

Multimedia Reporting

COMM 3154 – Spring 2021 – T/R 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. – Online synchronous

Multimedia news gathering, news writing, visual content, and news judgment for print and online media

Instructor Megan Duncan, Ph.D.

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Office hours 10 to 11 a.m. Wednesday; 2 to 3 p.m. Thursday

<https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/97386738025>

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Final exam: 10:05 a.m. May 7

Required texts:

- Rich, Carole. *Writing and reporting news: A coaching method*. 8th Edition. Cengage Learning, 2015.
- Associated Press. (2020 or newer). *The Associated Press stylebook*. New York: Basic Books.
- Culver, K. B., Duncan, M., Forster, S., and Wagner, M.W. 2015. *The Media Handbook: Writing and Producing Media for the Public*.
<https://handbook.journalism.wisc.edu/>
 - This is an online textbook that you may use at no cost with the password. Please do not post the password publicly or share with students outside this course. The password is _____.

Learning objectives:

- Increase awareness of careers in multimedia journalism
- Increase awareness of trends in multimedia journalism
- Reflect on and consider ethical issues in multimedia journalism, especially those related to individual and institutional biases and prejudices
- Report, edit and produce multimedia journalism that includes audio, visual, textual and social elements
- Increase knowledge of Associated Press Style

- Improve professional interviewing skills
- Develop journalistic research skills for primary data sources
- Improve media literacy skills
- Develop a better understanding of how to write with audiences in mind

Engagement:

You have chosen to take an online synchronous course. I expect you to attend the course via Zoom for our scheduled time period, to arrive on time, to have your camera on, and to participate in discussions and activities. I incentivize this through daily reflections that are due at 9 p.m. the day of class. See the assignments section for more details. You will get the most out of this class if you participate actively and in real time. If something prevents you from turning on your camera or participating, please contact me.

Materials needed:

- SDHC SD card (at least 16GB)
- 16GB USB thumb drive or an external hard drive to store your media
- Earbuds
- Adobe Creative Cloud on your laptop

A personal laptop is needed for this course that meets the department technology requirements.

Department Equipment:

You will need to check out additional audio and visual equipment owned by the Department of Communication from the Moss Arts Center. Information is available here: <https://vtcomm.getconnect2.com/>

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Adobe Cloud

COMM majors who are sophomores, juniors and seniors are required to purchase the Adobe

Creative Cloud through Virginia Tech using the link emailed to them. Students should not use Adobe.com to create their account.

Academic integrity

Your integrity, the integrity of the work produced in this course and the Department of Communication as part of Virginia Tech, and the integrity of the institution and profession of journalism are extremely important to me and others at Virginia Tech.

I expect each of you to conduct yourselves with integrity in respect of your personal character, future careers, and the VT community.

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states:

"As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do."

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit:

[Links to an external site.](#)

The Virginia Tech honor code pledge for assignments is as follows: "I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this assignment."

Your written assignments may be reviewed through the University's plagiarism prevention and detection software called Turnitin- Feedback Studio, which is a resource designed to detect and prevent plagiarism. This software is a tool that works by cross-referencing submitted materials with journals, essays, newspaper articles, papers, books, the internet, and other literary works. Turnitin-Feedback Studio does not identify all forms of plagiarism. The software also does not replace my judgement regarding what constitutes plagiarism.

If you have questions or are unclear about what constitutes academic misconduct on an assignment, please speak with me. I take the Honor Code very seriously in this course. The normal sanction I will recommend for a violation of the Honor Code is an F* sanction as your final course grade. The F represents failure in the course. The "*" is intended to identify a student who has failed to uphold the values of academic integrity at Virginia Tech. A student who receives a sanction of F* as their final course grade shall have it documented on their transcript with the notation "FAILURE DUE TO ACADEMIC HONOR CODE VIOLATION." You would be required to complete an education program administered by the Honor System in order to have the "*" and notation "FAILURE DUE TO ACADEMIC HONOR CODE VIOLATION" removed from your transcript. The "F" however would be permanently on your transcript."

All assignments submitted shall be considered "graded work" and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Honor Code. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

Commission of any of the following acts shall constitute academic misconduct. This listing is not, however, exclusive of other acts that may reasonably be said to constitute academic misconduct. Clarification is provided for each definition with some examples of prohibited behaviors in the Undergraduate Honor Code Manual located at <https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>

1. CHEATING

Cheating includes the intentional use of unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids or other devices or materials in any academic exercise, or attempts thereof.

1. PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism includes the copying of the language, structure, programming, computer code, ideas, and/or thoughts of another and passing off the same as one's own original work, or attempts thereof.

