**JOUR 4410 Online Syllabus**

Reporting of Public Affairs

Lecturer: Gary Ghioto, M.A.

Class time: Online on Canvas

Office hours: Zoom or telephone conferences by appointment on Wednesday 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. during the semester. Contact me at least 24 hours prior to the Zoom meeting.

I can be reached via Canvas email. I promise to return your email Monday-Friday within 24 hours, usually sooner.

**Course description**

This three-credit course provides training for journalists who will cover law enforcement, court, political and governmental news with typical practical news assignments assigned to professional reporters.

The course focuses on the role of the journalist, the role of the government and the Freedom of Information Act and open government acts. Reporting with a focus on environmental justice and issues in public affairs journalism are also covered.

Real-time experience covering public affairs issues will be provided and students will report across multiple platforms. You will spend time in a community covering important government and political stories that impact citizens.

**Course structure**

A learning module has been set up for each section of the class and will be activated week to week as the semester progresses.

Each weekly online class module is activated at 12 noon (CST) on Mondays during the semester. Deadlines for assignments are 11:59 p.m. Sundays of each week.

It is the student’s responsibility to follow and adhere to this schedule.

Check weekly Learning Objectives & To Do List for each week and the Canvas calendar to ensure you make deadline.

**Course objectives**

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

* Report stories on multiple platforms covering government, politics and elections.
* Learn the organizational structure and basic functionality of key public institutions, such as city councils and school boards
* Utilize and access public documents useful in public affairs and environmental justice reporting
* Understand the fundamental role of a free press, the role of the First Amendment and the importance of open government laws
* Learn the importance of fairness and ethics in covering government institutions and elected leaders

**Text and course content materials**

Associated Press Stylebook online at the UNT library databases or in print editions 2023-2025.

Poynter Institute webinars and streaming content as provided by the instructor. The costs of streaming films and Poynter.org webinars will be limited to no more than $50.

**Writing assistance**

The [UNT Writing Center](https://writingcenter.unt.edu/) is a great resource for grammar and punctuation questions. The lab also provides tutoring and assistance in writing stories and critical essays.

The course TA and the lecturer are also resources for writing and reporting questions.

**Technology requirements**

Don't use your cell phone to do any work for this course. Canvas doesn't work well with cell phones.

You must have a working computer with a keyboard and consistent high-speed internet access during the course of the semester.

This is a writing-intensive course, so having a keyboard on which to write your stories is necessary.

The assignments in this class will be turned in to Canvas. No assignments will be accepted if they are sent by email outside of Canvas. No exceptions.

**Grading**

Grades will be determined from scores on the following assignments:

Discussion = 5 percent

NewsU.org Training Webinars = 10 percent

Short exercises = 20 percent

Issues in public affairs reporting = 25 percent

Content assignments = 40 percent

**Deadlines and commitments**

I don't accept late work.

Students have up to six days to complete all reading and turn in assignments and quizzes. If you put off your work until the last minute, your grades will reflect the effort taken.

There are no retakes in daily journalism. Deadlines are sacred.

Contact me 48 hours before deadline if you are having problems making deadline. I may grant an extension for late work depending on the situation. Obituary or death notices are required in the event you miss assignments due to a death in the family.

**All work turned in after the deadline will receive a grade of zero unless the student has a**[**university-excused absence site**](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-039) **and  provides documentation with 48 hours of the missed deadline.**

Medical, legal, mental health-related or personal issues that result in missing deadline must be documented before permission to make-up an assignment will be granted. The Dean of Students Office can assist you if you have an extraordinary situation that requires you to miss assignments.

Problems with Internet or computers are not a valid excuse for missing work and no extensions will be granted as you have six days to make deadline each week.

If your Internet service is disrupted, go to campus or find Internet service at local restaurants and coffee shops.

**About AI**

JOUR 4410 is an AI-free zone.

Use of AI is considered a form of academic dishonesty. The TurnItIn system checks for it. I also use other software.

Any assignment turned in with an AI score will receive a 0. Additional AI detection will result in a referral to the university for an academic integrity violation.

