



MPJO-900-01: CAPSTONE

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS JOURNALISM

Tuesdays, 5:20 p.m. to 7:50 p.m. | Fall 2014

Group One Instructor: Robert Benincasa

Group Two Instructor: Carole Feldman

Group Three Instructor: Brian Healy

Capstone Coordinator: Catherine Cannon

Downtown campus, Room C230

- Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

The Master of Professional Studies Journalism degree program culminates in the Capstone. Each student produces a substantive and original reporting project on a timely issue that showcases his/her talents as a prospective journalist. It should be a major work of professional quality that requires extensive legwork, interviewing and research and will become the centerpiece of your portfolio.

The Capstone experience is intended to provide students an opportunity to demonstrate that they have the journalistic skills, ethics and initiative necessary to be a professional journalist. The Capstone project is an independent reporting endeavor. Class sessions provide feedback and structure. Group instructors will give you guidance throughout the semester, and your small groups will serve as mini-newsrooms where you will be expected to give each other feedback and support.

Successful completion of the MPSJ degree also requires submitting an ethics essay that reflects on your firsthand experience as a journalist. The essay will be graded as one of the assignments in the Capstone class.

This is a core course of the MPS Journalism program, and students must earn a “B” (83) or higher to pass the course. Please see the Graduate Student Handbook for more details. Students with at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA who receive a final grade of a B- or below may receive one opportunity to retake the course, if approved by the dean.

By the end of the semester, students will be expected to:

- Narrow down and sharpen the focus of a timely story idea
- Demonstrate reporting initiative and thoroughness
- Demonstrate the ability to work independently and problem solve
- Provide feedback in a small group setting



- Identify a target media outlet that is strategic and feasible
- Produce a professional quality story that makes use of at least two media

REQUIRED READING

There is no required text for this class, but your group instructor may assign specific articles to read. Students must be prepared to discuss any of those assigned readings in class. We recommend that students read the following book, which is focused on how to put together solo journalism projects:

Title: Aim for the Heart

Author: Al Tompkins

ISBN: 1608716740

Publisher: CQ Press College

Edition: 2nd Edition (paperback)

Year: 2011

Price (Amazon): As low as \$29.95

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

A successful class depends on the active engagement of all students. 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. What happens in class stays in class.

Students are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. If you are unable to come to class or if you know will not be there on time, you are responsible for notifying your group instructor via email prior to the start of class. There are no excused absences.

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.

Students are expected to stay in touch with their group instructor throughout the semester, including during weeks when the class does not meet. Generally, these check-ins can take place in person, over the phone or via email. At least once in June and once in July, students will meet in person one-on-one with their group instructor, outside of regular class meetings. These meetings are mandatory and are subject to the attendance policy.

All students must update the blog created for them on Blackboard each week. By the end of the semester, each student should have at least 14 blog posts. At a minimum, these updates should include at least two sentences about how you are doing. If you don't have much of an update, you need to explain what happened and what you are working on for the next week.



In the event of a weather emergency (or any other widespread emergency) that would close the Georgetown Downtown building during one of our in-class sessions, we will plan to meet virtually through online videoconferencing tools. More information will be provided on how this will work later in the semester.

OTHER GUIDELINES

Students must turn in a blurb of their subject and format by noon on June 10 for the fall semester. They will then each have a one-on-one meeting with their assigned group instructor to prepare them to write their proposals. Proposals are due at noon on July 8, and students will be notified if their proposal has been accepted or rejected for the fall semester.

Students must also meet with the SCS librarian to go over research techniques before the semester begins. We have scheduled two meetings with her: Wednesday, June 11 and Friday, June 13. Students need only attend one of these sessions. If you are unable to attend, it is your responsibility to reschedule with the librarian.

The program and instructors may give students **ONE** additional opportunity to submit a new or updated proposal, if the first proposal is rejected. If a second proposal is rejected, then the student will have to wait until the next semester to submit a new Capstone proposal. **Only students with accepted proposals can enroll in and take the fall Capstone class.**

If you decide to make a substantive shift in topic at any point after your proposal has been approved, you must immediately notify your group instructor and the assistant dean to get permission to move forward. Small shifts in focus should be discussed with your group instructor as you go through the semester. As a reminder to all students, the last day to drop the Capstone class for the summer semester – and to receive a full refund for the course – is Sept. 6.

