

**Journalism 4436/7436  
Investigative Reporting**

**Syllabus for Fall Semester 2007  
August through December 2007**

**Class to be held at 202 Lee Hills Hall  
Wednesday: 2 p.m. to 4:50 p.m.**

**Professor:** Mike McGraw

**Office:** 138 Neff Annex

**Phone:** 816-234-4423

**Email:** [mcgraww@missouri.edu](mailto:mcgraww@missouri.edu) or [mcgraw@kcstar.com](mailto:mcgraw@kcstar.com)

**Appointments:**

Please make appointments through IRE Administrative Assistant Amy Johnston.

Phone: 884-1444.

Email: [Amy@ire.org](mailto:Amy@ire.org) or [johnstonae@missouri.edu](mailto:johnstonae@missouri.edu)

**Office hours:**

Usually Wednesday, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and by appointment.

**Brief Course Description:**

This course will show you how to do investigative and in-depth reporting. It will teach you how to go beyond the day-to-day journalism done at newsrooms and how to bring context and meaning to all your stories. It will teach you how to improve your credibility and accuracy by using documents and databases, by interviewing more effectively, and by getting out into the field.

You will use primary and secondary sources - people sources, paper sources, electronic documents and databases, both online and offline.

You will learn how to organize your material and then write a compelling story that covers not only the who, what, when and where, but also the why, the how and the "so what?"

If you work hard at this course, you should be capable of doing better journalism than most journalists do. This course is intended to be extremely practical, while at the same time causing you to think deeply about the stories you do and why you do them. This course will also deal with the daily ethical questions investigative journalists face.

**Topics To Be Covered During The Class:**

1. What is an investigative story?
2. The investigative reporter mindset.
3. Paper and electronic trails - an overview. Getting a "documents state of mind."
4. Creating audit trails.

5. Levels of government: How the system is supposed to work and how it really works.
6. Secondary sources of information, hard copy.
7. Secondary sources of information, online.
8. Primary sources of information - truth and falsehoods in data and documents.
9. Agencies as repositories of information.
10. Freedom of Information issues and recent attacks on news-gathering methods.
11. Interviewing techniques and source development.
12. Checking for accuracy, the line-by-line method.
13. Ethics.
14. Organizing the information.
15. Writing the project.
16. The importance of photographs and graphics to tell the story.

### **Overall Assignments:**

1. You will report and write at least one project for possible publication in the *Columbia Missourian*, for possible airing on KOMU-TV or KBIA-FM, or for another news organization. You and I must agree on the project idea in advance, which could be your idea or mine.
2. After we reach agreement, you must find an editor or producer interested in the idea at the proposed news outlet. You will then tell me who the editor or producer is. **Your project proposal, accompanied by at least two alternate ideas, is due to me by Monday, Aug. 27.** Tell me as much as you can about what you plan to do, how you plan to do it, why your intended audience should care, and why you are enthusiastic about it. Together, we will work on the proposal. Everyone's ideas will also be discussed in class and feel free to share your thoughts about the story proposals.
3. For you to pass the course, you must hand in a project suitable for publication or broadcast **no later than December 3.** (That will give you time to make changes or do more research.) If you wish, we can critique them in class as well. The grade will be based on the completed version. If you are unable to complete the project by the end of the semester, you may substitute a detailed description (15 pages minimum, double-spaced) of the problems you encountered, what you learned, what you would do differently next time, and how you might finish the project.
4. One publishable/broadcast-quality project assures you of a B in the course and an A if your attendance and class participation is acceptable, and you complete the weekly assignments.
5. You will turn in a weekly memo **due by 5 p.m. Monday.** The memo should be turned in **by e-mail** to me and must be **at least two pages long**, double-spaced. **Please do not send the email as an attachment. Please send the memo in the body of the message.** Divide your memo into these sections. 1) Report on reading, 2) Report on document Web searches, 3) Report on project, and 4) Other comments.
6. The first memo is **due Monday, Aug. 27.** Again, memos should review books read, documents looked at, electronic information and databases checked, human sources contacted, what you learned and dead ends or difficulties that you encountered as you work on your story. Think of the memo as your weekly log or diary.

