



# J361F REPORTING TEXAS

Section 08968

Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30-11 a.m.,  
CMA 4.148

## Instructors:

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Office hours (in-person, phone or Zoom): 2-3:30 MO, 11-12:30 TU and by appointment

J361F Reporting Texas is a class that we believe will benefit local Texas news media as well as your career. Instead of reporting and writing just for your instructors, Christy Hoppe and Kathleen McElroy, your bosses now include professional editors who are assigning you to cover some aspect of the Texas Legislature. Your audience isn't just here in Austin but in your assigned "hometown," where you'll be reporting on topics that matter to your community.

We know that you are not full-time statehouse reporters and have other classes and jobs that require your attention. But we hope you'll immerse yourself as much as you can into state government, and state and local politics. You'll come away from the class with a penchant for political coverage, a passion for local journalism and some killer clips that showcase your reporting and writing skills.

In fact, by the end of the semester, you'll be able to:

- Navigate a professional newsroom and work with professional editors
- Hone news judgment skills
- Develop sources for in-depth reporting
- Cover a topic/beat/policy and acquire knowledge and expertise
- Interview and hold accountable government and elected officials
- Write/produce and publish advance, feature and breaking news stories

Covering the Texas Legislature, even part time, can be exhilarating, enlightening and daunting. The late Molly Ivins, the iconic Texas commentator, wrote a long time ago:

*All anyone needs to enjoy the state legislature is a strong stomach and a complete insensitivity to the needs of the people. As long as you don't think about what that peculiar body should be doing and what it actually is doing to the quality of life in Texas, then it's all marvelous fun.*

That said, fair, nonpartisan reporting is non-negotiable for us. It's not that way for politicians and some officials. The Legislative session will make you aware of the range of human experiences under the guise of governance. People will say terrible things. People will say misleading things. Your job is not to be naive, shocked or combative. Your job is not to debate policy but to ask respectful and probing questions. Your job is provide clear, accurate, fully dimensional reporting for your appreciative local audience.

And we can't say this enough: Our profession is built on trust. Therefore, dishonesty in its many guises will end your career before it really gets started. More specifics on Page 8 of this syllabus, but journalistic and academic dishonesty includes fabrication, plagiarism and passing off AI-created content as your own.

#### **PREREQUISITES AND REQUIREMENTS:**

- Upper-division standing
- Completion of J310F Reporting: Words with a grade of at least B-
- Knowledge of AP Style
- Daily consumption of your local news outlet. You need to know local issues, what others are reporting and upcoming events. Not doing so risks your missing out on key information and players and/or sounding uninformed.
- Reading [The Quorum Report](#), an insider's guide to the Legislative session, complete with news media links.

Your Beat Report (see below) should reflect how your beat is being covered by other news outlets, both in the state and nationally.

#### **ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING (see class schedule for tentative due dates):**

Grade	Cutoff
A	94%
A-	90%
B+	87%
B	84%
B-	80%
C+	77%
C	74%
C-	70%
D+	67%
D	64%
D-	60%
F	<60%

The grading scale is on the left. We will provide templates, rubrics, group and personal feedback to ensure you can do your best.

- o You'll provide seven **Beat Reports** – which includes your contacts, reporting notes, what's going on publicly and behind the scenes on your beat – that are written for your editor, your instructors and your colleagues. Treat these as public notes. We'll provide a template for the Beat Report as well as due dates. The Beat Reports are worth 20 percent of your final grade (roughly 3 percent each).

- o **News Story 1: "The Set-Up"** is your first big feature/explainer on your beat. It will have voices of real people, government officials, advocates and experts. It will be a compelling and enlightening read (worth 20 percent of your final grade).

- o **Three updates:** This is your opportunity to cover live hearings and news conferences pertaining to your beat. You'll have timelines for when these Updates are due (30 percent total, 10 percent each)
- o **New Story 2: "Where We Are"** is a piece you'll write at the end of the semester, letting your local consumers know where you beat stands. The legislation might be completed for some beats, but many others might be in the thick of a legislative plot (25 percent of your final grade).
- o **Participation and Engagement**, worth 5 percent. Includes attendance and class participation. Unexcused absences will lower this grade.

### CLASS STRUCTURE

We'll usually meet on scheduled Tuesdays and Thursdays in person. We're planning at least one trip to the Capitol, down the street. Some days, we don't meet as a class but you are expected to complete reporting assignments during that time. You are also responsible for reporting and interviewing for your local media outlet. This syllabus outlines an assignment schedule, but as you know, it's always subject to change.

