

EN23201 / CO22901 INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM: CRITICAL THINKING
FALL SEMESTER 2013 4 Credits

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Boston College Mission Statement

Strengthened by more than a century and a half of dedication to academic excellence, Boston College commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation's finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition. As a Catholic and Jesuit university, it is rooted in a world view that encounters God in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together. In this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious traditions and value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.

Course Description

Whether your interest lies in the human interest story, breaking news, the exposé or in honing your critical thinking and writing skills, this course offers the practical skills necessary for mastering journalistic form, drawing on credible sources, reporting the facts, and sharpening your inquiry and interpretive skills. It also introduces students to the sources for public information including city and town halls, State House, court houses and regulatory agencies on both state and federal levels of government. Class will review the critical role that investigative reporting plays in democratic societies. Students read, analyze and critique investigative journalism using Pulitzer Prize Feature Stories.

Course Objectives:

The course will introduce students to the skills involved in doing investigative reporting, the resources that it draws on as well as the many benefits and few perils that come with it. Class participants will be expected to learn these sources of information and working individually or in small teams present to the class, like a reporter would, an example of their own where information can be found and how that information led to a certain decision or judgment they had formed. Class will prepare several papers on the areas of focus selected.

1. The student will demonstrate competency across cultural settings and will learn the impact of culture, gender, and age in a variety of topics as demonstrated by the articles selected for reading.
2. The student will demonstrate ethical knowledge and skill pertaining to the newspaper profession as pertaining to investigative articles that uphold the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Grading

Class members are expected to keep up with the weekly reading assignments and participate in class discussion. Students will also be graded on the class presentation and performance on three to five mini-articles - one to three pages in length – that will be assigned on individual topics discussed in class or newsworthy events. Final paper will be three to five pages in length.

WCAS Grading System

The undergraduate grading system consists of twelve categories: A (4.00), A- (3.67), excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), B- (2.67), good; C+ (2.33), C (2.00), C- (1.67), satisfactory; D+ (1.33), D (1.00), D- (.67), passing but unsatisfactory; F (.00), failure; I (.00), incomplete; F (.00), course dropped without notifying office; W (.00), official withdrawal from course. The graduate grading system is A (4.00), A- (3.67), Excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), good; B- (2.67), C (2.00), passing but not for degree credit; F (.00), failure.

Grade Reports. All students are required to log into the web through Agora to access their semester grades. Students must utilize their BC username and password to log on. If your username or password is not known the HELP Desk located in the Campus Technology Resource Center (CTRC) in O'Neill Library will issue a new one. The CTRC requires a valid picture ID (a BC ID, driver's license or passport) to obtain your password.

Text(s)/Readings (Required)

The Investigative Reporter's Handbook, 4th edition, by Brant Houston, Len Bruzzese and Steve Weinberg. We will use this text to learn the various resources that are publicly available for information necessary for researching investigative stories.

(SUGGESTED)

Pulitzer Prize Feature Stories, America's Best Writing 1979-2003, David Garlock, editor. Second edition. A compendium of the best examples of feature and investigative articles that have appeared in newspapers and magazines over a recent 25-year period.

SUGGESTED.

The Boston Globe, The New York Times

Important Policies

<http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/advstudies/guide/academicinteg.html>

Written Work

Graduate and undergraduate students are expected to prepare professional, polished written work. Written materials must be typed in the format required by your instructor. Strive for a thorough, yet concise style. Cite literature appropriately, using APA, MLA, CLA format per instructors decision. Develop your thoughts fully, clearly, logically and specifically. Proofread all materials to ensure the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You are encouraged to make use of campus resources for refining writing skills as needed [<http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring.html>].

Scholarship and Academic Integrity

It is expected that students will produce original work and cite references appropriately. Failure to reference properly is plagiarism. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, cheating on examinations or assignments, and submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without seeking permission of all instructors concerned. Scholastic misconduct may also involve, but is not necessarily limited to, acts that violate the rights of other students, such as depriving another student of course materials or interfering with another student's work.

Request for Accommodations

If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for this course, please register with either Dr. Kathy Duggan (dugganka@bc.edu), Associate Director, Connors Family Learning Center (learning disabilities or AHD) or Dean Paulette Durrett, (paulette.durrett@bc.edu), Assistant Dean for students with disabilities, (all other disabilities).

Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

<http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html>.

Attendance

Class attendance is an important component of learning. Students are expected to attend all classes and to arrive by the beginning of and remain for the entire class period. When an occasion occurs that prevents a student from attending class, it is the student's obligation to inform the instructor of the conflict before the class meets. The student is still expected to meet all assignment deadlines. If a student knows that he or she will be absent on a particular day, the student is responsible for seeing the instructor beforehand to obtain the assignments for that day. If a student misses a class, he or she is responsible for making up the work by obtaining a classmate's notes and handouts and turning in any assignments due. Furthermore, many instructors give points for participation in class. If you miss class, you cannot make up participation points associated with that class. Types of absences that are not typically excused include weddings, showers, vacations, birthday parties, graduations, etc. Additional assignments, penalties and correctives are at the discretion of the instructor. If circumstances necessitate excessive absence from class, the student should consider withdrawing from the class. In all cases, students are expected to accept the decision of the instructor regarding attendance policies specific to the class.

