Investigative Reporting  
JOUR-UA9501001  
Fall 2014, Thursdays, 6:15pm - 9:15pm.

Location to be confirmed.

Faculty Name  
Faculty Email  
Office Hours: TBD

N/A

Investigative Journalism (JOUR-UA9501001) looks at the role of the reporter in examining society with investigative practices, discussing the good, the bad and the ugly of this side of news reporting. The class will examine the theory and practice of investigative news, as well as its history. Students will discuss the strengths and limitations of journalism as an investigative tool through readings of seminal reporting and critiques, with the aim of building in them an awareness of its possibilities and pitfalls. The class should equip students with a practical grounding in investigative reporting, and make them thoughtful about its role in society.

In structure and scope, this course is modeled after Investigating Journalism, Fall 2011 (V54.0501) by Prof. Mitchell Stephens, NYU.

Students will:

Learn standard journalistic practices as applied to investigative reporting.

Demonstrate reporting skills relevant to investigative reporting.

Discuss and demonstrate an understanding of key moments in investigative reporting.
Grading formula for the course is as follows:

- Writing assignments together 40%
- Word assignment (just check or zero)
- Sentence assignment (just check or zero)
- “Five Ws” assignment 3%
- Other lead assignment 3%
- Quotation assignment 3%
- Argument assignment 5%
- Crime assignment 7%
- Community essay assignment 14%
- Other medium assignment 5%
- Class participation 10%
- Midterm 10%
- In-class writing assignments together 15%
- Final 25%.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

Grade A: The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays/exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

Grade B: The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

Grade C: The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need
of improvement.

**Grade D:** The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

**Grade F:** The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

NYU Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical Equivalent</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>89-87</td>
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<td>86-84</td>
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<td>76-74</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>73-70</td>
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<td>69-67</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<td>65-66</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>below 65</td>
<td>F</td>
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**Attendance Policy**

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. Beginning Fall 2014, at all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Program Coordinator for Academics in advance of their missed class. For an excused absence, students must produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Program Coordinator for Academics prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the
student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. (Note: Students are expected to attend all classes. We will notify the department if we are aware that a student has missed two classes. More than two absences could affect class participation grade.)

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Program Coordinator for Academics can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 10-6, M-F.

3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g: A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.

4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.

6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.

7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a
zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

As the University's policy on "Academic Integrity for Students at NYU" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity
**Session 1**

**9-4-2014**

NEWS


Discussion: nature and significance of news; discuss Orwell and use of words in journalistic writing.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: A word to replace “toppling” in New York Times lead,
September 12, 2001:

Hijackers rammed jetliners into each of New York's World Trade Center towers yesterday, toppling both in a hellish storm of ash, glass, smoke and leaping victims, while a third jetliner crashed into the Pentagon in Virginia. There was no official count, but President Bush said thousands had perished, and in the immediate aftermath the calamity was already being ranked the worst and most audacious terror attack in American history.

Due 8:30 p.m. Sept. 4. (Graded check or zero.)

Session 2

JOURNALISM

Its (complicated) relationship to news. An introduction to the semester’s discussion of its importance, its methods and its limitations. How it does or does not succeed in bringing the public insight into matters of public import. A “plus” and “minus” scheme introduced. The journalistic sentence.


Discussion: craft or profession of journalism; discuss Crane article as example of journalistic writing; discuss LeBlanc reading as example of what journalism can be.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Write a sentence in journalistic style explaining how you, or someone else you have interviewed, first learned that Osama bin Laden had been killed. Due 9 p.m. Sept. 11. (Graded check or zero.)

Session 3

FACTS

The significance of literacy and print. Myth versus the “clear truth.” The “inverted pyramid” and the “five Ws” lead. Accuracy. The history of objectivity. Objectivity versus analysis or opinion.

Discussion: Lippmann reading, Stewart critique and the value of objectivity. Prepare for “five Ws” lead assignment.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Report on a simple news event – a talk, speech, news conference, meeting – and write a “five Ws” lead paragraph that might begin a traditional newspaper account of that event. Due 6 p.m. Sept. 25. (Graded check-plus, check, check-minus or zero.)

Session 4  9-25-2014

POWER OF THE PRESS

The good it can do. The good it can fail to do. The bad.


Discussion: journalism’s potential (Priest and Hull article; “Harvest of Shame”) and missteps (Gordon and Miller article).

Session 5  10-2-2014

HUMAN INTERESTS

What we come to journalism for. How to make writing more interesting. Delayed leads: anecdotes, zingers, scene-setters.


WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Write a different, delayed lead paragraph on the event reported on in the Facts assignment. Due 6 p.m. Oct. 9. (Graded check plus, check, check minus or zero.)

Recitation section: discuss Didion story and delayed leads.

Session 6  10-9-2014

LIBERTY

Interpretation. Arguments and how they are made. The debate over freedom of information.

Circulation.”. Plato, The Republic (selection).


Recitation section: discuss the wages of liberty. Discuss interviewing and making an argument.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Write one paragraph, including a one sentence quotation, based on an interview with someone who would not normally have his or her point of view reported in the mainstream news media because it is too extreme. Due 9 p.m. Oct. 16. (Graded check-plus, check, check-minus or zero.)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Write 200 words making an argument on some issue at New York University. Make sure it includes a summary of the situation, a thesis and support for that thesis. Due 6 p.m. Oct. 30. (Graded check-plus, check, check-minus or zero.)

REPORTING

Its history. Its ability to illuminate. How it changes the world. Muckraking.

10-16-2014

READINGS (Due Oct. 16):

Stephens, Chap. 13, “Before Reporting,”

Chap. 14, “The Development of Reporting”. Woodward and Bernstein, All the President’s Men.

SELECTIONS:

Timothy Crouse, The Boys on the Bus C, E (selections – on reserve).


Panel on election coverage or guest speaker / data reporting.

DISCUSSION: Woodward and Bernstein, election coverage, Crouse and Wallace.

SHORT MIDTERM.

SENSATIONALISM
Blood, sex and journalism.

10-23-2014

READINGS: Truman Capote, In Cold Blood E.

DISCUSSION: discuss Capote and prepare for crime story.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Report and write a five-hundred-word account of a crime in whatever journalistic style you find appropriate. You must report this story yourself by visiting a criminal courthouse and gathering information on a criminal case. Due 6 p.m. Nov. 11. (Graded check-plus, check, check-minus or zero.)

GUEST SPEAKER: INVESTIGATING CRIME

Session 9

DEMOCRACY AND DIVERSITY

IX. Democracy and Diversity. Nov. 8, 10, 15.

10-30-2014

The effectiveness of journalism in furthering the public dialogue. Diversity in coverage and newsrooms. The journalistic essay. The “nut graf.”


DISCUSSION: Discuss Kerner Commission report and diversity in journalism today. Discuss Baldwin, Talese and the journalistic essay.

Recitation section: Pitch meeting on coverage of a community essay.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Journalistic essay on the intersection of a community, group or subculture and journalism. Has the group been well served by journalism in its various forms? Are we well informed about them? How might they be better covered? Use examples of coverage from the last six months only. 1,200 words. Outline plus “nut graf” due 6 p.m. Nov. 13. Essay due 6 p.m. Dec. 27.

Prompt for coverage of a community essay:

The idea here is to analyze the performance of journalism not just by studying news organs but by focusing on the human beings who are the subjects of journalism.
Pick a group – could be a neighborhood, could be people who share an interest, a lifestyle, a faith, a politics, etc. Gay parents might be an example, or Hasidic Jews, or women who wear a hijab, or residents of Chinatown, or Pit Bull owners, or people with many skin piercings. (More newsworthy or even controversial groups might be somewhat easier to write about.) The question is how good a job journalists are doing covering this group. Are the group’s concerns being well communicated? Are they subject to bias or discrimination, subtle or unsubtle, in news reports? Are they being unfairly sensationalized or ignored? Do they themselves have access to the news they need about their group? And are the rest of us getting a fair, accurate and reasonable portrait of them? With few exceptions (which would require approval of the adjunct leading your recitation section) we assume the group and the coverage will be in the United States.

Make sure to inform us in the essay about the group you have chosen, but the emphasis should not be upon them but upon what coverage appears about them. Try to take a broad and informed look at that coverage: not just one or two nasty newspapers or websites, for example. (It is okay to use broadcast reports, if you can get them.) If the group is large and much discussed, look at major news organs. If it is small, then the publications you look at will likely be smaller. We are more interested in a critique of mainstream coverage – if the group receives any mainstream coverage: the New York Times or Rolling Stone, where possible, more than goths.com. However, acknowledging the role of small, focused publications might also be important.

Make sure you have examples – maybe even word or story counts – to back up any assertions you or others make. Specifics! Statistics might help point up distortions in news stories: the actually crime rate in Harlem, for example, or the number of skateboarders who are seriously injured each year. Perhaps some historical examples would be of interest, but we expect that almost all the examples of the coverage should be from the last six months.