Once we learn your topics, we will bring in experts to help you gain knowledge and sources. In addition, the timeliness and rhythms of the session prevent us making a schedule carved in stone. You'll get updated schedules throughout the semester.

### ATTENDANCE

Because you have many reporting duties outside of class, we need you to be present and engaged when we do meet on campus. Absences that are unexcused (see below) or unannounced will result in a lower participation grade. You can be excused from assignment deadlines by alerting us ahead of time about religious holy days (see below)

or by having Student Emergency Services contact us after you have notified them. Deadlines in the syllabus may be superseded by the needs of your publication, which may need your story submitted along a different timeline. If this is happening, you will need to coordinate edits and reviews with us.

### **Religious Holy Days**

By [UT Austin policy](#), you must notify us of your pending absence as far in advance as possible of the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

### **NURTURING AN EFFICIENT, ENGAGED CLASS**

**Stuff happens:** This syllabus and the course structure are subject to unforeseeable changes (remember SNOVID?). Any changes to the syllabus and the course will be announced via Canvas, email or in class. You are responsible for knowing about any possible updates.

**Phones, laptops and other digital devices:** We depend on our digital devices, and you'll be using them to participate in the life of the class, read pieces, complete exercises, do projects. Please use these tools wisely and in the service of our professional efforts. That means refraining from texting or emailing or browsing the web on personal errands. Why? Focus is the key to good thinking and good detective work; distraction is the enemy. Honor the learning space. Stay engaged, avoid distractions—don't use phones, laptops or digital devices for personal business during class time. Let's all stay in the same mental ZIP code.

### **OUR COMMUNITY: PANDEMICS**

Yet another semester begins with a pandemic or two kinda around. So we must remain cautious to keep everyone as safe as possible. When we meet face to face on campus, we may be masked even though we are vaccinated and boosted. If we're meeting in person and you don't feel good, especially in terms of respiratory distress, stay home. For any illness, students should stay home if they are sick or contagious, not only to stop the spread, but also to promote their personal wellness. For an absence to be excused, you will need for Student Emergency Services to contact Professor McElroy via email.

### **OUR COMMUNITY: CIVIL CONVERSATION AND CONTENT**

Our classroom provides an open space for the critical and civil exchange of ideas, including the political arena. Some readings and other content in this course will include topics that some students may find offensive and/or traumatizing. We'll aim to forewarn you about potentially disturbing content, but can't police what politicians, advocates and government officials say. We ask all of us to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and sensitivity.

So let's create a safe, useful and meaningful learning environment. What is expected: That we all are keen listeners, contributing often and in a civil manner to conversations, being a sharing, kind and good person in general. Working on stuff for another class during our time will negatively impact our class relationship.

This class will discuss topics that some might consider different, odd, controversial and/or an antithesis to their personal ethics. In addition, sometimes we say something we think is harmless but is hurtful to others. While we appreciate candor as part of the classroom experience, actions that hurt other classmates – including unintentional microaggressions and insensitive remarks – will be pointed out. Please do the same to us. We must be respectful of each other. Let's think before we speak or hit send (Christy and me included).

In this class, we don't use gendered language that belittles women. During class and in assignments, we'll practice referring to any person 18 and older using female pronouns as a "woman," not a "girl."

We don't engage in hateful, mean-spirited, indecent, obscene, offensive and/or clearly biased or bigoted discourse – in class, in virtual classes, in class groups or setting, in any assignment and online, including social media. By the way, depending on their context, using asterisks used to replace letters in offensive words is subject to discipline. Let's aim to:

- See this class as a community: looking out for each other, treating everyone with respect. UT-Austin students work to support each other, not bring each other down.
- Contribute to the discussion but know when to let others speak. Please email us if something in this syllabus that doesn't make sense to you or might hinder your ability to do your best in class.

### **NAMES AND PRONOUNS**

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender identity & expression, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the

instructor with the student's legal name, unless they have added a "chosen name" with the registrar's office, which you can do so [here](#). We will gladly honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the pronouns you use (she/he/they/ze, et al.). Please advise us of any changes early in the semester so that we may make appropriate updates to our records. For instructions on how to add your pronouns to Canvas, visit [this site](#). More resources available on the Gender and Sexuality Center's website, [www.utgsc.org](http://www.utgsc.org).

