Fall 9-1-2018

JRNL 494.01: Pollner Seminar

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SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM, UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

FALL 2018 POLLNER SEMINAR:
INVESTIGATIVE STORYTELLING

JOURNALISM 494 / MW 12:10 – 1:30 p.m. / 301 Don Anderson Hall

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Office hours: MW 10 a.m. - noon and by appointment in 429 Don Anderson Hall

THE COURSE

Tikkun Olam.

That’s this class in two words.

I know I titled it “Deep Dive: Investigative Storytelling,” but that’s just because a phrase little-known outside the Jewish community is a poor way to sell a class on hallway fliers in Missoula, and I didn’t want to be the first Pollner professor with empty seats.

Tikkun Olam, then.

It’s a Hebrew phrase that means, loosely, “repairing the world.” I first heard it from my mentor, Mike Levine, a great journalist who died more than a decade ago. He felt like the phrase represented the best of community journalism, and he put it like this: The world is broken, and it’s our job as journalists to do what we can to repair it. To have the guts for empathy. To right wrongs. In its extreme, we inflict the comfortable, and comfort the afflicted. We do this with our words, and voices, and images. We hold mirrors to our communities. We shine light in dark places. We broadcast injustice. We shout from mountaintops.

In this class, our aim is to learn the best practices to identify corruption, collusion and all manners of crime and injustice, to expose the human condition, using legal and professional means, and to tell stories that make an apathetic populous care. We will learn how to identify potential stories, how to retrieve documents and access the historical record, how to conduct interviews, how to organize data, how to structure words, and most of all, how to write stories that have the potential to change the world.

REQUIRED TEXTS
COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

40% Story in four parts
Our goal this semester is to complete a single impactful investigative story. We’ll do this in four parts (each worth 10 points): the pitch, the reporting (getting documents, interviews, research), the draft, and the revised final. I’ll explain more in class.

40% Class participation
This means I will be grading you on you. Your presence. Your engagement. Your curiosity. Your commitment to learning and becoming a better journalist. That means being in class, and being active in class. In practical terms, that means that each week, you will be required to read the assigned stories written or edited by our Wednesday guest speaker(s) and come up with five written questions pertaining to their reporting, writing, or editing. You’ll hand these in at the beginning of each Wednesday class when a speaker is with us. I will know by your questions if you’ve failed to read the stories.

5% Documents request
You’ll file a request for public documents and follow it up until the agency fills the request.

5% City council story
You’ll attend a meeting of the Missoula City Council at 7 p.m. Oct. 22 and file a story, no shorter than 10 column inches, to me via email by midnight. If you CANNOT attend this meeting, talk to me in advance.

5% In-class assignment: Scene piece

5% In-class assignment: Rudy Taylor

*You’ll receive more detailed instructions for each assignment.

SCHEDULE

*Required readings appear in italics on the date they are due for class discussion. Though we are discussing the reading from the books in late October and late November, I encourage you to
pace your reading throughout the semester. Bring relevant books, articles, and any required annotations or questions about the material to each class.

**Monday, August 27**
- Introduction

**Wednesday, August 29**
- Settling on a subject

**Monday, September 3**
- No class: Labor Day

**Wednesday, September 5**
- The pitch: Learning from the best

**Monday, September 10**
- Getting docs/FOIA; tapping historical archives
  - “Spectacle: The lynching of Claude Neal”

**Assignment due: Story pitch**

**Wednesday, September 12**
- Class visit by Bill Duryea and Michael Kruse
  - “Brevard woman disappeared, but never left home”
  - “Bernie Sanders has a secret”

**Monday, September 17**
- Earning trust; helping investigations take shape

**Assignment due: Documents request**

**Wednesday, September 19**
- Skype call with Tom Lake
  - “The boy who died of football”

**Monday, September 24**
- Finding exes; developing sources; going where you’re not supposed to go

**Wednesday, September 26**
- Class visit by Tony Rehagen
  - “This land is my land”

**Monday, October 1**
- Interviewing, part I

**Wednesday, October 3**
- Skype call with Corey Johnson
  - “On shaky ground” pts. 1 and 2

**Monday, October 8**
- Interviewing, part II

**Wednesday, October 10**
- Class visit by Kelley Benham French
“For their own good”
“100 years later and it’s still hell”

Monday, October 15  Outlining
Assignment due: Story reporting

Wednesday, October 17  Class visit by Leah Sottile
7-part “Bundyville” (podcast)

Monday, October 22  No class: Council meeting coverage
Assignment due at midnight via email:
City council story

