

(This syllabus has been approved by COCI 4-28-15)

# J120: Investigative Reporting

Instructor: TBA

GSI: TBA

Location: TBA

3 units

## COURSE OBJECTIVE

Whether it's matters of national security, public health, or official misconduct, investigative reporters play a crucial role in a democracy, exposing events, realities and conditions that powerful interests would often prefer kept quiet. The best investigative reporters – such as Woodward and Bernstein, Seymour Hersh, Glenn Greenwald – change the way we think about the world.

The objective of this course is to teach students the basic tools and techniques used in investigative reporting. We will explore how to find sources, obtain public records, and craft enterprising reporting into compelling stories that go behind the curtain of public life.

This course is both an introduction to the practice of investigative reporting as well as an opportunity for students to gain practical experience working collaboratively on an in-depth reporting project.

While much of the course will take the form of a news lab where students will workshop stories, it is also a seminar where students will be exposed to guest speakers, potential sources and expert practitioners. The prerequisite for this course is *Principles of Journalistic Reporting & Writing*.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A goal of this course is to make students proficient in how professional journalists investigate leads, use public records and other sources to unearth or verify buried or hidden information.

By the end of this course students will be able to apply investigative techniques to everyday reporting as well as produce one longer form investigative piece. Students will also have built a working knowledge of the different types of public records available, including understanding how to access court and corporate documents, and be comfortable in using these documents as they report stories. Students whose work is of the highest standards may be published in the *Daily Cal* or another outlet.

### Readings:

*Pay any Price*, by James Risen

[\*Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers\*](#),

by [Daniel Ellsberg](#)

[\*Seymour Hersh: Scoop Artist\*](#), by Robert Miraldi

*All the Devils Are Here: The*

*Hidden History of the Financial Crisis*, by Bethany McLean and Joe Nocera

'*The Prescribers*,' in ProPublica, by Tracy Weber, Charles Ornstein

Newspaper periodical writings of: Darwin Bond Graham and Robert Rogers

**Week 1** What is investigative reporting? How do you pick a story?

Readings and case studies. Come prepared with one to two pitches for long- term projects. *Assignment:* Write one or two story pitches.

The memo should be a pitch and a review of what has been covered on the topic. Explain how your idea advances the story. Submit outline.

**Week 2** Court records and public records: how they can be used in reporting different types of stories. Records covered include police, criminal courts, civil courts, property records, business and corporate records. Begin reporting story and write progress memo. Guest speakers

**Week 3** Accessing financial disclosure statements, campaign statements, and other records related to elections and legislation, and personal records such as voter registration, DMV, professional licensing and vital records. How to file public records act requests also is covered. Using anonymous sources, risks, rewards and ethics. Progress memo due. Guest speakers

**Week 4** Using software to create maps, charts and graphs, and building skill with numeracy. We will work with **Tableau Public**, which allows you to create a wide variety of interactive charts, maps and tables and organize them into stories that can be embedded on the web. This software is good for both reporting and creating data visualizations for the web. Research feature story structure. Guest speakers. Progress memo due.

**Week 5** Structuring a feature: how do you research, structure and write an in-depth feature. Libel, fact-checking and the First Amendment. Protecting your sources. First draft of your final project is due. Guest speaker

**Week 6** Final projects due; class presentations

**Grading:** Students will be graded as follows: Final Project 40%, homework 20%, participation in class discussions 20%, delivering assigned work on time, 20%. Enthusiastic participation is an imperative in this class. Good investigative reporters always ask lots of questions and this is a good place to begin developing that habit.

Late assignments will be docked one full letter grade per 24 hours up to three days late (A to D).

### **Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

Students will abide by the Student Code of Conduct

<http://students.berkeley.edu/uga/conduct.asp>. There is a zero-tolerance policy for work that is submitted without proper attribution and that constitutes plagiarism. If students are unsure about the expectations regarding the Student Code of Conduct, please seek advice from the instructors.