



UNIVERSITY OF
KING'S
COLLEGE • HALIFAX

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

Advanced Reporting, JOUR3004

Term: Fall 2017

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(Be sure to include your name in a text-no cell calls please)

Office Hours: One hour before and after each class

Location: Computer Lab 1, 3rd floor
A&A

Classes: Tuesdays 3:05 p.m. to 5:25
p.m.

1. Course Description

These days, information is everywhere. It comes at us from every direction, through social media posts, online data, the news media, academic journals, our friends and family....in short, anywhere we turn. It's easy enough to be swamped by information, yet have little coherent knowledge.

This is a course about improving our understanding of advanced reporting methods, so we can know more, and therefore find and tell better stories.

We'll explore a range of reporting tools, but more importantly, we'll consider how reporters use them and think about them, and how you can use them to find news and provide necessary context.

Students will file a freedom of information request, follow it throughout the term, and write a reflective memo on both their experience and the FOI system in general. We'll discuss the progress of requests throughout the semester.

The final four classes are devoted to the Explosion Project, a class project coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the Halifax Explosion. You'll put the skills you've already learned to work, and learn new ones, in this intense month-long exercise.

2. Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

*Use a variety of public records, obtain relevant information from them, and combine information from different sources.

*Find and tell stories and provide context from research.

*Identify the objective truth, and distinguish it from embellished truth.

*Background an individual in depth.

*Integrate research from different sources into one piece of journalism.

*Use a spreadsheet to enhance your work.

*File a FOI request and follow it through the process.

*Spot some of the most common number traps before they trap you.

3. Texts/Learning Materials

Math Tools for Journalists, Second Edition (Kathleen Woodruff Wickham)

Digging Deeper, a Canadian Reporter's Research Guide, Third Edition (Cribb et al)

Handouts as circulated

Both are available in the bookstore

Students will be responsible for filing one freedom of information request. The requests usually have a fee of \$5.00, about the price of a fancy cup of coffee. If you have your own chequing account, you can write your own cheque for the fee, if online filing isn't available. If you don't have a chequing account, bring your completed request and addressed envelope to the third class along with the fee in cash, and I will mail it for you, and include a cheque. Some requests can be filed online using a credit card or Visa debit.

4. Ground Rules/Protocol

In-class protocol

Studies have shown it is not possible to learn effectively when you are trying to send unrelated emails, check your Facebook, Instagram, etc. These activities will also interfere with the learning of those around you. Therefore, the following rules apply and will be enforced strictly.

- Cell phones and other mobile electronic devices are to be off or set to airplane mode for the duration of each class unless their use is expressly authorized;
- Lab computer monitors are to be off unless we are actively using the computers in class; and
- Students' own laptop computers are to be used for notetaking or authorized class activities only.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory.

How to hand in assignments

Writing assignments will be handed in on paper, usually at the start of the class when they are due. **Do not send assignments by email unless directed. Please keep a copy of your work as a backup** in case something you have handed in goes astray. You just never know. Certain assignments may be submitted electronically, and you will be provided with instructions when this is the case.

5. Assessment

This is a hands-on class focused on reporting and writing, so most of our assignments are news stories. We will also have one longer news feature, the freedom of information assignment, two quizzes worth 10 per cent in total, and the numeracy test.

10 % each	Four reporting and writing assignments
5 % each	Three popup quizzes on the readings
5 %	Numeracy quiz
15%	Explosion feature
10%	Explosion research and participation
15%	FOI assignment

Grade Scale

Grade	Grade Point Value		Definition	Explanation
A+	4.30	90-100	Excellent	Considerable evidence of original thinking; demonstrated outstanding capacity to analyze and synthesize; outstanding grasp of subject matter; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
A	4.00	85-89		
A-	3.70	80-84		
B+	3.30	77-79	Good	Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytical ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature
B	3.00	73-76		
B-	2.70	70-72		
C+	2.30	65-69	Satisfactory	Evidence of some understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems; benefiting from his/her university experience
C	2.00	60-64		
C-	1.70	55-59		