7. When you hand in your story, it should be accompanied, when appropriate, by **samples** of key documents used, including relevant laws and regulations, summaries of key secondary sources, and suggestions about angles that should be explored further in the future. **It's best to keep a three-ring binder of all your documents and work and submit that at the end of the semester.**
8. You will read the main textbook during the course, "**The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques,**" the **fourth edition**, written by Brant Houston, Len Bruzzese and Steve Weinberg. You can buy it at a discount at the **IRE offices at 138 Neff Annex**. You should buy it immediately after the first class. You will need to consult it, or subsequent editions, regularly throughout the semester, not to mention throughout your career. It is a book used constantly by many professional journalists and represents the collected knowledge of hundreds of journalists over the past 30 years. You will report on your readings in it in your weekly memo, saying what you found useful. **You should check and view each of the Web sites at the end of each chapter. (Please let me know of any that have changed addresses.)**
9. You should read news sections and legal ads of the *Columbia Missourian* and the *Columbia Daily Tribune* every Sunday. You should read the news sections of the Sunday edition of one of these national papers: the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Washington Post*. **Please let me know which one you plan to read.** These can be read online or in the journalism library. You should also read the news sections of the Sunday editions of *The Kansas City Star* or *The St. Louis Post Dispatch*. These can be read online. One of the purposes of reading the daily local papers is to see what a resource the paper is and what possible investigative ideas can be gleaned from daily stories. The purpose of reading the Sunday editions is to see how more in-depth reporting is done and to see if you can identify the documents behind the stories. There may be quizzes on these readings.
10. You will also read selections from "**Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide.**" (third edition) It is critical for journalists doing investigative reporting to have a working knowledge of the data analysis techniques used in computer-assisted reporting. Two copies will be available at the library.
11. During the semester there will be additional readings and assignments on current stories and issues, relevant historical articles, and "quick hit" research assignments. Among the readings will be relevant selections from The IRE Journal, the IRE Web site – Extra!Extra! in particular and the IRE Resource Center. **(I will give you those assignments as we go along.)** Completion of these assignments is required for you to pass this course. There may be quizzes on these assignments.

**The "sign in" you will need to access all of the IRE Web resources is listed below. Remember that tip sheets from the Resource Center can be downloaded and printed out.**

**Last Name:** InvestigativeReport  
**Membership Id Number:**

12. I expect regular class attendance and participation in the discussions. If you must miss a class, I expect you to leave a message on Amy Johnston's voice mail (884-1444) and on my E-mail, [mcgraww@missouri.edu](mailto:mcgraww@missouri.edu), telling me why you will not be in class. Unexplained and/or unexcused absences will lead to an incomplete or failure.
13. I also expect you to see me for individual meetings. Some meetings may be scheduled during class time; some will be during other hours. Please do not hesitate to contact me about questions about the syllabus or assignments through e-mail.

### **Grading:**

Investigative project - 50 percent

Completion of all readings and field assignments - 20 percent

Attendance, participation, other assignments, conferences, memos - 30 percent

To receive an A or B, you must do what's on this syllabus, plus turn in all assignments on time; do not plagiarize or commit other acts of dishonesty; and work to the best of your ability.

### **Partial Reading List:**

(Some books or parts of books will be required reading. Others will be suggested.)

Ehrenreich, Barbara; "Nickel and Dimed"

Glasser and Ettema; "Custodians of Conscience"

Houston, Brant; "Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide" (Fourth edition)

Smallman, David; Amicus Brief filed in Food Lion vs. ABC (on IRE Web site)

Stewart, James; "Blind Eye"

Selections from other books and from magazines to be named.

### **Information About Mike McGraw:**

I have been a journalist for 35 years, and never wanted to do anything else.

I graduated from the Missouri School of Journalism, where I went through the school's Washington Reporting program to get my Master's.

