J410: Investigative Reporting
Syllabus     Fall 2013

• Section 10595   Th  4-6:45 p.m.   MZ 360

INSTRUCTOR: Henrietta E. Charles       PHONE/FAX: (310) 568-9638 *
OFFICE: MZ 337/MZ 360       OFFICE PHONE: (818) 677-2864 no msgs
MAIN OFFICE: (818) 677-3135       E-MAIL: hcharles@csun.edu

ALTERNATE EMAIL: getitwrite@gmail.com **

OFFICE HOURS: 2:30 to 4, Th; noon to 1:30, p.m., Sat
** EMAILED ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

ONLINE RESOURCES

WEB PAGE: http://newsforu.weebly.com *

THE COURSE:

Journalism 410 gives serious, highly motivated journalism majors a culminating learning experience in researching, reporting, writing and producing investigative stories and series on societal, governmental and scientific issues for print, broadcast and online formats. Ethical issues and problems, traditional techniques as well as innovative technological approaches to investigative journalism are stressed.

- CSUN 2012-2014 Catalog

GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

• Introduce students to the concepts and techniques of investigative reporting through hands-on experiences;
• Improve students’ research skills with traditional and electronic sources, including the use of computer-assisted reporting techniques;
• Continue to improve students’ facility with journalism skills, including story conceptualization and organization, as well as with writing skills’
• Continued students’ examination of ethical issues in journalism as they relate to the techniques and purposes of investigative reporting;
• Improve students’ small group cooperative skills;
• Prepare students for entry-level reporting positions.
PREREQUISITES:

1. A “C” or better in Jour 310 or 315.

2. Basic typing and computer skills

TEXTS/SUPPLIES:

1. *The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques, Fifth Edition*, by Brant Houston (Editor), Len Bruzese (Editor), Steve Weinberg (Editor), Investigative Reporters and Editors (Editor)


3. *Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters*, by Jonathan M. Ladd
   *(For Required Class Assignments)*

4. A USB drive or other means of saving your work.

5. A daily news source

   Optional:


3. Or similar grammar book/ or resource

4. A recent edition dictionary

COPY PREPARATION:

1. All writing exercises must include your name, the assigned title line (slug) and a date in the upper lefthand corner.

   **Example:** Henrietta Charles
   Story Review
   Aug. 29, 2013 or 8-29-13
2. We will use proof reading/copyediting symbols to correct errors in printed/typed stories. Be sure to review these symbols (which will be handed out in class and posted on my Web page) and use them to correct your news style errors before turning in your assignments.

3. All assignments must be typed and double-spaced with paragraphs indented at least five spaces. Stories that don’t meet these criteria will be returned ungraded.

ATTENDANCE:
Attendance will be monitored by keeping tabs on your weekly in-class assignments since something will be due at the end of each session. Three or more unexcused absences, missed assignments and/or underdeveloped writing skills due to absenteeism will significantly lower your grade. For example, an "A" student's grade could drop to a "B" or lower due to excessive absences.

University policy defines an excused absence as illness/injury, family death/emergency, religious holiday, jury duty/other government obligation or a CSUN-sanctioned activity. You must submit verifiable proof to have an absence excused.

You will not be able to make up missed in-class assignments.

CLASS CONDUCT

- Computers must be off during class except when noted by instructor. Students Caught using their computers during class will receive a lower grade for all assignment submitted that evening. No exceptions.
- Cell phones and pagers must be on silent alert.
- Private conversations are not permitted during lectures.

WORKLOAD:

- Quizzes / AP Style Exercises: Before each class, you MUST complete ONE of the AP Style exercises posted on the Class Webpage. These are self-graded but must be printed and turned in each week with your Blog entry. There will also be periodic quizzes about the required reading assignments: Investigative Reporter’s Handbook and the book for the semester, Why Americans Hate the Media.
- Weekly lectures/presentations and in-class exercises to help you learn the basic techniques necessary to write in-depth news stories.
- A final investigative article of publishable quality, using multiple sources, research methods and new media techniques reviewed during the semester. Topics will be discussed and selected in the early weeks of the semester.