International students are encouraged to use their real names, but we understand if you prefer an anglicized name because of our inability to properly pronounce your name.

### **LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

We acknowledge that we are meeting on the Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, the ancestral name for what now is called North America. Moreover, we would like to acknowledge the Alabama- Coushatta, Caddo, Carrizo/Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Comanche, Kickapoo, Lipan Apache, Tonkawa and Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas.

### **STUDENT RESOURCES**

Your success in this class is important to us. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning at your best or exclude you, please let us know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. There is also a range of resources on campus.

### **DISABILITY & ACCESS (D&A)**

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Disability & Access (D&A). Please refer to the D&A website for more information: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are registered with D&A, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to us as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

### **SANGER LEARNING CENTER/MOODY WRITING SUPPORT PROGRAM**

More than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance. All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist

appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

Moody also has its own writing program, called appropriately enough, the [Moody Writing Support Program](#). The student writing coaches are ready and willing to help, even for upper-division assignments.

### **BASIC SECURITY NEEDS**

Student facing challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. UT maintains the [UT Outpost](#), which is a free on-campus food pantry and career closet. If you are comfortable notifying me, please do so; we might have additional resources we can share. In addition, Moody offers its own [Student Emergency Fund](#). Please use every resource possible to support yourself and your education.

### **COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH CENTER (CMHC)**

All of us – students, instructors, staff, friends and family – benefit from support during times of struggle. Know you are not alone. If you or anyone you know is experiencing symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, academic concerns, loneliness, difficulty sleeping, or any other concern impacting your wellbeing – you are strongly encouraged to connect with CMHC. The Counseling and Mental Health Center provides a wide variety of mental health services to all UT students including crisis services, counseling services with immediate support and well-being resources. Additionally, CARE Counselors are located within the academic schools and colleges. These counselors get to know the concerns that are unique to their college's students. For more information on CMHC, visit <https://cmhc.utexas.edu> or call 512-471-3515.

### **UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES (UHS)**

Your physical health and wellness are a priority. University Health Services is an on-campus high-quality medical facility providing care to all UT students. Services offered by UHS include general medicine, urgent care, a 24/7 nurse advice line, gynecology, sports medicine, physical therapy, lab and radiology services, COVID-19 testing and vaccinations and much more. For additional information, visit <https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu> or call 512-471-4955.

### **STUDENT EMERGENCY SERVICES (SES)**

Student Emergency Services in the Office of the Dean of Students helps students and their families during difficult or emergency situations. Assistance includes outreach, advocacy, intervention, support, and referrals to relevant campus and community

resources. If you need to be absent from class due to a family emergency, medical or mental health concern, or academic difficulty due to crisis or an emergency situation, you can work with Student Emergency Services. SES will document your situation and notify your professors. Additional information is available at <https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/> or by calling 512- 471-5017.

### **IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION**

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or professors, contact BCCAL (the Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line) at <https://safety.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line> or by calling 512-232-5050. Confidentiality will be maintained as much as possible, however the university may be required to release some information to appropriate parties.

### **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

#### **SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY**

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. **By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them.** Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career.

Academic dishonesty includes:

- Plagiarizing or using someone else's material, another media source, student work or yourself (in part or in whole) and representing it as new for this class. Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT and in the field of journalism. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you are guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failing this course.
- Using artificial-intelligence tools, including ChatGPT, to create content that you claim as your own.
- Pitching or turning in an assignment from a previous class without instructor permission.
- Making up quotes, sources and facts (fabrication)
- Cheating during a quiz or any assignment, graded or not
- Failure to tell me before an assignment is due that you have a personal conflict of interest (partner, relative, boss, roommate, et al.) with a party involved.



Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct>

**Confidentiality Of Class Recordings:** Any class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

**Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited:** No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class without explicit, written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. The University is well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to [Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#) in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure of the course.

### **TITLE IX DISCLOSURE**

Beginning Jan. 1, 2020, Texas Education Code, Section 51.252 (formerly known as Senate Bill 212) requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, to report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations, or third party reports) must be report it. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, please remember that I will be required to report this information to the Title IX Coordinator. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email [supportandresources@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:supportandresources@austin.utexas.edu). For more information about reporting options and resources, visit <http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/>, contact the Title IX Office via email at [titleix@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:titleix@austin.utexas.edu), or call 512-471-0419.

