



JOUR 517: Advanced Investigative Reporting

4 Units

Spring 2022 – Thursdays – 12-3:20 p.m.

Section: 21116D

Location: ANN 211

Instructor: Tammy Leitner

Office: ANN lobby or classroom

Office Hours: By appointment and Thursdays, 11-11:50 a.m.

Contact Info: Tleitner@usc.edu, 480-628-2189

Course Description

This course will provide you the opportunity to do the work of high-level investigative journalists. You will learn by doing. Which means you will hit roadblocks. You will be told no. You will be shut out. And you will be discouraged. But through these real-life scenarios you will learn how to blast through roadblocks, finesse your way around them and sidestep past them.

You will gain powerful tools to navigate your career as a working investigative journalist: from pitching stories so that you don't get shut down by impatient editors, choosing sources wisely so you don't get burned, learning the ins and outs of the business from veteran investigators, knowing how to work the court system from the inside and building your rolodex of contacts now – in this class!

Think of me as your news director or editor. I will be brutally honest, as though you were a real member of an investigative team. We will strategize and work together – just like in a real newsroom. This course will be intense, just like newsroom deadlines.

To enter this course, you must have a story proposal approved by the instructor, and it is highly recommended that you have taken JOUR 539 "Introduction to Investigative Reporting."

While this is a journalism course, students in related fields (for example, documentary students in SCA) can enroll with permission of the instructor. Exceptional undergraduates may also be accepted.

Prerequisite: JOUR 539 Introduction to Investigative Reporting

Overall Learning Objectives and Assessments

The objective of this course is to learn how to pitch, investigative, report, interview and write a solid piece of investigative journalism. The assessment is the story (text, video or audio) that you produce at the end of the course.

Learning objectives include:

- Writing and pitching a story
- Using research tools like Nexis Lexis
- Finding a story in an autopsy report

- Understanding the functions of the Medical Examiner-Coroner’s Office
- Developing sources that won’t burn you
- Mining the courts for stories
- Executing expository and narrative writing styles
- Knowing when to conduct the unscheduled interview
- Understanding when it’s appropriate to go undercover.

These skills will be assessed mainly through class participation, short assignments, pop quizzes and readings.
 *All students will need to submit a story proposal and gain approval from the instructor to take this course.

Course Notes

You will learn by reporting and producing a substantial work of investigative reporting. This course is hard. But so is being an investigative reporter. It takes curiosity, drive and unwavering tenacity.

This syllabus is a guide, but readings and assignment will change. You must thoroughly read any and all emails the instructor sends to your USC email account.

Finally, this class has a policy of no screens. Yes, you should bring your laptop to class, because we will do exercises that require going online. But in general, you will not be on your phone, laptop, or any other screen. Please see below: “IX Laptop Policy.” NOTE: This policy means that you must print out the readings and bring them to class.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

You will provide regular updates – some will be verbal in class, while others will be written. This teaches you to formulate your thoughts quickly, become adept at pitching and fluid at writing pitches. You will also submit multiple drafts starting no later than midterm.

There will be other assignments.

Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Class Participation	15%
Pop quizzes	10%
Assignments	30%
Final Story	45%
TOTAL	100%

b. Grading Scale

95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

c. Grading Standards

Journalism

Our curriculum is structured to prepare students to be successful in a professional news organization with the highest standards. Students will be evaluated first on accuracy and truthfulness in their stories. Good journalism prioritizes transparency, context and inclusivity. All stories should be written in AP style unless Annenberg style conflicts, in which case students can follow Annenberg style.

The following standards apply to news assignments.

“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. Sources are varied, diverse and offer a complete view of the topic.

“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. Sources are mostly varied, diverse and offer a complete view of the topic.

“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. Sources are repetitive or incomplete.

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

“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.

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. Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard and also email to tleitner@usc.edu. All text assignments must be submitted in Microsoft Word. No PDFs!