1. FALSIFICATION

Falsification includes the statement of any untruth, either verbally or in writing, with respect to any element of one's academic work, or attempts thereof.

1. FABRICATION

Fabrication includes making up data and results, and recording or reporting them, or submitting fabricated documents, or attempts thereof.

1. MULTIPLE SUBMISSION

Multiple submission involves the submission for credit—without authorization of the instructor receiving the work—of substantial portions of any work (including oral reports) previously submitted for credit at any academic institution, or attempts thereof.

1. COMPLICITY

Complicity includes intentionally helping another to engage in an act of academic misconduct, or attempts thereof.

1. VIOLATION OF UNIVERSITY, COLLEGE, DEPARTMENTAL, PROGRAM, COURSE, OR FACULTY RULES

The violation of any University, College, Departmental, Program, Course, or Faculty Rules relating to academic matters that may lead to an unfair academic advantage by the student violating the rule(s).

Accommodations:

Accommodation recommendations from the Dean's office for ANY documented learning need (the Dean's office supplies such paperwork) will be honored. Please notify me in person by the second week of class to discuss how I can ensure that you have a comfortable and reasonable learning environment.

Any student who has been confirmed by the University as having accommodations for learning must notify me in person by the second week of class so that we can work together to ensure your learning needs are met. For more information about accommodations, please go to the **Services for Students with Disabilities** office website: <http://www.ssd.vt.edu/>

Academic Support Services:

Any student needing academic support should investigate the University's services at <http://www.studentsuccess.vt.edu/index.html>

For complete information on student services at Virginia Tech, please see: <http://www.dsa.vt.edu>.

Inclusion and support

I will honor your request to address you by your chosen name and pronouns. Please advise me of this early in the semester.

I respect and honor your cultural and religious holidays. If you have a religious or cultural observance that will coincide with this class, please let me know in an email or Zoom office hour meeting by the start of the third week of classes.

We're having a semester during a pandemic. Things are not normal, and I recognize that.

I want you to feel able to share your life experiences in classroom discussions and written work. I want you to trust that I will keep any information you share private. Please be aware that I do have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as a faculty member. This means I am required to share information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on campus with the university Title IX Coordinator.

Grading Scale

93.0 – 100 A	87.0 – 89.9	77.0 – 79.9	67.0 – 69.9	0 – 59.9
B+		C+	D+	F

90.0 – 92.9	83.0 – 86.9	B	73.0 – 76.9	C	63.0 – 66.9	D
A-						

80.0 – 82.9 B- 70.0 – 72.9 C- 60.0 – 62.9 D-

Graded Assignments

- **In-class:**

- Tuesdays: A short quiz on current events, the material covered during the past week and assigned AP style categories will start each Tuesday class. During the first week we'll talk about what this quiz looks like and create a practice quiz for the class. The quiz will be administered in Canvas, and you'll have 10 minutes to complete the quiz. Two scores drop from your final grade calculation, so you can miss two quizzes without an impact on your grade.
- Thursday: In pairs, each of you will lead a 10-minute class discussion on a Thursday about either a journalism ethics issue in the news in the past two weeks or a multimedia journalism trend that was recently reported. If you arrive adequately prepared to lead this discussion and professionally conduct yourself during your assigned date, you will earn the full grade on the assignment.

After the presentation, each of you will reflect on the presentation or recent course material in Canvas. Two reflections drop from calculation of your final grade, so you can miss two reflections without a grade penalty. You cannot miss the day of your ethics presentation without a documented reason.

- **Attendance:** I do not formally take attendance in class. However because most class sessions involve assignments that require you to be in class, you will need to attend most days to get full credit. You can miss up to four classes (four reflections) without penalty. If you need to miss additional classes, please see that I get documentation.
- **Fundamentals:** Throughout the semester, I will ask you to complete several assignments that address the fundamentals of multimedia reporting. While none of these assignments will require independent reporting, they will help you prepare for the assignments that do. These will include in-class assignments, and assignments that you will begin in-class and finish at home.
 - Information on these assignments will be provided in class and on Canvas before their due date.
 - Examples of these assignments include:
 - Cover letter. We will draft a cover letter for a job application for an internship or job you would be qualified to apply to at the conclusion to this course.
 - Rewrite poor story. We will revise a poorly written news story.
 - Ledes and story formats. We will use the same information to write ledes for different types of story formats.
 - Photo edits. We will use photos you take from around campus to practice ethical editing techniques.
 - Each of these assignments will be graded as either a 1 or a 0. To get a 1, students should complete the assignment according to the direction and with a good-faith effort
- **Homework reporting stories:** You will do one each of four multimedia reporting projects on an assigned topic as homework. More details about each will be available closer to the assignment due dates.
 - Audio story. You will complete an audio story edited in Audition. The audio story will have at least two people sources and some natural sound. You may use your own voice to help tell the story or leave it out. You do not count as one of the two people sources.

