



JOUR 517: Advanced Investigative Reporting 3 units

Spring 2016 – 6:30-9:10 p.m. Tuesdays

Section: 21476D

Location: ANN 305

Instructor: David Medzerian

Office Hours: By appointment (usually 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays, ANN 305)

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I. Course Description

The goal of this course is to inspire you and teach you the practical skills and ethical principles that will allow you to become a responsible investigative reporter – digital, broadcast or print. The focus of the class will be on learning the fundamentals of investigative journalism:

- How to choose a subject for investigation.
- How to identify human sources and persuade them to talk with you on the record.
- How to conduct an interview.
- How to use documents.
- How to organize large amounts of material and present it in a fair and compelling way.
- How to successfully present multimedia elements to your audience.

This class is intended to give you a strong foundation of reporting and writing skills that should allow you to do more interesting stories than most other journalists do. While the focus will be on learning practical skills, you should also develop a better understanding of the principles of the First Amendment and the roles of an investigative journalist in our society. We also will be discussing the practical, ethical and legal aspects of investigative reporting in the context of our rapidly changing media landscape.

We will spend some time learning about the history and traditions of investigative reporting – from the early muckrakers through Edward R. Murrow and Woodward and Bernstein to modern day investigative journalists. There will be outside assignments designed to teach you interviewing skills, the use of court and other public records, journalism ethics, the use of financial and economic databases and other journalism techniques. Some assignments may require going to courthouses and locations in the Los Angeles area where public records are available.

You will also be required to propose, report and write one in-depth digital investigative story, with its primary component being text or video. This story should be at least 2,500 words long and it must include a significant amount of original reporting. You will be expected to write periodic memos about your progress on the project, and to discuss it in class. You should have a topic in mind by mid-February; a draft, which will be graded, is due April 12, with the final rewrite due April 26, the last day of class.

The goal of the semester-long project is to help you learn investigative techniques while pursuing a groundbreaking investigative story. A further goal is to get your project published. I will work with you to help you get your project published in a campus or professional publication.

We will also be discussing strategies for getting good jobs as investigative reporters at newspapers, magazines, online and broadcast organizations.

II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment

By the end of the course you should achieve the following:

- Understanding of in- depth and investigative journalism and the role of an investigative reporter.
- Ability to generate story ideas for investigative and in- depth stories.
- Ability to identify and develop human sources.
- Ability to conduct in- depth interviews.
- Ability to identify and use documents and databases - both electronic and paper.
- Understanding of, and ability to use, the federal Freedom of Information Act and state open records and meetings laws.
- Ability to organize large amounts of material.
- Ability to write and present in- depth material in a compelling way.
- Ability to plan for photos and graphics to illustrate in- depth stories.
- Ability to work in collaboration with other journalists, as part of a team reporting effort.
- Sensitivity to diversity issues in reporting and writing in- depth and investigative stories.
- Commitment to accuracy and fair play. Understanding of ethical issues involved in investigative reporting.

III. Description of Assignments

There will be a variety of assignments:

- In- class assignments: Research and writing assignments to be completed during class.
- Weekly assignments: Research and writing assignments to be completed by the specified deadline, usually prior to the following class period.
- Final project: An in-depth investigative story presented in digital, broadcast or text format.

You should begin thinking immediately about the topic of your final project, which must be submitted for approval as indicated. After that week, you are expected to file weekly updates on your reporting progress and plans for your project. Part of your final project grade is based on the quality of these updates and the critical thinking you demonstrate in investigating your subject.

You will submit your Final Project at three times: as a rough draft for in-class review; as a completed Final Project for presentation in class (this version is worth 40 percent of your course grade); and a rewrite (this version is worth 10 percent of your course grade).

IV. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Your grade will be determined by the quality of your assignments and your participation in class:

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Final project	100	40
Final project draft	100	10
Other assignments	100 each	40
Class participation	100	10
TOTAL		100%

b. Grading Scale

Projects will generally be assigned a letter grade, which is then converted to a numeric grade.

95 to 100: A	70 to less than 75: C+	45 to less than 50: D-
90 to less than 95: A-	65 to less than 70: C	0 to less than 45: F
85 to less than 90: B+	60 to less than 65: C-	
80 to less than 85: B	55 to less than 60: D+	
75 to less than 80: B-	50 to less than 55: D	

c. Grading Standards

Reporting/writing assignments should be of publishable quality. All assignments will be edited on a professional basis and you will be judged first on the accuracy, fairness and objectivity of your stories. You will then be evaluated for broadcast style, editing, production value, originality and the ability to meet deadlines. Research assignments will be judged on completeness and professionalism. All work should conform to AP style.