Students are encouraged to submit their work for consideration to Annenberg Media or the Daily Trojan, or pitch it to mainstream media outlets. Visit <http://bit.ly/SubmitAnnenbergMedia> for more information about that submission and review process and email Daily Trojan news editors at dt.city@gmail.com for more on how to pitch work to the campus newspaper.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required textbooks:

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, by Associated Press

Catch and Kill by Ronan Farrow

The Elements of Style, by Strunk and White

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.

News consumption: You should read at least one daily newspaper every day, review online news resources daily, and be familiar with daily news broadcasts.

Laptop Policy

The class will have a policy of no screens. Still bring your laptop to class, because occasionally we will do exercises that require going online. (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 Digital Lounge for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's Information Technology Services website.)

But at all other times, phones, laptops, and other electronic devices must be put away. Why? The following will help explain:

- "Why you should take notes by hand – not on a laptop"
- "The Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom"
- "How Smartphones Hijack Our Minds: Research suggests that as the brain grows dependent on phone technology, the intellect weakens"
- The Los Angeles Times article on an "off the grid" policy.
- "The Myth of Multitasking"

Please note: The no-screens policy means that when assigned a reading from the web, you need to bring a printout to class.

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 Digital Lounge for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's Information Technology Services website.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/10/2022 – 4/29/2022; Final Exam Period: 5/4-11/2022)

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20221/calendar/>

Last day to add: Friday, January 28, 2022

Last day to drop without a mark of "W" and receive a refund: Friday, January 28, 2022

Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit: Friday, January 28, 2022 [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Last day to add/drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund or change to Audit: Tuesday, February 1

Last day to withdraw without a "W" on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade: Friday, February 25, 2022 [Mark of "W" will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply.]

*Please drop any course by the end of week three for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

Last day to drop with a mark of "W": Friday, April 1, 2022

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.

Before the first class: read everyone’s story proposal, which the instructor will email to you, and be prepared to present and discuss your story proposal in class on the first day.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 Date: 1/13	<p>Introduction and course overview: What to expect, how we will go about it, and how does investigative journalism fit into today’s society?</p> <p>Discussion: Why are investigative reporters crucial? How has the landscape changed for investigative journalists?</p> <p>Time to present! Everyone takes a turn pitching their story. You will learn from each other. And as the semester goes on, this will get easier each time.</p>	<p>READINGS:</p> <p>The LA Times investigation of USC</p> <p>HOMEWORK:</p> <p>“USC students protest toxic Greek life after fraternity suspended for alleged drugging, sexual assault.” https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-10-22/usc-protests-intensify-after-fraternity-suspension-over-alleged-drugging-sexual-assault</p> <p>“USC admits to troubling delay’ in warning about fraternity drugging, sex assault reports.” https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-10-29/usc-admits-troubling-delay-warning-fraternity-drugging-sex-assault-charges</p>	<p>Reporting update on investigative project due 1/27</p>

		<p>“USC’s ‘Greek experience’ under fire even as fraternities gain in popularity post-pandemic.” https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-10-31/usc-greek-fraternities-roil-over-drug-sex-assault-reports</p> <p>https://annenbergl.usc.edu/news/spotlight/qa-usc-librarian-chim%C3%A9ne-tucker</p>	
<p>Week 2 Date: 1/20</p>	<p>Guest Lecturer: Chiméne Tucker, the Communication & Journalism Gender and LGBT Studies Librarian will give us a tutorial in Lexis Nexis. And she has created an incredible Journalism research Guide that will be an indispensable tool for all of you moving forward.</p>	<p>HOMEWORK: Use Nexis to do background research for your investigative story: a person, business, event or court case.</p>	<p>Nexis research due 1/27. Bring to class.</p>
<p>Week 3 Date: 1/27</p>	<p>Guest Lecturer: NBC News Senior Investigative Reporter Andy Blankstein focuses on law enforcement, courts, homeland security and anti-terrorism across the West.</p> <p>Previously he worked as a staff writer for the LA Times for 23 years, focusing on breaking news, policing, courts and celebrity.</p> <p>Andy’s sources here in Los Angeles and throughout the law enforcement community, run deep. He shares some tips on how to protect the ultra-sensitive source.</p>	<p>Homework: Scout out a location to meet with a sensitive, secret source. Write a description of where and why.</p> <p>Homework: Familiarize yourself with this website https://autopsyfiles.org/</p> <p>If you’ve never seen an autopsy report, take a look at a few examples on this website. I will teach you how to read them in next week’s class.</p>	<p>Location assignment due 2/3 at noon. Graded.</p>
<p>Week 4 Date: 2/3</p>	<p>How to read an autopsy report and why would you want to?</p> <p>Guest Speaker: Chief of the Forensic Science Laboratories Division of the County of Los Angeles Department of Medical</p>	<p>Homework: Sketch out a rough draft of your story. What have you found? What do you still need to get?</p>	<p>Due at 9am 2/10</p>