D	1.00	50-54	Marginal Pass	Evidence of minimally acceptable familiarity with subject matter; some critical and analytical skills.
F	0.00	0-49	Inadequate	Insufficient evidence of understanding of the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytical skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature
INC	0.00		Incomplete	
W	Neutral and no credit obtained		Withdrew after deadline	
ILL	Neutral and no credit obtained		Compassionate reasons, illness	

6. Assignments

Freedom of Information request assignment: Students will file a freedom of information request early in the term, taking the topic from a list of suggestions provided by the instructor or, better yet, devising his or her own request. Each student will follow the progress of their request, and respond as necessary to any questions from government. Hand in copies of all correspondence, a brief summary of the status of the request as of the last week of classes, and copies of documents received. Write a 1,500-word memo reflecting on your experience and the broader FOI process. Readings will be provided to assist with the latter.

Research, reporting and writing assignments: You'll write four research-driven news stories. These stories will be marked half on the research and half on the writing quality, storytelling, grammar, style, etc.

Final project: You will participate in a special research and reporting assignment on the Halifax Explosion. This will include a feature story and contribution to group research. More details will be provided at the start of the project.

Popup reading quizzes: Three quizzes, unannounced as to timing, covering content of all readings to date.

Numeracy quiz: An in class quiz on numeracy principles. It will be closed book and last 30 minutes beginning at exactly 3:05 p.m.

Deadlines, assignment rules and penalties

Any assignment not handed in on time will be docked 10 per cent of its potential mark for each day or portion that it is late (e.g. An assignment worth 10 per cent handed in five minutes late will lose one percentage point. A day later, it will have lost two, and a day after that, three. Once you enter the fourth day late, the assignment will receive 0. There are no exceptions and no individual extensions. The university's standard protocol for work missed due to illness applies. When appropriate, assignment extensions are given for the whole class, in which case the above rules apply to the new deadline.

No interviews with friends, other students or relatives

For any assignments requiring interviews, you may not interview friends, family members (near or distant) or high school or undergraduate students (college or university) for any assignment, without first making the case for the interview to me and receiving written permission from me. If you include such an interview in a story, without written permission, you will have to redo the assignment using other sources or you will receive an automatic 0 on the assignment. This applies whether I learn of such an interview before or after I initially mark the assignment.

Why this rule? It is often an easy shortcut to call up someone you know from your hometown, or from another school, or who is in your near or distant family, especially if you are trying to do an assignment at the last moment (always a bad idea). There may be occasions when such interviews are justified, but these are few and far between, as they are in real life.

Misspelled names result in 0s.

One thing will get you an instant 0 on an assignment: misspelling someone's name. This applies without exception for names of people, starting with the second time such a misspelling is detected. If you misspell a one name, I'll let you know when I give you feedback. There is no opportunity to make up assignments on which you get 0 for misspelling a name, so go through and verify the spelling of all names before you hand in an assignment. The best source of spelling is the person him or herself, so make sure you ask and repeat back the spelling.

Why this rule? Misspelling someone's name is a sign of sloppiness and disrespect. It hurts people and earns you a bad reputation. It is a cardinal sin of journalism, and therefore a cardinal sin in this class.

7. Rubrics

Rubrics will be provided with each assignment. Quizzes are assessed on the accumulation of correct and incorrect answers, with the indicated number of marks for each question.

8. Course Schedule (subject to change both as to content and order.)

Sept. 5 Why we are here and why good research is critical. We'll explore some examples of research driving work, and why research-savvy reporters are good reporters, what the tools are and how we use them. What makes reliable information? Unreliable information? When you encounter a claim or piece of information you need to verify, how can you do it?

Sept. 12 Using freedom of information laws effectively. What to expect in response. The exemptions. Your rights under the laws. Read chapter 10 of *Digging Deeper* for today.

Sept. 19 Holding public officials and politicians accountable. Political donations records, the lobbyist registry, salary disclosure. We'll build a spreadsheet of what people are making at Nova Scotia universities. Read Chapter 4 of *Digging Deeper* for today. Please review Appendix A of *Digging Deeper* for a review on using Microsoft Excel as we will use Excel in the class. A video tutorial will also be provided prior to this class to help you prepare. You can download a copy of Excel for use on your own computer from your Dal Office 365 account.

