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

**Course code:** DOPP5300

**Instructor:**  Marius Dragomir

**No. of credits (US/ECTS):** 2

**Academic year and term (fall/winter/spring):** 2023-24, Winter term

**Course level: MA**

**Course type (Mandatory, Mandatory Elective, or Elective):** Elective course

**Course description**

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 intended to be published in a media outlet with international coverage. 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.

All the remaining sessions throughout the course will be organized as practical workshops where the students will present and discuss data and information collected during their reporting. The final report based on the students' reporting will be drafted collectively by students under the editorial supervision of the professor.

The last three-four sessions in the course will be used mostly to identify gaps in reporting and to improve the final report. The work carried out during the class will be used to generate other media products, be they podcasts, short videos or other forms of content that will be made public along the main piece. The stories produced so far in the similar class during the previous years were published by the political and business magazine Politico (each story garnered more than 2.5 million views).

During some parts of the course, students will work individually on collecting data and information or on drafting the final report, yet the course requires a lot of team work and collaboration, and constant exchange of information. The final report in the international magazine will be signed by all participating students and professor (see the byline in the previous two stories).

**Learning outcomes:**

The instructor hopes that this journalism immersive experience will help students familiarize 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 (a lot more time is required for that), 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 very early phase of topic selection to the publication phase when the journalistic report enters the public domain. This overall understanding of what journalism is can be useful for those students planning a career in organizations that interact with media 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-on-one-topic-only, 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 (desk research), interviewing sources including experts, politicians, celebrities, officials, etc., interpretation and selection of data, fact-checking and verification, and other reporting work 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.

It is very likely that students will have to travel for reporting purposes either alone or with colleagues/professor.

**Assessment**:

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

Active participation in drafting and reviewing the final report (50%)

**Reading list and resources**

Data journalism, verification and investigation

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)

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

Research and investigative tools

**General**

https://magazine.journalismfestival.com/tools-for-investigative-journalists/

https://gijn.org/series/the-toolbox/

https://www.journaliststoolbox.org/2021/01/14/investigative\_backgrounding/

**Researching individuals**

https://gijn.org/citizen-investigations-researching-individuals/

https://gijn.org/2019/06/05/finding-people-online-a-tipsheet-from-paul-myers/

**Researching companies**

https://gijn.org/researching-corporations-and-their-owners/

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