I covered county government for The Springfield (Mo.) Daily News. In 1972 I went to work for The Kansas City Star covering the labor beat (which few if any newspapers staff anymore). I covered corruption in the Teamsters and other unions and learned the value of using workers, labor unions and workplace records as primary sources in investigative stories.

That's about the time I became an active member of Investigative Reporters and Editors, which has taught me more about investigative reporting than any journalism school ever could. I later became a board member.

The Des Moines Register hired me in 1978. I covered and learned more about unions, workplaces, agribusiness and the meatpacking industry.

I returned to The Star in 1981 and worked briefly as a bureau chief and investigations editor. Management did not suit me, nor did my management style suit management.

I left The Star again in 1985 to work for The Hartford Courant, where I was labor editor and continued investigative reporting, covering such issues as the Challenger shuttle explosion, a building collapse and a state veterans' home that often arranged to get liquor for its sickly, alcoholic patients.

The Star hired me back for the last time (so far) in 1989 to be a reporter on its Projects Desk, where I remain today. Among other things I have written investigative series on college sports, public housing, hepatitis C and the U.S. Department of Agriculture for which I won the Pulitzer Prize.

I am currently working on the longest-running investigation I have ever tackled -- a look at a 20-year-old mass homicide.

## **University and School Policies:**

### **Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful.

Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to the following:

- Use of materials from another author without citation or attribution.
- Use of verbatim materials from another author without citation or attribution.
- Extensive use of materials from past assignments without permission of your instructor.
- Extensive use of materials from assignments in other classes without permission of your instructor.
- Fabricating information in news or feature stories, whether for publication or not.
- Fabricating sources in news or feature stories, whether for publication or not.
- Fabricating quotes in news or feature stories, whether for publication or not.
- Lack of full disclosure or permission from editors when controversial reportorial techniques, such as going undercover to get news, are used.

When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting or collaboration, consult with your instructor. For closed-book exams and exercises, academic misconduct includes conferring with other class members, copying or reading someone else's test and using notes and materials without prior permission of the instructor. For open-book exams and exercises, academic misconduct includes copying or reading someone else's work.

### **Classroom Misconduct**

Classroom misconduct includes forgery of class attendance; obstruction or disruption of teaching, including late arrival or early departure; failure to turn off cellular telephones

leading to disruption of teaching; playing games or surfing the Internet on laptop computers unless instructed to do so; physical abuse or safety threats; theft; property damage; disruptive, lewd or obscene conduct; abuse of computer time; repeated failure to attend class when attendance is required; and repeated failure to participate or respond in class when class participation is required.

**IMPORTANT:** Entering a classroom late or leaving a classroom before the end of the period can be extremely disruptive behavior. *Students are asked to arrive for class on time and to avoid early departures.* This is particularly true of large lectures, where late arrivals and early departures can be most disruptive. Instructors have the right to deny students access to the classroom if they arrive late and have the right to dismiss a student from the class for early departures that result in disruptions.

Under MU policy, your instructor has the right to ask for your removal from the course for misconduct, disruptive behavior or excessive absences. The instructor then has the right to issue a grade of withdraw, withdraw failing or F. The instructor alone is responsible for assigning the grade in such circumstances.

### **Dishonesty and Misconduct Reporting Procedures**

MU faculty are required to report all instances of academic or classroom misconduct to the appropriate campus officials. Allegations of classroom misconduct will be forwarded immediately to MU's Vice Chancellor for Student Services. Allegations of academic misconduct will be forwarded immediately to MU's Office of the Provost. In cases of academic misconduct, the student will receive at least a zero for the assignment in question.

### **Professional Standards and Ethics**

The School of Journalism is committed to the highest standards of academic and professional ethics and expects its students to adhere to those standards. Students should be familiar with the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists and adhere to its restrictions. Students are expected to observe strict honesty in academic programs and as representatives of school-related media. Should any student be guilty of plagiarism, falsification, misrepresentation or other forms of dishonesty in any assigned work, that student may be subject to a failing grade from the instructor and such disciplinary action as may be necessary under University regulations.