FOI request is due for submission today.

Sept 26 Holding business accountable. Because people entrust their money to them, publicly traded companies have stringent reporting requirements, and much of the information is available online. There is also basic information on privately held companies. We'll focus on CEO salaries. You will also write the school-wide grammar test in the last 15 minutes of class today. Read chapter 9 of *Digging Deeper* for today. **First news story due.**

Oct. 3 Backgrounding people. From social media networks collecting vast storehouses of personal data to land registry and liens data that show what people own, there are so many resources to background people. Read chapters 7 of *Digging Deeper* for today. **Second news story due.**

Oct. 10 Numbers, numbers everywhere, but which ones can we trust? Knowing the difference is the difference between good and sloppy reporting. Read *Math Tools* for today. **Third news story due.**

Oct. 17 Tracking democratic decision making. Laws, regulations, orders in council and Hansard. Read pages 77 to 80 of *Digging Deeper* for today. **Numeracy quiz at start of class today.**

Oct 24 The courts are places where people go to settle differences, as well as to find out their fate under the criminal law. They're a font of stories if you know where to look. We'll explore some important civil court records and how we can use them. Read pages 80 and onward of

chapter 5 of *Digging Deeper* for today. **Fourth news story due.**

Weeks 9-12. The Explosion Project (Oct 31, Nov. 14, 21 and 28)

The Halifax Explosion was the largest man-made blast before Hiroshima, wiping out a swath of the city, and killing about 2,000 people and injuring thousands more. We'll dig into archival records, consult land titles, interview experts and work on an online map. Read chapter 8 of *Digging Deeper* before the Oct. 31 class.

9. Ethical Conduct

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with and abide by the School of Journalism Code of Ethics, which can be found at kingsjournalism.com/ethics-code

10. Safety

All students are expected to read the School's safety guidelines <kingsjournalism.com/safety-guidelines/>. To do journalism well, you must sometimes be uncomfortable. You should never be unsafe. If you run into trouble, or if you feel a situation might put your or others' safety at risk, bail out and call your instructor right away.

11. Inclusive Behaviour

King's prides itself on inclusiveness and respect for others. Our classrooms and newsrooms are public spaces in which racist, sexist, homophobic or intolerant comments or humour will not be tolerated. Do not screen videos, images or web pages with such content on school equipment or in school facilities. Offensive behaviour is not just disrespectful to your colleagues and to your profession; it may constitute harassment under the King's Code of Conduct. For more information, go to the King's website <policies.ukings.ca/> and find the Yellow Book.

Contacting the Police

Students must talk to their instructor before they contact Halifax Regional Police or RCMP. On approval of their request, they must send the police an email from their official school account that is cc'd to their instructor.

12. Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is stealing someone else's work and presenting it as your own. It is a form of academic fraud. The most common cases of plagiarism involve students who cut and paste material from the Internet or copy something without giving the original author credit. In journalism, giving credit is called attribution. Do not cut and paste. Do attribute your sources.

Violations of academic integrity are handled by the university's Academic Integrity Officer and are taken seriously. The punishment for plagiarism or other forms of academic integrity can range from receiving a zero on the assignment, to failing the course, to being suspended or expelled from the university. If you have any doubt about proper citation for an academic paper or proper attribution in a piece of journalism, contact your instructor. For more information, consult the calendar of the University of King's College.

13. Accessibility

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests and exams should make their request to the Advising and Access Services Centre (AASC) prior to or at the outset of the academic year. Please visit www.dal.ca/access for more information and to obtain the Request for Accommodation – Form A.

A note taker may be required as part of a student's accommodation. There is an honorarium of \$75/course/term (with some exceptions). If you are interested, please contact AASC at 494-2836 for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require them will be able to participate in the class.

14. Appeals

Disputes over academic performance and assessment will be dealt with according to the Academic Regulations of the School of Journalism. These are described on p.135 of the King's Academic Calendar.