UT also offers private resources who are not confidential but are non-mandatory reporters to Title IX and the university. Advocates, University Ombuds, Faculty Ombuds and the Interpersonal Violence Peer Support Program are all private resources, and

safe spaces to ask questions and receive support without making an official report to the university. These services are there for you if you would like emotional support, would like to discuss options, or are in need of academic or financial assistance. We also take any other kind of discrimination or harassment very seriously, and we urge you to report such misbehavior. Discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, citizenship, veteran status, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression can be reported to the Office for Inclusion and Equity. Or tell us and we will report it.

**Office for Inclusion and Equity (OIE):** The Office for Inclusion and Equity (OIE) investigates and helps to resolve complaints of sexual misconduct and discrimination.

o **File a report of discrimination via online form**

o **Call to report discrimination 512-471-1849** or email: [equity@utexas.edu](mailto:equity@utexas.edu)

**Office for Civil Rights (OCR):** The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the US Department of Education is responsible for enforcing federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education, including sex discrimination covered under Title IX. **Call the Office for Civil Rights 214-661-9600.**

- **Equal Opportunity in Employment Commission (EEOC)**

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or employee on the basis of a protected class, including discrimination on the basis of sex. **Call the Equal Opportunity in Employment Commission 800-669-4000.**

Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Education Code, Section 51.252, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as sexual misconduct, including the types of sexual misconduct covered under Texas Education Code, Section 51.252. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support all impacted by a Title IX incident.

### **CARRYING OF HANDGUNS ON CAMPUS**

Texas' Open Carry law expressly prohibits a licensed to carry (LTC) holder from carrying a handgun openly on the campus of an institution of higher education such as UT Austin. Students in this class should be aware of the following university policies:

- Students in this class who hold a license to carry are asked to [review the university policy regarding campus carry](#).
- Individuals who hold a license to carry are eligible to carry a concealed handgun on campus, including in most outdoor areas, buildings and spaces that are accessible to the public, and in classrooms.

- It is the responsibility of concealed-carry license holders to carry their handguns on or about their person at all times while on campus. Open carry is NOT permitted, meaning that a license holder may not carry a partially or wholly visible handgun on campus premises or on any university driveway, street, sidewalk or walkway, parking lot, parking garage, or other parking area.
- Per our right, we prohibit carrying of handguns in our personal office spaces. Note that this information will also be conveyed to all students verbally during the first week of class. This written notice is intended to reinforce the verbal notification, and is not a “legally effective” means of notification in its own right.

### **CAMPUS SAFETY**

The following are recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the [Office of Campus Safety and Security](#), 512-471-5767:

- Students should sign up for Campus Emergency Text Alerts at the page linked above.
- Occupants of buildings on the UT-Austin campus must evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.
- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy.  
The nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- For more information, please visit [emergency preparedness](#).

## VERY TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR J361F REPORTING TEXAS

DATE	TOPIC	NOTES	DEADLINE
TU 1/10	Introductions		Connect with your editor before Thursday's class
TH 1/12	Discuss your beat		
TU 1/17	Introduction to Texas Lege		Have you done your readings?
TH 1/19	Big Three in Texas	Ross Ramsey	Beat Report 1 due by 5 p.m.
TU 1/24	Capitol Tour		
TH 1/26	Guest speaker tba		
TU 1/31	Reporting Day (no lecture)		
TH 2/2	Finding real voices		Beat Report 2 due by 5 p.m.
TU 2/7	Story 1 Rough Draft		
TH 2/9	Peer Review		
TU 2/14	Workshop Story 1		Story 1 due by 5 p.m.
TH 2/16	Austin delegation		Beat Report 3 due by 5 p.m.
TU 2/21	<i>Rest of schedule to be released at later date</i>		
TH 2/23			
TU 2/28			
TH 3/2			Beat Report 4 due by 5 p.m.
TU 3/7			
TH 3/9			At least 1 Update due by 5 p.m.
	<b>SPRING</b>	<b>BREAK</b>	
TU 3/21			
TH 3/23			Beat Report 5 due by 5 p.m.
TU 3/28			
TH 3/30			Beat Report 6 due by

TU 4/4			Update 2 by 5 p.m.
TH 4/6			
TU 4/11			
TH 4/13			Beat Report 6 due by 5 p.m.
TU 4/18	Rough Draft Story 2		
TH 4/20	Peer Review Story 2		Beat Report 7 as hand-off notes
TU 4/25	(no formal class)		Story 2 due by 5 p.m.