



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

MPJO-754-01: CRIME REPORTING

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Thursdays, 8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. | Spring 2013

Instructor: Matt Apuzzo

Room: C231

- Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Whether or not you're a cops-and-courts reporter, a career in journalism will involve covering crime in some fashion. This class will give you the hands-on experience needed to tackle any crime story in any newsroom. We'll learn about covering law enforcement agencies, victims, criminals and courts. Students will learn ways to hold law enforcement accountable, how to read and understand crime statistics, and how to cover issues of crime responsibly.

Source development is an important part of all reporting, and we'll focus on ways to build relationships with sources. Students will use all the tools and skills they learned in Digital Essentials and Reporting and News Writing to report and tell stories for multiple platforms, and they should be prepared for multiple story assignments.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Organize a criminal justice beat
- Develop sources inside and out of government
- Feel comfortable interviewing victims of crime and their families
- Understand crime statistics and how to use them
- Identify and obtain public records
- Cover court hearings
- Produce enterprise stories off their beat

REQUIRED READING

In addition to the reading identified below, the instructor may assign additional articles as part of the homework. Students must be prepared to discuss any of those assigned readings in class.

ATTENDANCE

As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). Absences for classes, beyond the initial two, will result in further reduction of the final grade. If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.



If you have a legitimate reason for missing class, please let the instructor know prior to the class period to be missed. Make-up work will be assigned.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers or other communication devices while in class. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions.

ASSIGNMENTS

There will be seven assignments during the semester: six full stories and one pitch. As in the real world, students will have the opportunity to rewrite each assignment for a higher grade after receiving feedback from the instructor. The optional rewrite deadlines will be set in class.

All assignments are due in the instructor's email inbox time stamped by the due date. Because deadlines are sacrosanct in newsrooms, late assignments will not be accepted and students will receive a 0. A late first draft of an assignment may still be rewritten but the highest final grade that can be received is a C.

The seven assignments are as follows (you will get more details in class for each):

- Indictment story: Due Jan. 23 by noon.
- Arraignment story: Due Feb. 10 by noon.
- Law enforcement interview: Due Feb. 14 by noon.
- Crime stats pitch: Due March 3 in class. (No rewrite.)
- IG report: Due March 31 in class.
- Sentencing: Due April 3 by noon.
- Cold case: Due May 1 by noon.

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Class participation | 10 points |
| Indictment story | 10 points |
| Arraignment story | 10 points |
| Law enforcement interview | 10 points |
| Crime stats pitch | 5 points |
| Sentencing | 20 points |
| IG report | 10 points |
| Cold case | 20 points |
| Total: | 100 points |



Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

| | | | |
|----|----------|----|----------|
| A | 100-93 | B- | 82.99-80 |
| A- | 92.99-90 | C | 79.99-70 |
| B+ | 89.99-88 | F | 69.99-0 |
| B | 87.99-83 | | |

The instructor will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

- MPS Writing Resource Program
Lauinger Library, 217A | 202-687-4246
<http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>
- Academic Resource Center
Leavey Center, Suite 335 | 202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
<http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
One Darnall Hall | 202-687-6985
<http://caps.georgetown.edu/>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION

The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of our agenda. The instructors will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.



CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (THURSDAY, JANUARY 14)

Crime reporting. What it was, what it is, what it will be.

Students should come to class having read “Covering the Cops” by Calvin Trillin in the February 7, 1986 edition of the New Yorker. Available at <http://bit.ly/coveringthecops>

After introductions and a review of the syllabus, we will discuss the American media’s fascination with crime and how journalists can balance the public’s need to know with the risks associated with glorifying crime and criminals. We will discuss what makes a good reporter as well as the elements of a good story, both spot news and enterprise.

Assignment: Students will pick a case from the MPD’s unsolved homicide list. This case will be the subject of the final story of the semester. Students should come to class next week having researched the case in Nexis and familiarized themselves with the basic facts.

WEEK 2 (THURSDAY, JANUARY 21)

Criminal justice in a nutshell

We will discuss the legal process from the time a crime is committed: search warrants and forensics, interviews and Miranda, grand juries and indictments, pre-trial hearings and trial, conviction/acquittal. Students will receive copies of actual recent indictments from either federal or state court. We will discuss the structure and how to decipher them.

Assignment: Students should write a 400+ word spot story reporting the basics of the indictment they received in class. Also, students should begin watching the court calendar for a sentencing hearing to attend some time around the middle of the semester. Coverage of this event will form the basis of the second-most heavily weighted assignment of the semester, one that uses court records, law enforcement interviews, victim/attorney interviews and other skills learned in class.

Deadline: January 23, by noon.

WEEK 3 (THURSDAY, JANUARY 28)

Structuring a Beat

We will talk about how the best crime reporters structure and manage their beats. What sources of information can they tap? What makes a good beat reporter and what are the



pitfalls to watch out for? How have the beat and the way they cover crime changed in the digital age? What skills separate good reporters from weak reporters and what makes their stories so much more compelling than the competition? Guest speakers: veteran criminal justice reporters talk about how they manage their days.

Assignment: Attend an arraignment at DC Superior Court, federal court in Arlington or the federal court in DC. We will discuss the court calendar and how to identify arraignment days and how to obtain information from the clerk's office. Students should write a 400+ word arraignment story.

Deadline: February 10, by noon.

Reading: The instructor will distribute a case file or other investigative documents related to a certain case. Students should read these documents and conduct any public records searches needed to familiarize themselves with the case. Students will be expected to come to class next week well versed in the facts.