	<p>Examiner-Coroner. Dr. Rakhshanda “Ruby” Javed overseas all six of the labs in the department. This includes: Toxicology, Histology, Human Genomics Unit/ DNA, Gunshot Residue and Toolmark Analysis, Field Criminalistics and Evidence Control. These labs are utilized to help the medical examiners determine cause and manner of death. You are getting a rare opportunity to understand the inner working of the Medical Examiner-Coroner’s Office. And this insight will help you in future investigations.</p>		
<p>Week 5 Date: 2/10</p>	<p>FIELD TRIP TO THE ORANGE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURTHOUSE!</p> <p>OC Superior Court PIO Kostas Kalaitzidis knows all the ins and outs of the California courts. And you want someone like him helping you navigate the system, because it’s admittedly confusing. You have court administrators who are afraid to give out public records for fear of getting in trouble. Some courts still deal with paper records and refuse to go electronic. While others charge the media exorbitant fees to get records.</p> <p>But civil and criminal court records are a wealth of information. And a great jumping off point for a story. Divorce records, search warrants and pre-sentence reports contain personal, detailed and private information that can help flush out a story.</p>	<p>Reading: Surveillance Self Defense – Tips, Tools and How-Tos for Safer Online Communications https://ssd.eff.org/en/module-categories/tool-guides</p>	

	<p>***This is a mandatory class excursion, because the material we will be covering is so important. Please do not miss this class.</p>		
<p>Week 6 Date: 2/17</p>	<p>Guest Speaker: Foremost Security Expert, who can hack into just about any computer system. He will teach you how to protect yourself and your sources.</p>	<p>*One must first know the rules to break them!</p> <p>Reading: Politics and the English Language by George Orwell</p> <p>The Elements of Style by William Strunk</p>	
<p>Week 7 Date: 2/24</p>	<p>How to Write Expository</p>	<p>Homework: Write the first 500 words of your investigative piece in expository style. This means a strong lead and solid nut graph.</p>	<p>First 500 words due at 10 a.m. Monday 2/28. Graded</p>
<p>Week 8 Date: 3/3</p>	<p>How to Write Narrative</p>	<p>Homework: Write a draft with a narrative section</p>	<p>Second draft of 750 words due 3/10.</p>
<p>Week 9 Date: 3/10</p>	<p>Guest Speaker: Former Dateline correspondent, Chicago television anchor and investigative reporter Rob Stafford has had a long and diverse career. As a network correspondent his investigation into hazing in the military and a prime-time hour-long special on Elizabeth Smart earned him two national Emmys. And a Dateline investigation into racial profiling garnered an Edward R. Murrow. Now Rob investigates unsolved murders and crimes in the Chicago area.</p> <p>What is document cloud?</p>	<p>Homework: Familiarize yourself with NBCLX. Our guest speaker after spring break (week 10) leads the team that developed and launched it. And he's always on the hunt for new talent!!! https://www.lx.com/</p> <p>Set up a Document Cloud account</p>	
<p>Spring Break Date: 3/17</p>	<p>NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK</p>		
<p>Week 10 Date: 3/24</p>	<p>Guest Speaker: Matt Goldberg is the VP of Content Strategy for the NBCU Owned TV Stations.</p>	<p>Homework: Work on the first draft of your investigative project.</p>	