**Academic Honesty**

When you submit work for this class, you are stating that you have produced the work yourself, in its entirety.  Plagiarism, fabrication, copyright infringement, and similar uses of other people's work are unacceptable.

 Plagiarism, in a nutshell, is using other people’s unattributed written words as your own. Some people consider the use of seven to 10 words in a row, copied from another source, as plagiarism. Be sure to include citations when using other people’s writing, because plagiarism is a serious offense in any discipline, especially in journalism. It is a firing offense in the professional world. In this class, plagiarism, fabrication, or other academic dishonesty can lead to a failing grade for the assignment or the course.

 Any situations involving potential academic dishonesty will be handled through procedures established by the UNT Office of Academic Integrity. The process also includes the opportunity for students to appeal the outcome.

 You should never quote friends or family members in news stories unless you have advance permission from the instructor. Most assignments for this class will not require original reporting because you will be furnished with the information you need. But the stories you pursue independently outside of class (the speech, profile, and news stories) should rely entirely on YOUR OWN reporting. If you must include information reported by another journalistic outlet (rarely, because you can almost always find a way to get the information yourself), cite the publication and date.

**Course schedule and assignments**

Note: This lineup may change. If it does, you will be notified in advance. Check each week's Learning Objectives & To Do List for specific assignments.

Week 1: The challenges and importance of public affairs reporting

Week 2: Prepping for community coverage

Week 3: How to cover a governmental meeting

Week 4: Cover a city council or school district meeting

Week 5: Ethics and public affairs reporting

Week 6: Covering elections

Week 7: Follow the money: Campaign finance reporting

Week 8: Environmental Reporting

Week 9: Cover a School Board meeting or a community issue

Week 10: Covering U.S. politics

Week 11: Covering Texas politics

Week 12: Using census data to cover a community

Week 13: Covering law enforcement and criminal/civil trials

Week 14: Thanksgiving break

Week 15: Following the paper trail

Week 16 Final story due

**Important Semester Dates**

2025 UNT [**Academic dates and deadlines**](https://uwf.edu/offices/registrar/resources/academic-dates-and-deadlines/)

**Academic Calendar**

[UNT Academic CalendarLinks to an external site.](https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html)

**JOURNALISM REQUIREMENTS & GUIDELINES**

**JOURNALISM COURSE REGISTRATION**

* By registering for this course, you are stating that you have taken the required prerequisites according to your catalog year and major/minor status. If the instructor later determines that you haven’t taken and passed these requirements, then you may be dropped at any point in the semester. If you have questions about your prerequisites, please see an advisor.
* A journalism major enrolled in any restricted 3000 and 4000 level classes must have taken and passed all foundational courses. Students must earn and maintain a 2.5 UNT and/or overall GPA (depending upon catalog year) to be eligible for major-level courses.

**RE-TAKING FAILED JOURNALISM CLASSES**

Students will not be allowed to automatically take a failed journalism course more than two times. Once you have failed a journalism course twice, you will not be allowed to enroll in that course for one calendar year after the date you received the second failing grade. Once a student has waited one calendar year after failing a course twice, the student may submit a written appeal to the director to be approved to enroll a third time. Students will not be allowed to re-take a failed journalism course more than three times.

**TEXTBOOK POLICY**

The Mayborn School of Journalism doesn’t require students to purchase textbooks from the University Bookstore. Many are available through other bookstores or online.

**FINANCIAL AID SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP) UNDERGRADUATES**

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total registered hours per semester. Students cannot exceed attempted credit hours above 150% of their required degree plan. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose financial aid eligibility.

**If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so has the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility**.

Please visit [UNT Financial Aid https://financialaid.unt.edu/satisfactory-academic-progress-requirementsLinks to an external site.](https://financialaid.unt.edu/satisfactory-academic-progress-requirements) () for more information about financial aid Satisfactory Academic Progress. It may be wise for you to schedule a meeting with your MSOJ academic advisor or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course before doing so.

**ACADEMIC ADVISING**

All first-time-in-college students at UNT are required to schedule an appointment with their Academic Advisor and receive an advising code to register for classes both fall and spring semesters of the first year in college. ALL students should meet with their Academic Advisor at least one time per long semester (Fall & Spring). It is important to update your degree plan on a regular basis to ensure that you are on track for a timely graduation.