WEEK 4 (THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4)

Interviewing the authorities

We will spend the first part of the class discussing interview techniques when talking to authorities, whether it is a police officer, a prosecutor or an FBI agent. The second part of the class will be spent interviewing, as a class, a police officer/FBI agent about the case we read. Students should come to class prepared to ask smart questions and take notes.

Assignment: Based on the case file and the interview, students will write a 600-800 word story about the case.

Deadline: February 14, by noon.

WEEK 5 (THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11)

Attorneys

We will discuss the role of prosecutors, defense attorneys and public defenders. We'll discuss the limitations the law places on what different attorneys can say in different situations. And we'll discuss the best ways to meet, stay in contact with and interview defense attorneys. Guest speaker: criminal defense attorney.

WEEK 6 (THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18)

Victims, witnesses and associates

The first part of the class will be spent discussing the unique challenges that come with knocking on doors and interviewing people who aren't paid to be part of the criminal justice world but who find themselves thrust into it, often in traumatic situations. We'll talk about how to approach people in difficult times and what to expect. The second part of class will be a



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

discussion about the law enforcement interview assignment, the story based on the interview and case file. We will also begin to discuss the framework for the two larger assignments of the semester and how to approach them.

WEEK 7 (THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25)

Crime Stats

An introduction to crime statistics, where to get them, what they tell you and what they don't tell you. We will work in the computer lab with FBI UCR reports, the standard crime report used by cities nationwide. The instructor will explain how to read them and make sense of them. We will also discuss other sources of data available locally and federally. We'll discuss how crime stats augment but do not replace the reporting methods we've discussed so far.

Assignment: Using either UCR or local crime data, students will identify a story idea and write a pitch, along with a story memo on how you would pursue the story, what sources and what documents would be used.

Deadline: Due March 3 in class.

WEEK 8 (THURSDAY, MARCH 3)

Meet the editor

Students will meet individually with the instructor to discuss the assignments so far and discuss their pitch for the crime stats story. In the meeting, we will also talk about the sentencing and cold case stories. We'll talk about which witnesses, victims or family members to interview along with what law enforcement and attorney sources to approach and what documents to seek.

Readings:

Supreme Court opinion, *Graham v. Connor*: <http://bit.ly/grahamvconnor>

Ferguson, Mo., Use of Force Policy: <http://bit.ly/fergusonforce>

DOJ investigation of the Ferguson Police Department: <http://bit.ly/dojferguson>

DOJ investigation into the shooting of Michael Brown: <http://bit.ly/brownreport>

MARCH 10 – NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

WEEK 9 (THURSDAY, MARCH 17)

Investigating the Investigators

Who makes sure the police are honest? Who makes sure the government hands out justice the way it is supposed to? We discuss ways to identify conflicts of interests and determine whether the criminal justice system is fair. We will discuss the Justice Department's civil rights division, the role of the inspector general at the federal level and municipal oversight boards at the local level.



Assignment: The instructor will give students an inspector general's report from an investigation into police/FBI wrongdoing. Students should read it and write a 350+ word story that demonstrates their understanding and ability to find the lede and distill the document into a relatively short piece, something that could easily run online, in the morning paper, on the evening news or ripped and read on the radio.

Deadline: Due March 31 in class.

MARCH 24 – NO CLASS (EASTER BREAK)

WEEK 10 (THURSDAY, MARCH 31)

Visualizing Crime

Photojournalists/videographers have unique challenges: providing compelling visuals to a beat where suspects are camera shy, victims are reluctant to come forward and the courts are often closed to cameras. No matter what your job is, thinking visually will be a part of it. We will also discuss the ethical/moral considerations of putting victims or suspects on camera and publishing mugshots online of people who have been arrested.

Assignment: Students will write a 700+ word story off the sentencing they selected earlier this semester. The story will include quotes from the hearing, information from court/police files and quotes from attorneys, victims, families, etc.

Deadline: Due April 3 by noon.

WEEK 11 (THURSDAY, APRIL 7)

Source Development

This class will be focused on practical tips students can use in the real world to develop and maintain sources in criminal justice. The tips are universal, though, and will be valuable regardless of the beat.

WEEK 12 (THURSDAY, APRIL 14)

The Big Breaking Story

Never are the demands greater, the pace faster and the risks more perilous than during a fast-moving, transcendent news event. Think Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech, 9/11, or the Boston Marathon. We'll talk with journalists who have been there about lessons learned from these events and real-world advice for covering them.

WEEK 13 (THURSDAY, APRIL 21)

White Collar Crime

We will discuss the ways white collar criminals are treated differently from other criminals and why. We'll discuss how companies handle investigations of fraud, bribery, etc., and how



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

reporters can make sense of these often complicated stories. This session will also touch on government corruption investigations. Guest speaker(s): FBI agent/white collar criminal defense lawyer.

WEEK 14 (THURSDAY, APRIL 28)

Covering the News Conference

The first part of the classroom will involve a mock news conference announcing a development in an ongoing case. The second half of the session, we will discuss as a group the storylines we anticipated pursuing short-term, medium-term and long-term. What records would we seek? What story would we publish/air/post online or on social media today and tomorrow? What enterprise would we pursue?

Assignment: Students will email the instructor and the rest of the class their cold case story.

Deadline: Due May 1 by noon.

MAY 5 – NO CLASS

WEEK 15 (THURSDAY, MAY 12)

Final Projects

As a class, we will critique each other's enterprise story and recap the key themes of what we've learned this semester.