All sources must be on the record. Any exceptions to this rule must be the result of extreme circumstances and must be approved in advance by your group instructor. You are required to provide a source list with your work plan, outline, draft and final. Your grade for each assignment will be based in part on the source list. The source list for the draft and final must include full names, phone numbers and emails for sources. The MPSJ Capstone team will do a spot check of your primary and secondary sources.

General resources for the class (including assignment sheets, tip sheets and announcements) and forums for uploading course work will be available on Blackboard. Blackboard also will be used to facilitate feedback and discussion in between class sessions.

Students **MUST** pay close attention to the rubrics for each assignment. They are designed to help you understand how you will be evaluated. Failure to adhere to them will result in unsatisfactory grades.



ASSIGNMENTS

Separate handouts will be posted on Blackboard detailing assignment requirements:

Work Plan: A timeline and reporting strategy for the Capstone project with source list, which includes reporting challenges you expect to face (these challenges must be different than the ones outlined in your Ethics Essay)

Deadline: Noon on Sept. 2

Ethics Essay: A discussion of ethical challenges you expect to face in your reporting and how you will overcome them (these challenges must be different than the ones outlined in the Work Plan)

Deadline: Noon on Sept. 16

Opening/Outline: Draft opening and nut section and/or storyboard with expected content mapped out, including list of secured elements and updated source list

Deadline: Noon on Oct. 7

Project Draft: A full first version of your project with **all** required elements

Deadline: Noon on Nov. 4

Final Project: A revised project meeting all Capstone criteria

Deadline: Noon on Dec. 1

In addition to assignments, you will be assessed on your overall process. That includes meeting deadlines, responding to feedback, posting to the Blackboard blogs, engaging in the group sessions and staying on track.

Each assignment is due by noon on the assigned day, via email to

CapstoneassignmentsMPSJ@gmail.com. The assistant dean will be a second reader and grader on the Ethics essays, drafts and final projects.

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following*:

Work plan:	5 points
Opening and outline:	5 points
Ethics Essay:	10 points
Project draft:	15 points
Final project:	60 points
Process:	5 points
Total:	100 points

*There is one exception to the grading distribution outlined above. For students who choose to do a web project, we will break out grades slightly differently, albeit with the same deadline



structure. We will provide the specifics of that grading breakdown and the web project rubrics at the beginning of the semester.

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

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program
202-687-4246
<http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>
- Academic Resource Center
202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
<http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
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 (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



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 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 2)

Class One: Overview & Tips for Success

Walk through Capstone requirements. MPSJ alumni will share their experiences on producing a successful Capstone project. Break up into small groups.

Work plan due by noon.

WEEK 2 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 9)

Class Two: Work Plan Feedback

We will hear briefly from the Digital Media Center manager. Break up into small groups to discuss Work Plan feedback.

WEEK 3 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 16)

Class Three: Pitching Discussion

Small group discussion on how you plan to pitch your project and what research you have done on your target media. Come prepared to talk about examples you have seen that are similar to the project you are doing. Break up into small groups.

Ethics essay due by noon.

WEEK 4 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 23)

Class Four: Ethics Roundtable

Discussion of Ethics essays and challenges you expect to face in your reporting. Break into small groups.

WEEK 5 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 30)

Independent Work & Individual Meetings with Group Instructor

WEEK 6 (TUESDAY, OCT. 7)

Independent Work & Individual Meetings with Group Instructor

Outline/opening due by noon.

WEEK 7 (TUESDAY, OCT. 14)

Class Five: Workshop

Discussion of openings and outlines/storyboards with small group

WEEK 8 (TUESDAY, OCT. 21)

Independent Work & Individual Meetings with Group Instructor

WEEK 9 (TUESDAY, OCT. 28)

Independent Work & Individual Meetings with Group Instructor



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WEEK 10 (TUESDAY, NOV. 4)

Independent Work & Individual Meetings with Group Instructor

First Draft due by noon.

WEEK 11 (TUESDAY, NOV. 11)

Class Six: Workshop

Discussion of drafts with small group

WEEK 12 (TUESDAY, NOV. 18)

Independent Work & Individual Meetings with Group Instructor

WEEK 13 (TUESDAY, NOV. 25)

Independent Work & Individual Meetings with Group Instructor

WEEK 14 (MONDAY, DEC. 1)

Final project due by noon

WEEK 15 (TUESDAY, DEC. 2)

Capstone Presentations

Students will share final projects and celebrate everyone's hard work.