**It is imperative that students have paid for all enrolled classes.  Please check your online schedule daily through late registration to ensure you have not been dropped for non-payment of any amount.** Students have been unknowingly dropped from classes for various reasons such as financial aid, schedule change fees, parking fees, etc.  MSOJ will not be able to reinstate students for any reason after late registration, regardless of situation.   It is the student’s responsibility to ensure all payments have been made.

**accreditation**

The Mayborn, which is one of over 100 journalism programs across the world that are accredited, is renewing its credentials this year. Accreditation is important to you because it means your degree is more valuable than one that comes from an unaccredited school.

Accreditation has profound benefits. Accredited programs may offer scholarships, internships, competitive prizes, and other activities unavailable in non-accredited programs.

Accreditation also provides an assurance of quality and rigorous standards to students, parents, and the public. Students in an accredited program can expect to find a challenging curriculum, appropriate resources and facilities, and a competent faculty.

Accreditation is our promise to our students that you will receive the best education possible in journalism and mass communication. With today’s technology, anyone can present information to a mass audience.  But not all are trained in the creation of ethical messages that reach and serve diverse audiences that our standards uphold.  What you learn in an accredited program makes you more marketable and your degree more valuable!

The Mayborn School’s accreditation is determined by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) through an extensive evaluation process.  Accreditation by the ACEJMC council means we embrace the value of a broad, multidisciplinary curriculum that nurtures critical thinking, analytic reasoning and problem-solving skills that are the essential foundation for all mass communication education.

**Adobe Access**

UNT has a contract with Adobe. The following link contains all the information that students will need to purchase a subscription, and opt-out of an existing agreement that is at a higher price: [https://cvad.unt.edu/cvad-it-services/it-services-adobe-cloud-access.htmlLinks to an external site.](https://cvad.unt.edu/cvad-it-services/it-services-adobe-cloud-access.html)

The email address for students to ask questions or report problems is adobe@unt.edu.

**JOURNALISM EQUIPMENT CHECK OUT**

Checkout length for the **Canon Mirrorless Camera, Batteries, Lighting Gear, Mirrorless Tripods, Individual Lenses, and Accessories**can be checked out up to 72 hours.

To checkout a **Canon Mirrorless Camera and items listed above** longer than 72 hours, the Professor for the course will need to approve the request.

Checkout length for the **Panasonic Video Camera, Batteries, SDXC, and Tripods** can be checked out up to 24 hours.

To checkout a **Panasonic Video Camera and items listed above** longer than 72 hours, the Professor for the course will need to approve the request.

Please send extended reservations approval from the Professor to the following email: **mayborn-equipment@unt.edu**

**Journalism Equipment Room - Location and Contact Information**

The Journalism equipment room is located at **Chilton Hall 410 S. Ave. C, Room 155.**

Equipment room phone number is **940-565-3580.**

Equipment room email is **mayborn-equipment@unt.edu****.**

Equipment room supervisor can be reached at **ladaniel.maxwell@unt.edu**

**Journalism Equipment Room - Operating Hours**

Monday/Wednesday: 9 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Tuesday/Thursday: 9 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Friday: 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Sat-Sun: 12 p.m. - 6 p.m.

**Journalism Equipment Room - Agreement Form**

Anyone who plans to check out equipment during the semester must complete the checkout agreement form found below:

[https://forms.office.com/r/q9fakNFTM8Links to an external site.](https://forms.office.com/r/q9fakNFTM8)

This form should be completed prior to checking out equipment and only needs to be done once per semester.

**Journalism Equipment Room - Late Returns/Abuse of Checkout Policy**

For every hour the student is late; a ban will be placed on the student's account accumulating the same amount of time.

A **ban**restricts the student from checking out any equipment within the Journalism Equipment Room.

For example, if the student returns equipment 2 hours late, a 2 hour ban will be placed on the student's account.

If the student returns equipment 72 hours late, a 72 hour ban will be placed on the student's account.