“A” stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well written and require only minor copyediting (i.e., they would be aired or published). Video work must also be shot and edited creatively, be well paced and include good sound bites and natural sound that add flavor, color or emotion to the story.

“B” stories require more than minor editing and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission. For video, there may be minor flaws in the composition of some shots or in the editing. Good use of available sound bites is required.

“C” stories need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors. Camera work and editing techniques in video stories are mediocre or unimaginative, but passable. Sound bites add little or no color - only information that could be better told in the reporter’s narration.

“D” stories require excessive rewriting, have numerous errors and should not have been submitted. Camera work is unsatisfactory or fails to show important elements.

“F” stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, are late, have numerous errors or both. Your copy should not contain any errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. Any misspelled or mispronounced proper noun will result in an automatic “F” on that assignment. Any factual error will also result in an automatic “F” on the assignment. Accuracy is the first law of journalism. The following are some other circumstances that would warrant a grade of “F” and potential USC/Annenberg disciplinary action:

- Fabricating a story or making up quotes or information.
- Plagiarizing a script/article, part of a script/article or information from any source.
- Staging video or telling interview subjects what to say.
- Using video shot by someone else and presenting it as original work.
- Shooting video in one location and presenting it as another location.
- Using the camcorder to intentionally intimidate, provoke or incite a person or a group of people to elicit more “dramatic” video.
- Promising, paying or giving someone something in exchange for doing an interview either on or off camera.
- Missing a deadline.

V. Assignment Submission Policy

- A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will automatically be given a grade of F.
- B. Written assignments should be sent by email, as Word attachments, to david.medzerian@usc.edu . Please make sure your name and contact information is on all attachments.
- C. Multimedia assignments should be submitted as specified for each individual assignment.

VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required textbook: "The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques," 5th Edition, by Brant Houston, Len Bruzzese and Steve Weinberg. You may substitute an earlier edition.

Additional required reading: There will frequently be additional reading material, usually distributed online. Much of this material will be investigative stories/case studies. You will be expected to read this material, and bring in written questions about it.

Other resources: If you need access to broadcast equipment or Web-server space not accessible to you through another class or learning lab, please work with your instructor as soon as possible.

News consumption: It goes without saying that you should read a daily newspaper every day, review online news resources daily and be familiar with daily news broadcasts.

VII. Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [Annenberg Virtual Commons](#) for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's [Information Technology Services](#) website.

VIII. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note to students: Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Jan. 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Introductions and course overview: Why we're here, what we'll do, how we'll do it.- Lecture: What are investigative reporters? Where do investigations come from? What makes a good investigative story?- Where to look for ideas and how to get started.- Ethics and standards: Review and discussion of ethics, stressing the school of journalism's commitment to academic excellence and ethical behavior. In class exercise: Reading an autopsy report – autopsyfiles.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Take home assignment— Investigative Reporting Assignment: Find an investigative story or project which was based on public records, and write a critique (minimum 750 words). Include a summary of the story or project, its findings, which records were used as well as how they were obtained and analyzed. Point out the work's strengths and weaknesses, and what you would do to improve it. Note the use of multimedia and databases. Be prepared to discuss your report in class. Due 1/19.- Read "A Case of Doubt" (tinyurl.com/310doubt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Investigative Reporting critique due at the start of class 1/19