It would probably be a good idea to talk to members of the group – to interview them and use quotations from them in your essay. Quotes, points or information borrowed from other sources must, of course, be carefully attributed. And leaning too heavily upon someone else’s analysis – a press critique in a gay newspaper, for example – would certainly not be acceptable and would lead to a failing grade on the essay. (Yes, we will search and check!)

**Session 10**

**11-6-2014**

**INTRUSIONS**

On the unpleasantness of journalists looking your way.

DISCUSSION: Malcolm and Warren/Brandeis.

**Session 11**

11-13-2014

BIASES

On the various directions in which journalism does or can lean. Institutional and procedural biases. Source, government and ownership controls. Political tilts? Story organization.


DISCUSSION: Boorstin, Steffens and bias in campaign coverage. Discuss upcoming redo of essay in another medium.

**Session 12**

11-20-2014

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS


Readings:
Stone, I.F. "Izzy on Izzy" http://www.ifstone.org/biography.php (What is Stone saying here about public documents?)
"What is FOIA" http://www.foia.gov/
FOIA Resources https://www.ifoia.org/#!/resources
"Anthrax slip-ups raise fears about planned biolabs" http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2004-10-13-anthrax-labs_x.htm (This story was published in 2004, what happened to the person in the lead sentence?)
"Glowing reviews on 'arseniclife' spurred NASA's embrace" http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/columnist/vergano/2013/02/01/arseniclife-peer-reviews-nasa/1883327/

GUEST SPEAKER TBD

Assignment: Find the most recent Congressional Research Service reports posted online by the Federation of American Scientists. Write the lead sentence of a news story based on one of these ("X verbs Y, a Congressional report finds") and explain why this seems like news. Find out why these reports are not made easily available to the public.
BIG INVESTIGATIONS

In an era of Big Data, big investigations are possible. What are the possible benefits and pitfalls of large data-driven investigations?

READINGS:

Bradshaw, P. "How To Be A Data Journalist"  

Eisler, P. et al "Ghost Factories"  

Gellmann, B. et al "Communication Breakdown"  
http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/world/communication-breakdown/1153/

Mathews, D. "Blue States Watch More Porn Than Red States"  

Tufecki, Z. "Learning From @NateSilver538's OMG-Wrong #Bra vs #Ger Prediction"  

Vergano, D. "Big Data Disguises Digital Doubts"  
http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/science/columnist/vergano/story/2012-06-16/big-data/55628002/1

DISCUSSION: What is and isn't news data? How do you verify your data dive results? When do you call in the experts? How do we read a data driven investigation differently from any other story, or not?

Guest speaker TBD

ASSIGNMENT: List three datasets you might pursue for their news value. Examples are: pipeline leak reports, drowning locations, newspaper corrections...
Session 15

Whither journalism, after the Internet? Changing (declining?) economics of journalism. Will we be well informed? Will journalists be paid?

12-11-2014


Panel on future of journalism.

Recitation section: discuss third essay and use of other media.

Recitation section: discuss future of journalism.

ASSIGNMENT: Redo part of essay on coverage of a community in another medium: digital, video, audio. If you have no facility with any of these media, you may simply outline what you would do on poster board. Due Dec. 6 p.m. Dec. 11. (Graded check-plus, check, check-minus or zero.)

Classroom Etiquette

All students are expected to participate in classroom discussions. All comments should be made in a forthright and courteous manner that focuses on the piece of writing or matter under examination in class. Disagreement is fine, and expected, but it should only be over the points under discussion. If you strongly like/dislike one of the readings, give your reasons. Read the assignments and be prepared to share your thoughts.

Required Co-

If the class is small enough, and anyone wishes to go, I may arrange an optional tour of National Geographic’s new newsroom.
Your Instructor

FACULTY NAME is a senior writer-editor at National Geographic. He was previously the senior science writer at USA TODAY for more than a decade. He has also written for Men’s Health, New Scientist, Science, Washington Post, Air & Space Smithsonian and elsewhere. Mr. Vergano has a B.S. in aerospace engineering from Penn State and a M.A. in Science, Technology and Public Policy from George Washington University. He won the 2011 Gene Stuart Award from the Society for American Archeology and the 2006 David Perlman Award for Excellence in Science Journalism from the American Geophysical Union. He was a 2007-08 Nieman Fellow at Harvard.