

Sam Houston State University » Department of Mass Communication

Course Title:	Investigative Reporting
Course Number:	MCOM 4634
Credit Hours:	3
Semester/Year:	Spring 2018
Class location:	Online/Blackboard
Class Meeting Time:	N/A
Professor:	Robin Johnson, Ph.D.
EMAIL:	<a href="mailto:robin.johnson@shsu.edu">robin.johnson@shsu.edu</a>
Office:	Dan Rather Communications Building, RM 122
Office hours:	Tuesday 10:30 am to noon and Wednesday 1-2:30 pm, or by appointment
Office phone:	936-294-1499

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This capstone course examines strategies for gathering, analyzing and developing background information necessary for in-depth news writing and reporting. Students will be expected to use the research and analysis techniques to produce investigative journalism.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to provide students with:

- The steps necessary to conceive, manage and carry out an investigative reporting project
- Case Studies of investigative stories from radio, television, print and online and the techniques the journalists used to make them successful
- Ways to protect and interview sources
- Strategies for conducting research online, through databases and through Freedom of Information requests

## REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

*Investigative Reporting: From Premise to Publication*, by Marcy Burstiner. Holcomb Hathaway, 2009.

This book is available as an ebook through the university library

Supplemental readings and audio/video will be available through the course's online Blackboard site.

## REQUIRED RESOURCES

Access to Microsoft Excel or a similar spreadsheet program

Access to SHSU's Library and databases

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The course has three grading categories:

- |                 |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Case Studies | 12 % of your overall grade |
| 2. Exercises    | 18 % of your overall grade |
| 3. Assignments  |                            |
| a. Assignment 1 | 20 % of your overall grade |
| b. Assignment 2 | 20 % of your overall grade |
| c. Assignment 3 | 15 % of your overall grade |
| d. Assignment 4 | 15 % of your overall grade |
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Weighted Total: 100 % **Blackboard displays overall grade in the Weighted Total column**

### Grading scale

A 90 % and above

B 80-89 %

C 70-79 %

D 60-69 %

F 59 % & below

## COURSE ORGANIZATION

Each week of the semester has a course link on Blackboard, and you can access the Case Studies, Exercises, Assignments and associated learning materials through their individual links or the weekly links.

**There are due dates for each Case Study, Exercise and Assignment throughout the semester.** Late submissions will have 5 points deducted for each day it is late. The Calendar of due dates can be found in the Syllabus & Calendar of Due Dates link on Blackboard.

Case Studies and Exercises can be accessed via the Weekly links. Additional content modules such as lectures and assigned readings from the textbook provide practical tips, ideas, web sites and tools to be used to help in completing weekly Exercises or Case Studies.

Assignments 1-4 are parts of a total investigative project can be accessed via the Weekly links and are designed for you to:

- Assignment 1: Conduct background research for an investigative story
- Assignment 2: Find primary documents and make freedom of information requests for primary

documents for the story

- Assignment 3: find people to interview for the story and develop interview questions for the story
- Assignment 4: develop a pitch for a broadcast, print or multimedia story for the story

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

E-mail – You must be able to receive e-mail via your “@shsu.edu” account. You will be responsible for any messages you miss if you do not use this university-assigned address. Class announcements may also be posted on Blackboard.

Academic Honesty – All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

[Dean of Student's Office](#)

Proper Classroom Demeanor/Rules of Conduct: Students will refrain from behavior in the classroom that disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. Please turn off or mute your cellular phone and/or pager before class begins. Students are prohibited from eating in class, using tobacco products, making offensive remarks, reading newspapers, sleeping, talking with each other at inappropriate times, wearing inappropriate clothing, or engaging in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result in, minimally, a directive to leave class or being reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with University policy.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy – Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf> [www.aps/documents/861001.pdf](http://www.aps/documents/861001.pdf)

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail [disability@shsu.edu](mailto:disability@shsu.edu)). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/811006.pdf>