### **University of Missouri-Columbia Notice of Nondiscrimination**

The University of Missouri System is an Equal Opportunity/ Affirmative Action institution and is nondiscriminatory relative to race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability or status as a Vietnam-era veteran. Any person having inquiries concerning the University of Missouri-Columbia's compliance with implementing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, or other civil rights laws should contact the Assistant Vice Chancellor, Human Resource Services, University of Missouri-Columbia, 130 Heinkel Building, Columbia, Mo. 65211, (573) 882-4256, or the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

## **Accommodations**

If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act and need assistance, please notify me immediately. The school will make reasonable efforts to accommodate your special needs. Students are excused for recognized religious holidays. Please let me know in advance if you have a conflict.

## **ADA Compliance**

If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and need assistance, please notify the Office of Disability Services, A038 Brady Commons, 882-4696, or the course instructor immediately. Reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate your special needs.

## **Religious Holidays**

Students are automatically excused for recognized religious holidays. Let your instructor know in advance if you have a conflict.

## **Class Schedule:**

This schedule is subject to change depending on the availability of outside speakers.

### **Wednesday, August 22**

Overview of course and what it will cover. Your task is to carefully read this syllabus and begin to think about topics for your project. Discussion of planning investigative stories. Discussion of document trails and people trails. Discussion of searching real estate records. Discussion of using open records laws.

You need to purchase the "Investigative Reporters Handbook" immediately and begin the reading.

### **To be completed by Monday, Aug. 27.**

#### **Reading assignments:**

- 1) The Reporters Handbook: Preface, Introduction and Chapters 1 through Chapter 4.  
Also Chapter 19.
- 2) Computer-Assisted Reporting: Chapter One.
- 3) Amicus Brief in the Food Lion case - ABC case, available on IRE Web Site, <http://www.ire.org/history/pr/foodlion.html>

#### **Web assignment:**

Review the IRE and NICAR Net Tour ([www.ire.org/training/nettour](http://www.ire.org/training/nettour)), The Reporter's Desktop ([www.reporter.org/desktop](http://www.reporter.org/desktop)) and the home page of the IRE Resource Center, ([www.ire.org](http://www.ire.org)). Review the Web sites of The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, [www.rcfp.org](http://www.rcfp.org) and the Web site for Missouri's Freedom of Information Center. Find sample FOI and Sunshine Law letters on the Web sites.

**Document assignment:**

Review the legal ads from one day of the *Columbia Missourian* and a page of legal ads from one day of the *Columbia Daily Tribune*. Your memo should include comments on your reading and address questions and story ideas that the legal ads raise. **Please turn in a page of legal ads with your memo with an interesting one circled.**

**Memo 1 and Project Ideas to be turned in Monday, Aug. 27.****Wednesday, August 29**

Discussion of legal ads and how they can lead to story tips and stories. Discussion of getting “documents state of mind.” Discussion on property and real estate investigations and why it’s important to know how to research property records.

**To be completed by Tuesday, Sept. 4.****Reading assignment:**

- 1) Reporter’s Handbook: Chapters 5, 6 and Chapters 7. Re-read Chapter 19.
- 2) Selection from Extra!Extra! on subprime lending scandal and other real estate scams.

**Web assignment:**

Find relevant and useful sites on real estate brokers and on foreclosures.

**Document assignment:**

Review city and county Web sites particularly for property and tax information. Memo should include list of documents available on Web sites of city and county.

**Memo 2 due on Tuesday, Sept. 4.****Wednesday, September 5**

Meet in the classroom at 2 p.m. Jeff Porter, IRE and NICAR data library director, will talk about databases and uses in investigative stories. You will then walk up to the county recorder’s office. On the way, you will select a building to research. At the recorder’s office, there will be a lecture on real estate documents and other documents at the recorder’s office. Then you will research the ownership of your selected building.

**To be completed by Monday, Sept. 10.****Reading assignment:**

Reporter’s Handbook: Part Two Chapters 8, Chapters 9.

**Web assignment:**

Look at [www.Searchsystems.net](http://www.Searchsystems.net). Read one story from Extra!Extra! and take notes on where documents came from.