	<p>He leads the team that developed and launched NBCLX. This is NBC Universal Local's TV and streaming network that is geared toward 18 to 45 year old's. The storytelling approach encourages audiences to take part in the conversation.</p> <p>Matt has been with NBC for 17 years, previously as the Assistant News Director at KNBC in Los Angeles and NBC Bay Area. Prior to getting into management Matt was an investigative producer in Los Angeles. He was also an elected board member of Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) and was the Board President.</p>		
<p>Week 11 Date: 3/31</p>	<p>First full draft of investigative project due!</p>	<p>Homework:</p> <p>This is what it's like to go undercover in North Korea https://www.ted.com/talks/suki_kim_this_is_what_it_s_like_to_go_undercover_in_north_korea?referrer=playlist-eye_opening_undercover_journal#t-28087</p> <p>My four months as a private prison guard https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/06/cca-private-prisons-corrections-corporation-inmates-investigation-bauer/</p> <p>Jury Finds ABD committed Fraud in Food Lion Investigation Story https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/supcourt/stories/foodlion122196.htm</p>	
<p>Week 12 Date: 4/7</p>	<p>The Unscheduled Interview and Going Undercover: There will be instances where you spend weeks or</p>	<p>Reading: Take note where you are in Catch and kill. Get caught up if you are not already.</p>	

	<p>months investigating, seeking the truth. Eventually it comes time to interview the subject of your investigation. He/she doesn't want to give you an interview. Sometimes it's enough that you tried. In some instances, it's important to ask the person the hard questions face-to-face even though he/she turned down your interview request.</p> <p>Guest Speaker: TBA</p> <p>Lecture: The confrontation: Why, when and how to do it.</p>	Work on final project	
Week 13 Date: 4/14	Fact-checking with Document Cloud.	Homework: Write second draft	Due 4/21. Bring hard copy to class
Week 14 Date: 4/21	Writing workshop. Bring your second draft to class.	HOMEWORK: Work on final draft	Final Draft due at noon on April 28.
Week 15 Date: 4/28	<p>Presentation of final Stories</p> <p>Evaluations</p> <p>Recap of class</p>		
FINAL EXAM PERIOD Date: Wednesday, May 11, 2-4 p.m.	<p>Summative Experience</p> <p>How to get a job</p>		

Additional Policies

Students are expected to read their USC email for messages from the instructors. Sometimes, readings or assignments will be changed, and it will be no excuse not to have read the email. Attendance is critical, because the discussion and in-class exercises are major parts of learning in this course. For field assignments, you will be representing USC, so you must conduct yourself in a professional and respectful manner.

Communication

Always feel welcome to reach out to the instructor via email or, if urgent, text. I will almost always reply within 24 hours, sooner if it is urgent.

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 or public relations class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, 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

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776

osas.usc.edu/

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscsa.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

About Your Instructor

Tammy Leitner is a 12-time Emmy-award winning broadcast and print investigative journalist. She has worked as a network correspondent reporting on The Today Show, Nightly News and MSNBC. Before that she was an investigative reporter in New York City, Chicago and Phoenix. Her investigations have taken her across the world. She was awarded a George Foster Peabody (broadcast journalism's highest honor) and an Edward R. Murrow for her international investigation into a U.S. Government cover-up that revealed American soldiers had been forced

to bury Agent Orange on a South Korean military base, leading to illnesses and deaths in countless innocent victims.

Leitner is currently writing a nonfiction book about a case she investigated two decades ago. It's slated to be published in 2023 by Thomas & Mercer.