If you are going to be late or unable to return equipment that you checked out on time, please email **mayborn-equipment@unt.edu**or**ladaniel.maxwell@unt.edu**

**ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Understanding the academic organizational structure and appropriate Chain of Command is important when resolving class-related or advising issues.  When you need problems resolved, please follow the steps outlined below:

|  |
| --- |
| Org structure |
|  Individual Faculty Member/AdvisorAssociate Dean, Mayborn School of JournalismDean, Mayborn School of Journalism  |

**OFFICE OF DISABILITY**

**The University of North Texas and the Mayborn School of Journalism make reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time. However, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class.**

**Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student.**

For additional information see the website for the Office of Disability Access ([http://www.unt.edu/odaLinks to an external site.](http://www.unt.edu/oda)). You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

**COURSE SAFETY STATEMENTS**

Students in the Mayborn School of Journalism are urged to use proper safety procedures and guidelines. While working in laboratory sessions, students are expected and required to identify and use property safety guidelines in all activities requiring lifting, climbing, walking on slippery surfaces, using equipment and tools, handling chemical solutions and hot and cold products.  Students should be aware that the University of North Texas is not liable for injuries incurred while students are participating in class activities.  All students are encouraged to secure adequate insurance coverage in the event of accidental injury.  Students who do not have insurance coverage should consider obtaining Student Health Insurance for this insurance program.  Brochures for this insurance are available in the UNT Health and Wellness Center on campus. Students who are injured during class activities may seek medical attention at the UNT Health and Wellness Center at rates that are reduced compared to other medical facilities.  If you have an insurance plan other than Student Health Insurance at UNT, please be sure that your plan covers treatment at this facility. If you choose not to go to the UNT Health and Wellness Center, you may be transported to an emergency room at a local hospital.  You are responsible for expenses incurred there.

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or exams; dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor, the acquisition of tests or other material belonging to a faculty member, dual submission of a paper or project, resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructors, or any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage.  Plagiarism includes the paraphrase or direct quotation of published or unpublished works *without*full and clear acknowledgment of the author/source.  Academic dishonesty will bring about disciplinary action which may include expulsion from the university.  This is explained in the UNT Student Handbook.

Other penalties may apply and are included in this syllabus.

**MSOJ ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY**

The codes of ethics from the Society of Professional Journalists, American Advertising Federation and Public Relations Society of America address truth and honesty. The Mayborn School of Journalism embraces these tenets and believes that academic dishonesty of any kind – including plagiarism and fabrication – is incongruent with all areas of journalism. The school’s policy aligns with UNT Policy 06.003 and requires reporting any act of academic dishonesty to the Office for Academic Integrity for investigation. If the student has a previous confirmed offense (whether the first offense was in the journalism school or another university department) and the student is found to have committed another offense, the department will request the additional sanction of removing the student from the Mayborn School of Journalism. The student may appeal to the Office for Academic Integrity, which ensures due process and allows the student to remain in class pending the appeal.

**FINAL EXAM POLICY**

Final exams will be administered at the designated times during the final week of each long semester and during the specified day of each summer term.  Please check the course calendar early in the semester to avoid any schedule conflicts.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

As you know, your access point for business and academic services at UNT occurs within the [My.UNT site Links to an external site.](http://www.my.unt.edu/)([www.my.unt.eduLinks to an external site.](http://www.my.unt.edu/)).  If you do not regularly check EagleConnect or link it to your favorite e-mail account, please so do, as this is where you learn about job and internship opportunities, MSOJ events, scholarships, and other important information. Visit the [Eagle Connect website http://eagleconnect.unt.edu/Links to an external site.](http://eagleconnect.unt.edu/) for more information () including tips on how to forward your email.

**Important Notice for F-1 Students taking Distance Education Courses**

To comply with immigration regulations, an F-1 visa holder within the United States may need to engage in an on-campus experiential component for this course. This component (which must be approved in advance by the instructor) can include activities such as taking an on-campus exam, participating in multiple on-campus lecture or lab activity, or other on-campus experience integral to the completion of this course.

If such an on-campus activity is required, it is the student’s responsibility to do the following:

(1) Submit a written request to the instructor for an on-campus experiential component within one week of the start of the course.