- Text written for the web. This will be a 450 to 750-word story that involves at least three live people sources and one documentary source.
- Social media story. You will use either Twitter or Instagram to tell a story about an event you attend in person. In addition to reporting on what happens for the general public, you must interview at least one person at the event personally and report on what that person says.
- Data visualization. Using a publicly available database, you will tell a story using online tools to describe three dimensions and explain at least two relationships.
- **Individual story.** For each type of assignment, we do as homework, you will repeat it as part of your individual story.
 - Story pitch. This is your opportunity to report a comprehensive, portfolio-quality story on a topic of your choice. Pick a topic that will keep your audience interested throughout several stories, that will keep you motivated to work independently throughout the semester, and that will have an impact on the community. The topic should be both challenging and important to you, but also appropriate to the requirements of the assignment, including the time frame. Further, you need to narrow your topic to a more specific angle, define the audience that would be interested in it, and do some research to ensure that you would be able to meet the requirements of all parts of the assignment, which include meeting sources in person and using all sources' names. A template for the pitch will be available. This pitch is not graded, but you cannot continue with the project (i.e. graded assignments will not be graded) until you have an approved pitch. Meeting the deadline for the initial pitch and revised pitch will count toward your participation grade in the individual story.
 - Q&A. This assignment is designed as a check-in on the progress of your individual story. After learning the basics of writing a Q&A in class, you need to interview in person a central source to your individual story. You'll need to turn in a Q&A of that source that would be appropriate for publication. Additionally, you need to turn in an audio/transcript file, and a list of four additional sources that you plan to interview next with a two-to-three sentence description of what you want to ask them. We'll use the text of the Q&A to design a magazine layout in InDesign that will be included in your

final project. However, the substance of the Q&A will likely be used elsewhere in the project.

- Audio or audio slideshow story. You will complete an audio story edited in Audition. The audio story will have at least two people sources and some natural sound. You may use your own voice to help tell the story or leave it out. You do not count as one of the two people sources. Additionally, you may add still photos to the audio story to make it an audio slideshow.
- Text written for the web. This will be a 750 to 1,000-word story that involves at least three live people sources and one documentary source. You will need three still photos to accompany the story on the web. A maximum of one of those photos can be contributed by a source or used with appropriate copyright permission from an archive.
- Social media story. While reporting on your individual story, you need to produce one social media story either on Twitter or Instagram that directly relates to your topic. All photos and text in the story must be written or taken by you. A social media story appropriate for Twitter would include live community or press events, an insiders' look at a particularly interesting bit of reporting, or an engagement activity with a community relevant to your story. A social media story appropriate for Instagram could be a tour of a relevant location, photos of a live community or press event, photos of sources doing a demonstration, or photos presented in listicle-type format.
- Data visualization. Using documentary sources relevant to your story, you will create one data visualization to accompany the other portions of your story. This could be a map of locations, a table, a group of three charts or graphs, or an interactive.
- WordPress site. The Q&A magazine layout, audio story, social media story, text with web (with accompanying still photos) and data visualization must all be loaded onto one WordPress website. The website must be easy to navigate, professional looking, appropriate to the topic, and working.
- Individual story reflection. This is a one- to- two-page essay reflecting on how you think you did on the individual story and your experiences from it. Topics included in the reflection should include your ability to meet deadlines, your experiences interviewing, your success in reaching diverse sources, your process for self-editing, your strengths and weaknesses on each story type, and a list of at

least three goals you want to accomplish in the next semester. A template for the reflection will be distributed. This reflection, which will count toward your presentation grade, will be very useful for organizing your final presentation.

- Final presentation. Each student must make a 5-minute presentation during the final exam. This will include a 2- to 3-minute presentation of the story's final products and a 2- to 3-minute presentation of tips you would give other reporters about your experience, i.e. reporting takeaways. This presentation should be semi-formal, well-practiced, organized and useful for the audience. The final exam session is scheduled for 10:05 a.m. May 7.