<p>Week 2 Jan. 19</p>	<p>- State of the Union: Watch president's address, Republican response and panel discussion in Annenberg lobby</p>	<p>- With your investigative reporter hat on, develop five quick SOTU-related investigations you could produce by the weekend. Due 1/26</p>	<p>- SOTU- related story ideas due at start of class 1/26</p>
<p>Week 3 Jan. 26</p>	<p>- In-class discussion of: "A Case of Doubt ." Turn in and discuss investigative report assignment. - View and discuss "Security theater ," of the PBS series EXPOSE, tinyurl.com/310exsecurity</p>	<p>- Assignment: Read "L.A. church leaders sought to hide sex abuse cases from authorities" (Los Angeles Times, 1/22/2013) and view CBS reports on the story. Bring written observations and questions for discussion next week. (tinyurl.com/310times)</p>	<p>- Come to class 2/2 prepared to discuss church leaders story</p>
<p>Week 4 Feb. 2</p>	<p>- In-class discussion of "L.A. church leaders sought to hide sex abuse cases from authorities." - Property records: What's available, how to get them and how to use them. How to use them to help a story. - View and discuss "Money for Nothing ," Episode 206 of the PBS series EXPOSE, www.pbs.org/wnet/expose/expose_2007/episode206/watch.html (tinyurl.com/310exmoney)</p>	<p>- Public records assignment: Property record report, due 2/10. - Assignment: Read textbook chapters 1- 3</p>	<p>- Come to class 2/9 prepared to discuss three stories at left - Property records assignment due prior to class 2/9</p>
<p>Week 5 Feb. 9</p>	<p>- Public records: What's available, how to get them and how to use them (tinyurl.com/310request). The use of public records in investigative reporting. In- class: Exercise demonstrating the potential use of public records. How to use the federal Freedom of Information Act and state open records and open meetings laws in investigative reporting. "Secondary Sources" and "Primary Documents") Discussion: Assigned readings - Discussion: Details of the Final Project; current ideas for Final Project; how to do pitches</p>	<p>- Public records assignment: Restaurant grading report, due 2/16. - Assignment: Read textbook chapter 12 ("Investigating Education") From "The Investigative Reporter's Handbook," read: Chapter 4, "Computer- assisted reporting." Chapter 5, "People trails."</p>	<p>- Public records assignments (restaurant) due prior to class 2/16</p>
<p>Week 6 Feb. 16</p>	<p>- Broadcast investigations: Guest speaker Vince Gonzales - Gather ideas from Vince on your Final Project</p>	<p>- Assignment: Read Chapter 7 of textbook, "Ethics of investigative reporting;" and from among chapters 8- 21, read the chapter(s) most appropriate to your final project topic.</p>	

<p>Week 7 Feb. 23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional print investigations: Guest speaker Bill Rempel - Gather ideas from Bill on your Final Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assignment: Read textbook chapter 11 (“Investigating Law Enforcement”) - Assignment: Prepare written and verbal project pitch, due 3/1. Include pre-reporting, sources you have already spoken with, sources you plan to speak with, opportunities for visuals, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review “Innocents Lost” from the Miami Herald before class 3/1. - Prepare pitch for final project
<p>Week 8 March 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>In-class pitches of final projects</u> - Multimedia investigations: Discussion including “Innocents Lost” from the Miami Herald. - In class: Discuss restaurant health assignment. - In class: discussion of research and Wikipedia; research obit assignment - Discussion of hidden databases, computer- assisted reporting, Surfing the web and sifting through mountains of seemingly boring data to find stories that aren’t. - Read “Website allows comparison of government payroll,” tinyurl.com/310payrolls ; in- class exercise using publicpay.ca.gov/ - View and discuss “The Scientific Method ,” Episode 205 of the PBS series EXPOSE, www.pbs.org/wnet/expose/expose_2007/episode205/watch.html (tinyurl.com/310exscientific) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assignment: Write 750- word obit based on your research. - Assignment: Read chapters 8- 10 of textbook: “Investigating the Executive Branch,” “Investigating the Legislative Branch,” “Investigating the Judicial System” and “Investigating Education.” Be prepared to discuss the material in class March 22. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obit (left) due before class 3/8.
<p>Week 9 March 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - View and discuss “Think like a Terrorist ,” of the PBS series EXPOSE, tinyurl.com/310exterror - If there’s time: In- class discussion of Manti Te’o case (tinyurl.com/310teo) - In- class: Discussion of critiques. Discussion: Cultivating sources. How you find and keep them. Drawing the line between source and friend. Making sure you don’t burn sources and vice versa. Updates on projects. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue working on Final Project

Spring Recess: 3/13-3/20

<p>Week 10 March 22</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-class updates on individual final projects. Discussion of status, questions, problems. - In- class exercise: Read and critique Newport Beach City Hall investigation; class- led discussion. - View and discuss “Death is Different ,” of the PBS series EXPOSE, tinyurl.com/310exdeath - Organizing and writing You’ve been gathering information for months or even years and now it’s time to sit down and write your investigative story. How do you make your story something people actually want to read? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assignment: Explore lasuperiorcourt.org; select a case and write a brief summary of what you have found. - Assignment: Read chapter 6 of textbook: “Writing the Compelling Investigation.” - Assignment: Read “Deeper in Debt / A bank, a school district and a 38-year loan” (handout; online at tinyurl.com/310deeperindebt). Write a critique of the investigation (be sure to consider the nonnarrative components of the investigation and the overall presentation), and email it prior to the start of class March 3. Come prepared to discuss your critique next week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Court assignment at left due prior to start of class 3/29
<p>Week 11 March 29</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data journalism - Discuss lasuperiorcourt.org assignment. - Discuss “Deeper in Debt” critiques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assignment: Data journalism Assignment - Assignment: Read chapters 13- 16 of textbook: “Investigating For-Profit Businesses,” “Investigating Nonprofit and Religious Organizations,” “Investigating Financial Institutions and Insurance” and “Investigating Health Care.” Be prepared to discuss the material in class next week. - Assignment: Submit a rough draft of your project. The rough drafts will be discussed in class next week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rough draft of final project (which will not be graded) must be submitted before class 4/5
<p>Week 12 April 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Status report on final projects - Discussion of strategies for getting stories published in campus or professional publications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assignment: Read chapters 17- 19 of textbook: “Investigating Energy and Utilities,” “Investigating the Environment” and “Investigating Transportation.” - Assignment: Read chapters 20- 21 of textbook: “Investigating Real Estate” and “Investigating the World of the Disadvantaged.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Near-complete draft of final project (which will be graded) must be submitted before class 4/12

