**Course Title**: Journalistic research and investigation: a practical course

**Instructor**: Marius Dragomir

**Term:**  Winter

**Module:** Elective

Credits : 2 US credits (4 ECTS)

Level : MA

**Relation to other courses:** None

**Background and Overall Aim of the Course:**

This is a distinctly practical course aimed at engaging students into a journalistic research and investigation project whose end-result will be an in-depth report that will be published on the online platforms of the Center for Media, Data & Society (CMDS) and shared with the media organizations with which the center is partnering across the world (some of them are expected to republish parts of the report or the entire work). The project will also explore the potential for policy recommendations related to the topic covered by the project.

The course will introduce students to the basics of investigative journalism, focusing on research and data gathering techniques. It will also offer an introduction to journalistic writing and discuss some of the key ethical considerations that journalists should keep in mind when they do their work.

In the first session of the course, key concepts and rules about journalism and journalistic research will be introduced and discussed. Students are encouraged to consult the recommended list of readings and resources throughout the entire duration of course, particularly those that are directly relevant for the work that will be carried out as part of the class.

The remaining sessions in the course will be organized as practical workshops where the team of students will present and discuss data and information collected for use in the final report. This final report will be drafted collectively by students under the editorial supervision of the professor.

The final, edited report will be published at a date agreed during the last sessions of the course. Those last three-four sessions will be used mostly to identify gaps in reporting and polish the final report. The work carried out during the class will be used to generate other media products, be they podcasts, short videos, short interviews, or other forms of content that will be made public along the main piece.

Although during some parts of the course, students will work individually on collecting data and information or on drafting parts of the report, the course requires team work, collaboration and constant exchanges of information. The final report will bear the byline of all participating students and professor.

**Learning Outcomes:**

By having this journalism experience, students will familiarize themselves with some of the key techniques and rules used in producing journalistic output. The course is by no means designed to prepare students for a career in journalism, but rather to stimulate their critical thinking, spur their intellectual and creative curiosity and encourage them to engage in incisive writing and analysis.

On a more general level, the course will give students an understanding of the practicalities behind the journalistic investigation from the stage of topic selection to the publication phase when the journalistic report enters the public domain. This understanding can be useful for students planning to make a career in organizations that use journalism in their work (human rights organizations, think tanks, risks assessment companies, etc.) or in fields that engage with journalists on a regular basis (policymaking and government, academia, technology, etc.).

**Learning Activities and Teaching Methods:**

This course will consist of a session introducing several key methods and techniques used in journalistic research and investigation, followed by a brainstorming session aimed at selecting the topic of the class investigation. The class will work as one team with each student being assigned research and investigation tasks needed to complete the project.

The assignment of tasks will be discussed in the class to ensure they fit the students’ strengths, interests and skills. The tasks generally include collection of data, interviewing sources, interpretation and selection of data, fact-checking and verification, and others, depending on the topic of the investigation. The team will also participate in drafting the final report under the close supervision of the professor who will edit the report for style, consistency and accuracy.

**Assessment:**

* Presence and active participation in collecting the data and information needed to complete the report (50%)
* Presence and active participation in drafting and reviewing the final report (50%)

**Course Content and Readings:**

*Session 1*

* Introduction to key journalistic research and investigation techniques: open discussion based on the resources and readings given for this course

*Follow-up work: students will think about potential topics for the project, collect some preliminary information about the topic and the issues that would be worth investigating.*

*Session 2*

* Brainstorming session: discussion about the topic of the investigation, assignment of tasks and project planning

*Follow-up work: students will start collecting data and information using the techniques agreed in class.*

*Session 3*

* Practical workshop analyzing the first round of data collection with a focus on the most relevant preliminary findings and potential areas for further investigation

*Follow-up work: students will continue collecting data and information using the feedback from the previous class.*

*Session 4*

* Practical workshop: update on the stage of data and information collection and discussion about interview planning, with a focus on selected sources, timeline, questions and topics to be included

*Follow-up work: students will conduct the interviews with sources as agreed in class.*

*Session 5*

* Practical workshop: discussion of the preliminary findings of the investigation to decide on the angles that we can/should pursue
* Tour de table: update on the progress of data and information collection, including the information obtained through interviews

*Follow-up work: students will start feeding data and information in the various parts of the planned report, in line with the plans agreed on in class.*

*Session 6*

* Practical workshop on report structure: discussion about the main parts of the report, the data and information to be used, distribution of tasks among the team members.

*Follow-up work: students will start drafting the report in line with the tasks assigned in class.*

*Session 7*

* Practical workshop: discussion of the first draft of the report with a focus on 1). Identifying information gaps and coming up with plans to fill them; 2). Checking the accuracy of data (assessment and further steps); 3). Assessing the balance of sources (assessment and plans for more interviews); 4). Ideas for visualization (charts, tables, etc. to use in the report)

*Follow-up work: students will collect further information and data to improve the report.*

*Session 8*

* Practical workshop: discussion of the additional data and information collected and agreeing on plans for revising the report

*Follow-up work: students will revise the report using the latest data and information collected.*

*Session 9*

* Practical workshop: discussion of the latest report to identify any final issues that need to be fixed

*Follow-up work: students will continue revising the report incorporating feedback from the professor.*

*Session 10*

* Practical workshop: discussion about the launch of the report, dissemination channels, visuals and design

*Follow-up work: any final editorial work that needs to be carried out.*

*Session 11*

* Wrapping-up workshop: lessons learned

*The last weeks of the course will be used for editorial work and for launching plans. The class will meet when needed to finalise the project.*

**Reading list and resources**

Data journalism

Crina Boros & Lawrence Marzouk, “Getting started in data journalism”, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), 2018 (available online at https://birn.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Data-journalism-single-page.pdf)

Giannina Segnini, “The Year of the Dead, Health and Crime”, Columbia University, 2019 (available online at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k5V4FG-Ds3BehudV3OVdHUB1VFoPfhEd/view)

Shaydanay Urbani, “Verifying Online Information”, October 2019 (available online at https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Verifying\_Online\_Information\_Digital\_AW.pdf?x88639)

**Other resources**

Craig Silverman, Verification and Digital Investigation Resources, available online at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZJbIUk5L8fe3VKK9CLVNMj9qOFdXG-RhQT6pyEgsS4I/edit

Paul Myers, Online Research Tools, available online at https://gijn.org/online-research-tools/

General Reporting Tips and Tools, available online at https://helpdesk.gijn.org/support/solutions/articles/14000036502-reporting-tips-and-tools

*More readings will be provided by the professor during the course, depending on the topic chosen to be covered by the class.*