**Assignment of drive-around or walk-around story ideas:**

Each student must come back with three quick investigative story ideas from driving around Columbia or walking around the downtown area. This should be in your memo. Your memo should contain possible documents in connection with the story.

**Memo 3 due on Monday, Sept. 10.****Wednesday, September 12**

Review of real estate searches. Review of document trails using property records as a model. Discussion of project ideas. (Bring to class a copy of one page from the deed relevant to the property you are researching and notes on the latest property tax bill. Memo should include list of real estate records to be found in a real estate search.)

Discussion of local government coverage: cities and counties. Discussion of basic documents for local coverage and budgets. Discussion of local government ethics. Discussion on kinds of stories to be pursued during the semester. Discussion of obtaining documents and databases, both from the Web and in hard copy.

**To be completed by Monday, Sept. 17.****Reading assignment:**

- 1) Custodians of Conscience: Chapters 1 and 2.
- 2) Selection from Extra!Extra!.

**Web assignment:**

Review city and county Web sites again. Review the U.S. Bureau of Census site. Review Web site for licensing of professionals in the state of Missouri.

**Document assignment:**

Obtain a conflict of interest statement for a city council member and two pages of a campaign finance report for a county commissioner or city council member. Obtain the summary (one to two pages) of the city expenditure budget. Memo should include list of documents available on Web sites of city and county and on information available at state Web site.

**Memo 4 due on Monday, Sept. 17.****Wednesday, September 19**

Review of the city budget. Discussion of effective searches online. Backgrounding individuals and businesses online. Making good use of libraries. Making good use of the resource center. Review of worthwhile commercial databases. Overview of computer-assisted reporting. Investigative uses of spreadsheets and mapping software. (Jeff Porter, guest speaker.)

**To be completed by Monday, Sept. 24:**

**Reading assignments:**

- 1) Reporter's Handbook: Chapters 10 and 11.
- 2) Selection from Extra!Extra!

**Web assignment:**

Research the Web sites of the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Missouri Secretary of State.

**Document assignment:**

Obtain the form for a local business license and the cover page of a 10-K for a local business. Download the cover page of incorporation papers for a local business.

**Memo 5 due on Monday, Sept. 24.**

**Wednesday, September 26**

Discussion of cultivating sources, interviewing and of ethics in dealing with sources and whistleblowers. Discussion of project planning and organization. Discussion of story progress. A review of documents not used enough, such as the Uniform Commercial Code.

**To be completed by Monday, Oct. 1:**

**Reading Assignments:**

- 1) Selections from IRE's Extra!Extra! and resource center tip sheet on interviewing and cultivating sources.
- 2) Reporter's Handbook: Chapters 13 and 15.

**Web assignment:**

Find Web sites dealing with whistleblowers. Also find sites including inspectors general and the Government Accountability Office.

**Document assignment:**

Obtain the cover sheet on a GAO report related to your topic. Get an electronic copy of a law related to your story.

**Database assignment:**

Find a useful state or local dataset on the Web and download and sort in Excel.

**Memo 6 due on Monday, Oct. 1.**

**Wednesday, October 3**

Discussion of covering business. Discussion of investigating licensed businesses. Discussion of investigating the judiciary and basic documents and sources. Story discussion.

**To be completed by Monday, Oct. 8:**

**Reading assignment:**

- 1) Reporter's Handbook: Read Chapter 1- 4. Review Chapters 6 and Chapter 7.
- 2) Selections from Extra!Extra!

**Web assignment:**

Review Web sites on nonprofits and on insurance regulation.

**Memo 7 due Monday, Oct. 8.**

**Wednesday, October 10**

Discussion of investigating federal and state agencies. Discussion of investigating the legislatures, Congress and lobbyists. Discussion of government ethics. Discussion of state and federal watchdog agencies. Discussion of story progress.

**To be completed by Monday, Oct. 15:**

**Reading Assignments:**

- 1) Reporter's Handbook: Part Three: Chapters 22 and 23.
- 2) Selections from IRE Resource Center and the Center for Public Integrity.