Grades

Category	Assignment	Date due	Percent of final grade
<i>In-class</i>			25
	Quizzes	Every Tuesday (two drop)	10
	Ethics Presentation and Reflections	Every Thursday (each student will present once)	5
	Reflections	Every class meeting with exceptions noted on schedule (four reflections drop)	10
<i>Homework</i>			25
	Midterm: The Newsroom	March 7	5

Feature homework	Feb. 21	5
Social media homework	March 14	5
Audio story due	March 28	5
Data visualization homework	April 11	5
<i>Fundamentals</i>		10
In-class, non-reporting exercises	Various	10
<i>Individual story</i>		40
Pitch	Feb. 21	2.5
Revised pitch (if necessary)	March 7	No grade
Q&A	March 21	2.5
Written for web draft	April 18	2.5
Data visualization	April 25	5

Feedback to classmates	April 25	2.5
Audio or audiovisual	May 2	5
Social media story	May 2	2.5
Written for web	May 4	10
Website	May 4	2.5
Presentation & Reflection	10:05 a.m. May 7	5

Deadlines

Deadlines are important in this profession. Turning an assignment one minute late to 24 hours late will reduce your grade by a full letter grade. An assignment turned in between 24 and 72 hours late will reduce your grade by two full letter grades. Assignments turned in more than 72 hours late will result in a zero. Timeliness is required in the profession and I hold you to equal standards in this course. If you face obstacles to turning in the work on time, please talk to me before the deadline.

Fact errors

Even more important to reporting than timeliness is accuracy. You are responsible for seeing that facts are correct in each piece of reporting you produce. We will discuss self-editing strategies in one of the beginning class sessions. Each error of fact (including spelling of proper nouns, incorrect numbers, inaccurate descriptions) will reduce your assignment grade a full letter.

Reporting ethics

I place a high value on journalistic ethics. We'll be talking about issues of ethics each week. You are responsible for following the SPJ's Code of Ethics

<https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Violating principles regarding conflicts of interest is of particular danger to student journalists. None of your reporting work should involve issues or causes that you are directly involved in, interviewing sources who you are close to personally (parents, family, friends, partners, co-workers, roommates, ect.). Additionally, never misrepresent who a source is, the source's relationship to a story, or allow the source to read from prepared remarks. Do not coach a source on what to say. You can't "double-dip" a story reporting assignment in this course with another course or an internship. Talk with me if you intend to publish any article that you turn into me for a grade in another publication, such as the Collegiate Times

Schedule

[Please see the online schedule here.](#)

Week	Meeting	Topic	In class	Reflection	Text book	Chapter	Additional Reading	Homework reporting (assignments in this column are due at 9 p.m. Sunday)	Individual story (homework in this column is due by 9 p.m the day of class)
1	Jan. 19	Introductions; current event writing quiz activity			1				
	Jan. 21	Creating the future of journalism products			2	1			
2	Jan. 26	Careers; the modern newsroom	Quiz 1	3	22				
	Jan. 28	Ledes and quotes	Ethics presentation 1	4	7				
3	Feb. 2	Story structure and organization	Quiz 2	5	2				
	Feb. 4	Writing for the web; Rewrite poor story	Ethics presentation	6	8				

			ion 2					
4	Feb. 9	Story ideas, pitches and features	Quiz 3	7	10			
	Feb. 11	Q&A stories; interviewing	Ethics presentation 3	8	9			
5	Feb. 16	Covering meetings and events	Quiz 4	9	18			
	Feb. 18	Snow day		10 Everyone gets credit		Feature story (deadline moved to 9 p.m. Feb. 23)	Individual story pitch	
6	Feb. 23	Individual story meetings						
	Feb. 25	Spring Break Day - No Class						
7	March 2	Midterm: The Newsroom						
	March 4	Midterm: The Newsroom				Midterm deliverables	Finalized pitch due (if required)	
8	March 9	Audio stories	Quiz 5	11				
	March 11	Audio editing workshop	Ethics presentation 5	12		Social media story due		
9	March 16	Photography	Quiz 6	13				
	March 18	Using Photoshop to edit photos	Ethics presentation 6	14			Q&A due	
10	March 23	Visual design basics	Quiz 7	15		Media Handbook : Visual Composition		
	March 25	InDesign workshop	Ethics presentation 7	16			Audio story	
11	March	Web design basics	Quiz 8	17	Media			

	30				handbook: page designing		
			Ethics presentat ion 4	18	Media handbook: website design		
12	April 1	Wordpress					Q&A layout due
	April 6	No Class - Spring Break Day					
	April 8	Data journalism and visualization	Ethics presentat ion 9	19		Data visualization homework due	
13	April 13	Data journalism tools	Quiz 9	20	https://youtu.be/zsLz0mRmEG0		
	April 15	Editing and peer editing	Ethics presentat ion 10	21			
14	April 20	Individual story workshop	Quiz 10				Draft of feature story due
	April 22	Thinking about audiences		22			Data visualization due
15	April 27	AR and VR	Quiz 11	23			Peer editing feedback due
	April 29	Individual story workshop					Audio story due; social media story due
16	May 4	Revisiting careers and future in the major		24			Individual story (complete on website)
Final Exam Perio d	10:05 a.m. May 7	Portfolio presentations					