Wednesday, October 24  Class visit by Wright Thompson
“The secret history of Tiger Woods”

Monday, October 29  No class: Individual status updates (schedule TBD)

Wednesday, October 31  Skype call with Gene Weingarten
Fiddler: Fatal Distraction; The Great Zucchini;
Tears for Audrey; The First Father

Monday, November 5  Beginning to write; developing character; finding tension
In-class assignment: Scene piece

Wednesday, November 7  Editing yourself

Monday, November 12  No class: Veterans Day

Wednesday, November 14  No class: Rudy Taylor assignment
(materials available online)
“Why cops shoot”

Monday, November 19  In-class assignment: Rudy Taylor

Wednesday, November 21  No class: Thanksgiving
Monday, November 26  Assignment due: First draft of story

Everyone Leaves Behind a Name: Tracing the steps of the man who walked away; Bisket bandit exposes flaw; Art or vandalism?

Wednesday, November 28  Finding the holes; intellectual rigor

Monday, December 3  Assignment due: Final draft of story

Wednesday, December 5  Lessons learned; feedback

GRADUATE INCREMENT

For each reading assignment, graduate students will be asked to choose ONE of the selected stories to analyze. These can take the form of hard-copy annotation (my preference) or short analytical essay (300 words or less). Each should address story structure, strengths and weaknesses, cliffhangers, foreshadowing, and whatever else you see. Criticism welcome and appreciated.

RULES

Filing assignments: I’m getting accustomed to Moodle. Meanwhile, you can email me your assignments or bring a hard copy to class. This may change.

Conduct: Review the University of Montana’s Student Code of Conduct: http://life.umt.edu/VPSA/student_conduct.php. Plagiarism is prohibited and will result in a zero for the assignment and possibly the course.

Reusing work from previous classes: You may not submit any assignment for this class that you’ve written for any prior class or publication (the Kaimin, internships, etc.). This is school policy. But I encourage you to publish the work you write for this class anywhere you can, once you’ve met the class deadline.

Deadlines: Late is late, but if you’re crashing-and-burning on deadline, please come see me or call me ASAP. (There is a very short list of allowable excuses for a late assignment, and almost all of them have to do with death and disease, so try not to go there.) In plainest terms: I’ll knock a letter grade off for each day an assignment is late.

Phones, iPads, etc.: We’ll follow the Robert & Elizabeth Lake Family rule here: “Only use your phone when you’re alone.” When we have speakers, please give them your undivided attention.

Accessibility and accommodations for students with disabilities: The university is committed to making this course accessible to otherwise qualified students with disabilities. Please see me
to request reasonable program modifications. The Disability Services for Students office can help us with this process. For more info: http://life.umt.edu/dss.

**GUEST SPEAKERS**

**Bill Duryea**, enterprise editor, POLITICO; formerly national editor and enterprise editor, Tampa Bay Times @williamduryea

**Kelley Benham French**, professor, Indiana University; finalist for the 2013 Pulitzer; editor of three Pulitzer finalist stories: “Winter’s Tale,” “For Their Own Good,” and “Speak No Evil”; author of *Juniper: The Girl Who Was Born Too Soon*; winner of Scripps Howard’s Ernie Pyle Award for Human Interest Writing, The National Headliner Award, etc. @kelleybfrench

**Corey Johnson**, investigative reporter, Tampa Bay Times; Pulitzer Prize finalist and IRE gold medal winner; formerly with the Marshall Project and the Center for Investigative Reporting; co-founder of the Ida B. Wells Society @coreygjohnson

**Michael Kruse**, senior staff writer, POLITICO; formerly Tampa Bay Times enterprise; bylines in *Outside* and *Grantland*; winner of the ASNE Distinguished Writing Award; anthologized in *Next Wave: America’s New Generation of Great Literary Journalists* @michaelkruse

**Thomas Lake**, senior writer, CNN Worldwide; author of *Unprecendented: The Election That Changed Everything*; winner of the Henry Luce Award for *Sports Illustrated*; anthologized in four editions of *Best American Sports Writing* and *Next Wave: America’s New Generation of Great Literary Journalists* @thomaslake


**Leah Sottile**, freelance writer, bylines in *Outside* magazine, *Vice*, *Playboy*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Inlander*; host of the podcast “Bundyville,” a collaboration between *Longreads* and Oregon Public Broadcasting @leah_sottile

**Wright Thompson**, senior writer, ESPN.com and ESPN the Magazine; formerly *Kansas City Star*, *Times-Picayune*; anthologized in *Best American Sports Writing*