one course and submitted for another; deliberate falsification of data; interference with other students' work; misrepresenting yourself (or having someone misrepresent you) as present during roll call; and copyright violations.

Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

In the event of a emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community.

Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency.

Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU email and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU email regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies.

In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

Specific to the ongoing pandemic, I suspect this course won't be further interrupted. That said, continue to monitor AU's COVID-19 resources site, should there be changes.

SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to change. I will post updated versions on our website and also announce changes in class when they happen. When in doubt, refer to the digital version on the class site. *Assignments* are due the day they're listed.

	MONDAY	**WEDNESDAY**
WEEK 1	**May 18: Welcome** Introduce class, review syllabus. Idea brainstorm and Q&A.	**May 20: Pro. Development** Topic TBA; Speaker TBA. Due: *Short Critiques*
WEEK 2	**May 25: Memorial Day** No class. Due: *Idea*	**May 27: Pro. Development** Navigating the COVID-19 job market Ted Kim, New York Times
WEEK 3	**June 1: Web Projects** Web design, Tips & Tools Due: *Reporting Memo*	**June 3: Pro. Development** Pitching stories successfully Bill Duryea, Politico
WEEK 4	**June 8: Individual Meetings** Sign up for a time slot Due: *Outline, Lead & MM*	**June 10: Pro. Development** Topic TBA Speaker TBA
WEEK 5	**June 15: Peer Review** Partner review of Draft 1 Due: *Draft 1*	**June 17: Pro. Development** Topic TBA Speaker TBA
WEEK 6	**June 22: Individual Meetings** Sign up for a time slot. Due: *Draft 2*	**June 24: Project Presentations** Livestream pre-produced video Due: *Final Project*