(2) Ensure that the activity on campus takes place and the instructor documents it in writing with a notice sent to the International Advising Office.  The UNT International Advising Office has a form available that you may use for this purpose.

Because the decision may have serious immigration consequences, if an F-1 student is unsure about his or her need to participate in an on-campus experiential component for this course, students should contact the UNT International Advising Office (telephone 940-565-2195 or email international@unt.edu) to get clarification before the one-week deadline.

**EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION & PROCEDURES**

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify you with critical information in an event of emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence).  In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials. If Canvas is not accessible during the emergency, contact me via email or phone for more information. Students should confirm that their Eagle Alert contact information is correct via the myUNT portal.

**STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING (SPOT)**

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The short SPOT survey will be made available to provide you with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught.  You will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via *IASystem* Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Please look for the email in your UNT email inbox.  Simply click on the link and complete your survey.  Once you complete the survey you will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted.  For additional information, please visit the [SPOT websiteLinks to an external site.](http://www.spot.unt.edu/) ([www.spot.unt.eduLinks to an external site.](http://www.spot.unt.edu/)) or email spot@unt.edu. Spots survey dates:

|  |
| --- |
| SPOT |
| **Term** | **Survey Administration Dates** |
| [Regular Academic SessionLinks to an external site.](https://vpaa.unt.edu/spot/calendars/fall-calendars/fall-regular.html) | November 11 - December 04 |
| [8W1Links to an external site.](https://vpaa.unt.edu/spot/calendars/fall-calendars/fall-8w1.html) | September 30 - October 09 |
| [8W2Links to an external site.](https://vpaa.unt.edu/spot/calendars/fall-calendars/fall-8w2.html) | December 02 - December 11 |

**Acceptable Student Behavior**

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct.  The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.  The Code of Student Conduct can be found on the [Dean Of Students websiteLinks to an external site.](http://www.deanofstudents.unt.edu/) ([www.deanofstudents.unt.eduLinks to an external site.](http://www.deanofstudents.unt.edu/)).

**Classroom Policies**

The Mayborn School of Journalism requires that students respect and maintain all university property. Students will be held accountable through disciplinary action for any intentional damages they cause in classrooms. (e.g., writing on tables).  Disruptive behavior is not tolerated (e.g., arriving late, leaving early, sleeping, talking on the phone, texting or game playing, making inappropriate comments, ringing cellular phones/beepers, dressing inappropriately).

**SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION, HARRASSMENT, & ASSAULT**

UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

[UNT’s Dean of Students’ websiteLinks to an external site.](http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources_0) ([http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources\_0Links to an external site.](http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources_0)) offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs.  Renee LeClaire McNamara is UNT’s Student Advocate and she can be reached through e-mail at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students’ office at 940-565-2648.  You are not alone.  We are here to help.

**MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

UNT provides mental health services to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

1. [Student Health and Wellness CenterLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center#programs)

([https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center#programsLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center#programs))

1800 Chestnut St. (Chestnut Hall)

940-565-2333

M-Th, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

1. [Counseling and Testing ServicesLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) – Free to UNT Students

([https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-servicesLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services))

801 N. Texas Blvd., Suite 140 (Gateway Center)

940-565-2741

M-F, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

1. [UNT CARE TeamLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care) – Free to UNT Students

([https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/careLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care))

Dean of Students, University Union

940-565-2648

careteam@unt.edu

1. [Psychiatric ServicesLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry)

([https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatryLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry))

940-565-2333

1. [Individual CounselingLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling) – Free to UNT Students

([https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counselingLinks to an external site.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling))

940-369-8773

If at any time you are feeling alone or in jeopardy of self-harm, reach out to any of the following:

* National Suicide Hotline 800-273-8255
* Denton County MHMR Crisis Line 800-762-0157
* Denton County Friends of the Family Crisis Line (family or intimate partner violence) 940-382-7273
* UNT Mental Health Emergency Contacts
	+ During office hours, M-F, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m: Call 940-565-2741
	+ After hours: Call 940-565-2741
	+ Crisis Line: Text CONNECT to 741741
	+ [Live chatLinks to an external site.](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/): ([http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.orgLinks to an external site.](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/))