Consistent with our commitment of creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that every reasonable effort should be made to allow members of the university community to observe their religious holidays without jeopardizing the fulfillment of their academic obligations. It is the responsibility of students to review course syllabi as soon as they are distributed and to consult the faculty member promptly regarding any possible conflicts with observed religious holidays. If asked, the student should provide accurate information about the obligations entailed in the observance of that particular holiday. However, it is the responsibility of the student to complete any and all class requirements for days that are missed due to conflicts due to religious holidays.

There may be circumstances that necessitate a departure from this policy. Feel free to contact the WCAS at 617-552-3900 for consultation.

Deadlines

Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the specified dates. Late assignments will be graded accordingly.

Course Assignments (readings, exercises and/or experiences)

Our class will meet the four credit hours of instructor time through our in-class sessions which customarily will last for two and a half hours, as well as 90 minutes weekly of out-of-class work gained by covering selected campus events as news assignments or research at various resource centers including courthouses, City Hall or the State House.

Students are also expected to stay abreast of news coverage provided by The Boston Globe and New York Times, and be ready to discuss articles that have shown good research and enlightened reporting. In all, students will be expected to commit eight hours a week to study time to stay abreast of resources – on-line or in public sites – that are available in the areas we are researching including the legal system, legislative process, running for public office, real estate transactions, measuring performance of educational and health care institutions.

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>Reading/Exercises/Experiences</u> | <u>Due Date</u> |
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Week 1 - Introduction. What the course will cover, what will be expected of students and history of the importance and relevance of investigative reporting/critical thinking for both newspapers and our lives.

Week 2 - The court system - Part One: The criminal side. Will cover how to gain information on the prosecution of crimes - from police reports, court documents and decisions, from neighborhood district courts to the US Supreme Court. How the information provides the underpinning for all crime stories yet may lead to wrong assumptions about the guilt of those arrested. Coverage of Boston's infamous Charles Stuart case will be discussed.

Week 3 - The court system - Part Two - The civil side. Will cover how to gain information from civil law suits that are filed at both district court and superiors courts in Massachusetts. Also, what information is available concerning divorces and other family-related issues at county Probate courts and the federal bankruptcy court. How this information can provide valued information on individuals who are being profiled or caught up in a public controversy in the papers. The coverage of the Clark Rockefeller case will be discussed.

Week 4 - Where's What - From who really owns your apartment building to what the seller of the house you're hoping to buy originally paid for it, we'll learn where the information is available and how to access it. From the cleanliness of your favorite neighborhood restaurant to the purity of your tap water, we'll also learn how to access these records and compare with those of our friends in neighboring towns. Just about everything we pay for or consume is inspected and evaluated by local, state and/or federal governments. We'll learn how to find those records and make the necessary comparisons which make us better consumers.

Week 5 - Interviewing Techniques - We take a break from searching of public records to improve our interviewing skills. Gaining information, whether in person or over the phone, is an integral part of a reporter's job and we will learn about the importance of the task and how to improve those skills from one or two of The Globe's best, including, hopefully Ric Kahn, retired Globe reporter. We will also explore how to gain information via the state's and federal Public Information/Freedom of Information Acts.

Week 6 - Politics - After BC football, politics is the most popular contact sport in this city and state. This semester presents a political junkie's dream season as candidates for the key spots of mayor of the city of Boston, the US Senate seat to succeed Sen. Edward M. Kennedy and get ready for next November's election of Massachusetts governor. We'll talk about what are the key issues on which voters will decide their choices as well as how campaigns are run. We will explore how the billions that will be spent this year in the US federal elections is coming from and how to judge if candidates are being swayed by the money they're receiving or voting their conscience. Globe political columnist, Joan Vennoch, who has worked both at the paper's State House and City Hall bureaus, as well as its Spotlight Team, will be our guest.

Week 7 - Government's Most Important Services - From the schools that teach our children, the hospitals that treat our families, the nursing homes that care for our parents and grandparents, to the police and fire departments that ensure our safety - we pay dearly for these valuable services and we have grown to expect optimum performance. Have we been getting our money's worth? Public agencies must maintain data to answer those questions and like your local reporters you can gain access to that information and how to interpret it.

Week 8 - Finances. How to protect your money, investments and yourselves.

Week 9 - Newspapers & Investigative reporting - How investigative reporting became hallmark of both good newspapers but also protecting the public from excesses of government and private industry. Also, how the privileges that are afforded to newspapers and journalists have evolved since the adopting of the First Amendment and the responsibilities that are attendant to those privileges.

Week 10 - The Internet - More than 30 years after I broke into the business, now everyone can be an investigative reporter and gather the information necessary that improves our communities and makes each of us better consumers, voters and citizens. From the sites that will show our own and our neighbors' tax assessments to those that will give you some idea of your financial credit rating, we will explore the ever-widening world of the web.

Week 11 - Legislation - From our utility rates to whether ticket scalping should be allowed, every year the Massachusetts Legislature makes scores of decisions that impact our lives and our pocketbooks. We look at the legislators spend their time on Beacon Hill, whether someone's pet project is getting special treatment while the state's larger problems are ignored or passed on.

Week 12 - Ethics and the Protection of Privacy - What right do newspapers and reporters, especially investigative ones, have to pry into people's lives and judge whether a person, company or agency has performed poorly. What are the standards and who sets them in deciding to criticize the performance of a politician or public official, and are those standards the same for judging the performance of teachers, police officers or private citizens.

Week 13 - Judging the Messenger. How good a job is your local newspaper or television and radio stations doing in covering your community and the issues that are important to it and you. How do these media outlets make their decisions in what is news and what to cover with their precious resources, and what does their decline in readership and revenue portend for the future?