**Web assignment:**

Research Missouri's Web site on the legislature and on the Ethics Commission.

**Document assignment:**

Try to obtain a state lobbyist report and an ethics filing for a state legislator. Research a federal agency's Web site, the federal government Government Accountability Office Web site on that agency, an inspector general web site on that agency. Also, look up privacy laws on the Thomas Web site. Review the Missouri legislature Web site.

**Memo 8 due on Monday, Oct. 15.**

**Wednesday, Oct. 17**

Further discussion of regulation, licensing and inspection. Discussion of ethics of licensed professionals, particularly in health, law and securities. Oral reports on project progress.

**To be completed by Monday, Oct. 22.**

**Reading assignments:**

- 1) Reporter's Handbook: Chapters 16 and 17.
- 2) Selections from "Blind Eye."
- 3) Selections from IRE's Extra!Extra!

**Web assignment:**

Review and critique one web site of the Missouri government on a group of licensed professionals.

**Document assignment:**

Obtain an ethics code for a licensed professional group. Download the annual report of a licensing board and critique the Web site of that board.

**Memo 9 due on Monday, Oct. 22.****Wednesday, Oct. 24**

Discussion of investigating health care. Hospitals, nursing homes, and clinics. Understanding the system. Discussion of investigating nonprofits. Story progress discussion.

**To be completed by Monday, Oct. 29:****Reading assignment:**

- 1) Reporter's Handbook: Chapters 18 and 20.
- 2) Selections from IRE's Extra!Extra!.

**Document and Web assignment:**

Profile a local hospital. Find GuideStar and IRS Web sites. Get a 990 report of local nonprofit and of a Missouri hospital. Try to obtain a hospital accreditation report. Obtain a nursing home report.

**Memo 10 due on Monday, Oct. 29.****Wednesday, October 31**

Discussion of investigations involving the environment. Substantial discussion of projects.

**To be completed by Monday, Nov. 5:****Reading assignments:**

Reporters Handbook: Chapters 11 and 12. Selections from the Resource Center and Extra!Extra!

**Web assignment:**

Research the Web sites of the EPA, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and the Society for Environmental Journalists.

**Document assignment:**

Obtain a TRI report for a local industry. Find five databases on the state natural resources site. Obtain a hazardous materials report.

**Memo 11 due on Monday, Nov. 5.**

### **Wednesday, November 7**

Discussion of investigating financial institutions and lenders.  
Discussion of stories and investigating utilities. Discussion of projects and presenting projects on the Web.

**To be completed by Monday, Nov. 12:**

**Reading assignments:**

1) Selections from IRE's Extra!Extra! and the Resource Center.

**Web and document assignments:**

Research local financial institutions on federal and state Web sites. Profile one local financial institution.

**Memo 12 and First Draft of Project due on Monday, Nov. 12.**

### **Wednesday, November 14**

Discussion of crime and courts investigations.  
Discussion of story progress.

**To be completed by Monday, Nov. 26:**

**Reading Assignments:**

- 1) Selections from IRE's Extra!Extra!.
- 2) Reporter's Handbook: Chapter 21

**Web assignment:**

Find a local court Web site and a federal courts Web site. Research Missouri's bail law. What are the standards? What are the rights of a bondsman? Review the FBI Web site and the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

**Document assignment:**

Obtain a court docket, a probate court document and a police crime report. Get the FBI statistics on crime in Missouri.

**Memo 13 due on Monday, Nov. 26.**

### **Wednesday, November 21**

No Class – Thanksgiving Break

### **Wednesday, November 28**

Reporting on poverty and the underground economy. Discussion of quick cash, title loans, labor issues and immigration.  
Discussion of editing and fact-checking a project.

**To be completed by Monday, Dec. 3:**

**Reading Assignments:**

- 1) Selections from "Nickel and Dimed"
- 2) Selections from tipsheets on how to cover poverty and welfare.

**Memo 14 and Final Draft of Project due on Monday, Dec. 3**

**Wednesday, December 5**

Discussion of class projects, challenges and successes.

**Week of December 10**

Individual story conferences to be scheduled.