

COMM 177I-01 and COMM 2771-01

Becoming a Watchdog: Investigative Reporting Techniques

Cheryl Phillips, Hearst Professional in Residence, Graduate Program in Journalism

Watchdog Reporting: Learn how to apply an investigative and data mindset to journalism, from understanding how to background an individual or entity using online databases to compiling or combining disparate sets of information in ways that unveil wrongdoing or mismanagement. Focuses on mining texts, tracking associations, and using visualizations. Stories produced apply investigative techniques to beat reporting, breaking news, and long form journalism. Prerequisite: COMM 104W, or consent of instructor

Instructor: Cheryl Phillips -- Class Times: Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-11:20 a.m., Lathrop 180.

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:20 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Thursday 11:20 a.m. to 1 p.m. and by appointment Office: In classroom or McClatchy 300C, 650-723-2504 Contact: cep3@stanford.edu; 206-850-1739

Required: Student membership in Investigative Reporters and Editors.

Details: Some data journalism assignments for this class can be coordinated with reporting efforts from other journalism courses with approval from all instructors. Students will work toward producing a completed publishable watchdog project, which could include a story, data visualization or data app. Whether your work is published is based on many factors, some of which will be outside of your control. You will not be graded down if the work is not publishable by the end of the quarter. Rather, you will be graded on your growth in understanding how data journalism and investigative journalism work together to produce stories with impact. You will learn or advance your knowledge of a variety of software programs used in the cleaning, analysis and visualization of data. During the course, you will all work to negotiate for documents and data as part of a Reuters project. Others will produce work that may be published at other news organizations and any work that is ready for publication may also be published on the Peninsula Press, a new site run by the communications department at Stanford. KQED and SFGate routinely use content by the Peninsula Press.
<http://peninsulapress.com/>

Data and investigative journalism involves a lot of moving parts. You will be graded on your ability to report out the facts, whether from documents or a database, how to tell a story from those facts and how to visually explore and/or present that data visually. Readings and viewings: Much of the work will be assigned via online links or for you to look up in the IRE archives. Be prepared to discuss clips and readings and lead discussions and hands-on sessions as assigned.

Grading

Reporting/Writing skills: 30%

Data journalism analysis skills: 30%

Data visualization skills for both reporting and/or presentation: 25%

Collaborative teamwork and participation: 15%

Professional journalism disclosure: When interviewing anyone for a story (on or off campus) you need to properly identify yourself “as a reporter writing BOTH an in-class assignment AND a PUBLIC story – one that could be published by major media outlets: sfgate.com, The San Francisco Chronicle or KQED via the Peninsula Press.” You must make this very clear. You need to MAKE SURE that your interviewee understands their words and image could appear in major media: the San Francisco Chronicle or KQED via The Peninsula Press. Additionally, when working on the Reuters project, you will identify yourself as working on a journalism project for Reuters.

Deadlines: Assignments should be uploaded to **Google Drive** before the start of class, on the dates assigned in the folder associated with your project team. Links to data visualizations should be included in Google Docs along with headlines, accompanying stories, etc. when appropriate. Some assignments may also be uploaded to the Peninsula Press WP site.

Structure: Most classes will include group work as well as short seminars on data and investigative journalism and demos or hands-on practice with software tools. Each student is expected to participate in class discussions, contribute constructive critique of work, and come to class having completed assignments and readings. Assignments and student work will be discussed and critiqued in class, which will be treated as a newsroom environment. Class begins promptly. Lateness or unexcused absence will affect your grade. If you have to miss class, notify me in advance. Stanford’s Honor Code applies: <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm>

Projects

(ALL) Reuters: Negotiating for data and documents (quarter-long effort)

Stops and Searches: We examine state patrol stop and search data, looking at disparities and other patterns or outliers that may lead to stories.

Student Loan settlements: We examine state-level settlements with for-profit student loans and track where the money went.

Affordable Housing: We reveal who is behind the political battle behind the local efforts for and against affordable housing.

