

**JOUR 5155**  
**Capstone: Database Reporting**  
**(3 credits)**

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM  
& MASS COMMUNICATION  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

- Lecture/lab twice a week

**Prerequisites**

- Major status
- JOUR 3004W, JOUR 3101, and JOUR 3121

**Course Description**

JOUR 5155 (Advanced Reporting Methods) is a skills-based, capstone course designed to teach journalism students how to report and write complex, in-depth news stories that require specialized reporting, such as investigative reporting, computer-assisted reporting and the use of thorough, paper-trail research and data acquisition. The course expands upon the competencies learned in JOUR 3121, but requires more disciplined organization and analysis of information and more advanced interviewing techniques. It also includes the study of longer story forms and alternative writing styles, such as narrative writing.

**Expected Competencies**

Students should have taken JOUR 3121. All students should have the following skills:

Basic reporting techniques, including:

- Making use of meetings, speeches, hearings and other public forums to find news stories, profiles and features
- Identifying useful sources
- Conducting in-depth interviews
- Finding and analyzing public records and other documents
- Using newspapers, television news, the internet and other media to find stories
- Critically assessing sources of information to ensure thoroughness, accuracy and balance
- Writing hard-news leads and inverted-pyramid
- Using other appropriate story forms, including anecdotal leads with “nut graphs,” and graphic devices to convey information
- Organizing information from human sources, public records, historical data and other sources into clear, interesting, relevant and thorough news stories
- Revising and self-editing to improve story drafts and ensure accuracy, precision and smooth writing

An introductory understanding of advanced reporting and writing methods:

- Computer-assisted reporting methods and purpose
- Investigative project reporting and writing
- Column writing

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- Narrative writing

Journalism ethics and law:

- State and federal public records, open meetings and shield laws
- Conflict of interest
- Use of unnamed sources
- Libel law (introductory only)
- Principles of sound news judgment

**Competency goals for JOUR 5155**

JOUR 5155 is designed to teach students skills and understanding in five general areas:

Understanding various types of in-depth news coverage, such as:

- Investigative reporting
- Long-form profiles
- Profiles of businesses, non-profits, government agencies and other institutions
- Computer-assisted reporting
- Trend stories
- Social issues
- National issues, war correspondence, national security
- Polls, studies and surveys

Public records research

- Mining the Internet
- Finding and analyzing state and national historical archives
- Identifying government databases and understanding their use for computer-assisted analysis
- Identifying relevant academic research
- Researching Securities and Exchange Commission filings
- Analyzing charitable organization records
- Using specialized libraries
- Identifying and using most types of local, state, federal law enforcement data

Source cultivation and interviewing techniques

- Writing hard-news leads and inverted-pyramid news stories
- Using other appropriate story forms, including anecdotal leads with “nut graphs,” and graphic devices to convey information
- Organizing information from human sources, public records, historical data and other sources into clear, interesting, relevant and thorough news stories
- Revising and self-editing to improve story drafts and ensure accuracy, precision and smooth writing

Writing and writing preparation

- Computer-assisted reporting methods and purpose

- Investigative project reporting and writing
- Column writing
- Narrative writing

#### Context

- State and federal public records, open meetings and shield laws
- Conflict of interest
- Use of unnamed sources
- Libel law (introductory only)
- Principles of sound news judgment

### **Assignments and activities**

Reporting and writing assignments:

Students typically complete five to seven short-to-medium reporting and writing assignments, and, often, one in-depth project. A sampling of potential assignments could include:

- Using a campaign contributions database to trace campaign donors to local candidates, and using other records to determine candidates' voting records related to those donors' interests
- Researching a publicly traded company through analysis of SEC documents
- Searching public databases such as the federal farm subsidy database to identify public money flow to local agricultural businesses
- Analyzing travel expenses of public officials
- Backgrounding individuals through the use of licensing data, lawsuits, property records, financial records and other public records
- Writing profiles based on research such as the steps above and conducting in-depth interviews with the subjects and others
- Writing memos updating findings on a subject and identifying potential areas for further research and possible story topics
- Writing a final story on a subject assigned in class or determined by the student's research as the course progresses
- In-class presentation of research findings and discussion of potential story directions
- Written or oral critiques of in-depth news stories, either print or broadcast
- Quizzes on topics covered during lectures

### **Workload**

Students work an average of nine hours per week in and outside of the class. Outside class work focuses on three basic tasks:

- Reading, including newspapers, the course text and other articles or books
- Reporting, including gathering records and conducting interviews
- Writing memos, critiques and stories

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The percentage of time spent on each task will vary depending upon each student's skills, but students can expect:

- About 40 percent reporting time
- About 30 percent writing time
- About 30 percent reading time