GRADES:

- 25% = AP / Reading Quizzes
- 25% = Class Exercises
- 50% - Final Paper
## GRADE SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100%</td>
<td>Excellent Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92%</td>
<td>Nearly Excellent Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>Very Good Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86%</td>
<td>Good Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
<td>Mostly Good Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79%</td>
<td>Above Average Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76%</td>
<td>Average Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72%</td>
<td>Mostly Average Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69%</td>
<td>Below Average Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-66%</td>
<td>Poor Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59%</td>
<td>Failing Work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Writing Assignments:

- Your writing assignments will be graded for style, punctuation, grammar, spelling, accuracy, organization, clarity and content.
- In addition, your writing assignments will be judged on whether they include all of the key elements discussed in class, are well organized and accurate.
- Substantial errors in grammar, spelling, AP style, sentence structure and accuracy — such as repeated misspellings of names or other key words — will result in your assignment grade being lowered.
- Unless there are extenuating circumstances (cleared with the instructor) all written assignments must be turned in on the designated date/deadline.
Grading for Final Project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>The final project exhibits successful experimentation with a broad range of techniques and sources drawn from the textbook, class presentations and other resources. The information is organized, clearly sourced, well-written and reflects creativity and resourcefulness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>The final project exhibits experimentation with a broad range of techniques and sources drawn from the textbook, class presentations, and other resources. The information is organized, clearly sourced and well-written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The final project exhibits successful experimentation with some techniques and sources drawn from the textbook and from class presentations. The information is organized and clearly sourced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>The final project reflects a weak attempt to use techniques and sources drawn from the textbook and from class presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The final project was not turned in or was not responsive to the assignment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Plus /Minus grades will also be used.

OUTCOME

For this course, students will:

- Employ advanced journalism concepts, skills and techniques through hands-on experiences by producing in-depth stories and projects in a variety of multimedia formats;
- Demonstrate research skills using traditional and electronic sources, including basic computer-assisted reporting tools and techniques, to create documents, such as spreadsheets, and access databases;
- Review and use state and federal public records acts and open meeting laws, including writing public records requests and retrieving government documents;
- Examine ethical issues in journalism as they relate to the practice and purposes of investigative reporting;
- Experiment with small group collaboration in a team-reporting approach;
- Read and analyze stories and projects produced by contemporary investigative reporters.

OTHER POLICIES:

Honesty — The Journalism Department of California State University, Northridge is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. Anyone caught cheating will be reported to the Dean of Students possible action and will receive a failing grade in the class. For a further explanation of the behavior defined as academic dishonesty, and a more detailed discussion of disciplinary procedures, consult pages 647-648 of the 2012-2014 CSUN Catalog: [http://catalog.csun.edu/archives/](http://catalog.csun.edu/archives/)
Also, please remember that most the information posted on the Internet is protected by U.S. copyright laws. Passing this information off as your own is a violation of CSUN's plagiarism policy and carries the penalties outlined above.

PUT ANOTHER WAY: All of your written work for this class should be in your own words, not copied from a book/magazine/newspaper or the Internet. When words/work from other sources are used, the information should be credited to the proper source.

**Diversity** — Students in this course are strongly encouraged to broaden their journalistic experiences, with the instructor's help, by including sources and subjects from a variety of ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds; senior citizens; the disabled and poor; gay men and lesbians; and similar groups. The intent is to ensure that your work reflects the diversity of the community.

A stated commitment to cultural diversity in journalistic work is as relevant in a photography or graphics course as it is in a reporting class. In addition, the statement applies to the practicum courses and their related publications and or broadcasts, and should be adapted to accommodate other courses and special offerings not mentioned here.

**DEPARTMENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES** –

The Department of Journalism strives to prepare its students to become well-educated, principled citizens who are capable of initiating careers as skilled journalists, public relations practitioners and other related communication professionals.

- Students will be able to write for a diverse audience, using proper grammar and punctuation, word usage and spelling, sentence and storytelling structures across multiple journalistic formats.
- Students will be able to gather and analyze information, including basic numerical concepts, using journalistic storytelling techniques, such as interviewing, observation, and researching primary and secondary sources.
- Students will be able to think critically, creatively and independently.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.
- Students will apply tools and technologies appropriate for the news media professions in which they work to communicate for and with diverse audiences.
- Students will be able to understand and apply the historical, theoretical, legal and societal contexts for producing news media for consumers, ranging from local to global.