Week 13 April 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Near-complete draft of final project (which will be graded) due. Last opportunity for in- class advice/help from instructor and students, before drafts are due. - Lecture: How to investigate businesses and non- profit organizations. - View and discuss “Friends in High Places ,” episode 204 of the PBS series EXPOSE, www.pbs.org/wnet/expose/expose_2007/episode204/index.html - Lecture: Ethics, Fairness, the Law and Investigative Reporting. In class exercise: Discussion of ethical issues described in assigned reading material. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assignment: Be familiar with the work of Woodward and Bernstein for discussion next week. - Work on Final Project 	Prepare to discuss Watergate Investigation in class 4/19
Week 14 April 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of Watergate - Special in-class exercise 	- Finish Final Project	- Final Projects due 4/26
Week 15 April 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>In-class presentation of completed Final Projects.</u> - Submit USC course evaluations - Recap of the class, of investigative reporting and a discussion of practical steps that students should take in looking for investigative reporting jobs (print, broadcast, online) today. 		
FINAL EXAMS Dates: 5/4-5/11	No class meeting		

IX. Policies and Procedures

Attendance

Attendance is expected for every class. Notify me in advance by email if you are going to be absent because of illness, a family emergency or any other reason. Unexcused absences will be reflected in your participation grade.

Tardiness is unacceptable. If you expect to be more than 15 minutes late to class, please stay home.

Class protocol

This is a professional degree program. As such, students are expected to deal with each other and with me in a collegial manner. That means you should immediately talk to your instructor if you have any concerns about the course, grading, fellow students, the length of time it takes to get back graded assignments, etc.

Laptops, tablets and cellphones

Information communication technologies are a part of the modern education landscape. Students are welcome to use laptop computers or tablet devices in the classroom for purposes relevant to the class lesson and furthering discussion. However, out of consideration for the learning environment and fellow classmates, you should refrain from extraneous activities such as instant messaging, gaming or other online services.

At times the instructor may ask that laptops and other devices be put away. Please honor such requests.

Internships

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/b/11-00-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

"Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an 'F' on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators."

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

b. Support Systems

Equity and Diversity

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://dps.usc.edu/contact/report/>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community - such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member - can help initiate

the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <https://sarc.usc.edu/> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support with Scholarly Writing

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://ali.usc.edu/> which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.

Students requesting test-related accommodations will need to share and discuss their DSP recommended accommodation letter/s with their faculty and/or appropriate departmental contact person at least three weeks before the date the accommodations will be needed. Additional time may be needed for final exams. Reasonable exceptions will be considered during the first three weeks of the semester as well as for temporary injuries and for students recently diagnosed. Please note that a reasonable period of time is still required for DSP to review documentation and to make a determination whether a requested accommodation will be appropriate.

Stress Management

Students are under a lot of pressure. If you start to feel overwhelmed, it is important that you reach out for help. A good place to start is the USC Student Counseling Services office at 213-740-7711. The service is confidential, and there is no charge.

Emergency Information

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

X. About Your Instructor

David Medzerian is a veteran journalist and educator with extensive digital, print and broadcast experience. As a reporter at The Miami Herald, he led coverage of a series of scandals involving the city of Sunrise, Fla., resulting in the mayor's trial and removal from office. At The Orange County Register, he served in roles ranging from home-page editor, web analytics specialist and webcast host to systems expert, design team leader and even Local Section columnist. He's been an on-air correspondent for the Orange County NewsChannel, a news production assistant with CBS and part of the launch team at Knight-Ridder's groundbreaking Viewtron project, and has spoken on news systems and online integration around the country and internationally. He is currently Managing Editor/News at USC, overseeing the USC News website and university home page. He has been teaching at Annenberg since 2003.