**YOUR CONTRACT**

- This syllabus clearly outlines the conditions and parameters of this class. Please review it carefully and keep a copy for reference. Acknowledgement of its contents implies an agreement by you to abide by the standards set forth within.
CLASS STRUCTURE (estimated times):

- **4 – 4:30 p.m. -** Quiz on Weekly Readings and/or Book of the Semester  
  (Schedule posted on J410 page at [http://newsforu.weebly.com](http://newsforu.weebly.com))
- **4:30 – 5:30. -** Lecture/Demonstration
- **5:30 – 6:45 p.m. –** Open/Writing Lab

COURSE OUTLINE:

NOTE: Occasionally, the course schedule may be revised to accommodate guest speakers, campus events or other unforeseen circumstances. You will be given as much advance notice as possible.

**Homework:** Reading assignments are all from *The Investigative Reporter’s Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques, Fifth Edition*, unless otherwise noted.

GETTING STARTED

**Week 1/Aug. 29**  
Course Overview & Class Survey  
Introduction to investigative reporting  
**Homework:** Chapters 1; Develop story ideas

**Week 2/Sept. 5**  
Delayed

SOURCES & ETHICS

**Week 3/Sept. 12**  
Quiz (Credit Only)  
Choose a Topic(s), get started  
Using the Internet & Social Media Responsibly  
In-class exercise  
**Homework:** Chapters 5, 7

**Week 4/Sept. 19**  
Quiz  
Finding Sources / Dealing with Sources  
Ethics, accuracy & the law  
In-class exercise  
**Homework:** Lynda.csun.edu – Up & Running with Excel

SKILLS BUILDING

**Week 5/Sept. 26**  
Quiz  
Using Excel; creating Spreadsheets  
In-class exercise  
**Homework:** Readings/Exercises posted at [http://newsforu.weebly.com](http://newsforu.weebly.com)
Week 6/Oct. 3  Quiz  Money, Math & Mapping  
In-class exercise  
**Homework:** Chapter 4

Week 7/Oct. 10  Quiz  Computer-assisted reporting  
In-class exercise  
**Homework:** Handbook 6

Week 8/Oct. 17  Quiz  Organizing, Writing & Editing the Story  
Making Your Story Interactive  
In-class exercise  
**Homework:** Work on Draft version of story (Bring extra copy and upload for peer review); Review posted guidelines on Freedom of Information

Week 9/Oct. 24  Quiz  Draft Due  
Using Freedom of Information  
**Homework:** Read, review peer articles

**WEBS & DATABASES**

Week 10/Oct. 31  Quiz  Discuss Draft Stories / Peer Reviews  
**Homework:** Chapter 20

Week 11/Nov. 7  Quiz  Researching Real Estate  
**Homework:** Chapter 13

Week 12/Nov. 14  Quiz  Doing Business  
**Homework:** Chapter 9

Week 13/Nov. 21  Quiz  Government & Politics  
**Homework:** Continue working on your articles

Week 14/Nov. 28  HAPPY THANKSGIVING 😊
Week 15/Dec. 5
Quiz
Review and Discuss Final Stories; Second Draft Optional
**Homework:** Finish Final Article

**LAST CLASS OF THE SEMESTER**

Dec. 12
**FINAL PAPERS DUE; No Exam**

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**GUIDE TO THE J410 WEB PAGE:** [http://newsforu.weebly.com](http://newsforu.weebly.com)

- **Home Page:** Handouts, examples of basic newswriting
- **Investigative-J410:** Handouts, examples of how to cover police, courts, local government and education issues. Includes Class Calendar.
- **Link for Twitter Updates:** Class updates, tips, other information. Usually updated weekly.
- **Reading Room:** Background on the Book for the Semester.
- **EXTRA CREDIT:** Self-explanatory.

* Email responses only

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**About the Professor:**

**Henrietta Charles** has taught at Cal State Northridge on a full- and/or part-time basis since September 1991 and is a former adviser to the *Daily Sundial* and *Scene Magazine*. She has also taught newswriting, feature writing and mass communication classes on a full- and/or part-time basis at Cal State Long Beach, Santa Monica College and Long Beach City College. Charles is also a part-time editor at for *City News Service*. She has more than 16 years experience as a newspaper reporter/editor covering general news stories, courts, education, diversity issues and labor at several small and medium-sized newspapers. These include the *Reno Evening Gazette/Nevada State Journal* in Reno, Nevada; the *Fresno Bee* in Fresno, Calif.; the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* in Long Beach, Calif. and the community news division of the *Los Angeles Times*. **Education:** bachelor's degree in Journalism, master's degree in Professional (Creative) Writing, both from USC.