

## **Independent Project in Journalism and Digital Media** ISPJ-3000 (3 credits)

### **South Africa: Journalism and Digital Media**

*This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.*

#### **Course Description**

In this course, students execute a full-length feature on a political issue in South Africa or the contemporary world more broadly, in the media format of their choosing and depending upon their experience in that format. The feature should meet the standards for publication or broadcast in a media outlet in South Africa. Students partner with South African journalism and digital media trainees at the Times Media Group or the Daily Maverick in either Cape Town or Durban, and are mentored by professional South African journalists. Professional journalists and digital media experts provide hands-on advice and mentoring at every stage of story development, sharing expertise gathered from years in challenging reporting situations. Story topics are assessed based on originality, richness, and appeal to a broad audience in both the US and South Africa. Students learn what it means to organize a story, to select sources, to question deeply, to work toward balance, to be alert to bias and clichés, respond to editors' feedback, check facts, rework and re-write, strive for clarity and achieve accessible, flowing prose supported by images.

South African journalism partners may publish features in a media outlet affiliated with The Times Media Group or Daily Maverick Group. However, the program makes no guarantee that student stories will be pitched and/or accepted by a media outlet.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Conduct a field-based journalistic or digital media project with respect to professional and ethical norms.
- Produce a report that documents the process of producing their feature story or photography; and
- Submit their journalism or digital media project to editors to be considered for publication.

#### **Language of Instruction**

This course is taught in English, but students may be exposed to region-specific vocabulary and dialect.

## **Instructional Methods**

All components of the program, beginning with orientation and including the *Field Ethics of Journalism in South Africa* course, thematic seminars, homestays, educational excursions, and associated forms of cultural interaction within the host society, are used to refine and deepen the project.

Students are expected to master the highest standards of journalism and journalism ethics especially as practiced in South Africa. Along with their final feature, students must submit a substantive report covering such areas as journalistic ethics, issue analysis, data collection, field reporting, accessibility of sources, interview dynamics, and the general story development process. Students will present their project at the end of the program to an audience of their peers, program staff, professional journalists, and advisors.

SIT students write their story in English, with a reporting credit to their South African partner. This is a rare opportunity to learn more about the reporter-editor relationship and to work directly with an experienced journalist who guides the student's reporting and writing. The stories undergo repeated revisions, often as many as five different edits before final submission.

## **Required Texts**

While the majority of the project work should be conducted in the field, readings in preparation for, and throughout the period, are strongly encouraged and will be based on the specific topic of study.

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

### Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

Most of the student's work is conducted in the field (as opposed to library research, for example). This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, writing, and meeting/talking with the academic director and journalist/advisor. Progress updates will be expected weekly.

#### 1) Paper (80%)

The final product is a typed and bound 1000–1500-word feature story with additional components including the following:

1. **The Pitch.** This is the final story pitch to your editor.
2. **Development & evolution of the story idea.** Explain the process by which you arrived at this story idea. How did the idea evolve into the pitch? What is this story's relevance

to your personal interests and course of study at your home institution? Why did you produce the story in the format you chose?

3. **Sources, interviews, scenes.** How did you find your sources, your elements, interviews, and scenes? What/who are they? What problems/challenges did you encounter in reporting this story and how did you solve them (or not solve them)?
4. **Journalism ethics.** What ethical issues did you encounter in reporting this story and how did you resolve those ethical issues? Were there ethical issues unique to South Africa?
5. **Potential media outlet and audience.** Where do you think your story might be placed? Why do you think this media outlet would be interested in your story? Who is your audience? Why do you think this story will be attractive to that audience? How did you produce the story to keep it interesting?
6. **The Story.**
7. **Photos.** Your story must be accompanied by at least three photos with a caption for each. In addition, you must submit three photos of you and your partner working in the field on your story.
8. **South Africa news.** What are the three best, most informative articles you read on South Africa and why do you find each of them so informative? What do you think are the three best sources of information on South Africa—anything including social media— and why?
9. **Conclusion:** What could have been done better? Is this a story that deserves a follow-up? If so, what might that be? What did you learn from doing this story?

The draft paper is due approximately one week before the final paper is due, and your editor/advisor may set further deadlines for you as well.

## 2) Presentation (20%)

A 20-minute oral presentation highlighting the story and the process of reporting will be given to colleagues, community members, program staff, the academic director, the project journalists/advisors, and other invited guests.

### Assessment

Paper - 80%

Presentation - 20%

### Evaluation Criteria

At the end of the project period, students are expected to present their work to the group and the journalist/advisor. This presentation must reveal the student's mastery of his/her story. Timely completion and meeting of deadlines is expected. Late submissions will be penalized. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on accuracy, journalistic quality, and adherence to the highest journalistic and ethical standards.

### Human Subjects Review

All proposals must reflect a thoughtful and culturally-appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry on the participants in the project, with an eye to the highest standards of journalism and journalism ethics. Any questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the program level (through the Local Review Board) are forwarded to SIT's Institutional Review Board for review.

### Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

### **Program Expectations**

This program has zero tolerance for plagiarism. Academic honesty is expected of all students. All quotes and source material must be properly attributed and verified. Your reporting must be original, truthful, accurate, and free of fabrication. Any work you present as your own must be your own. Violations of this policy include plagiarism, fabrication, and any other form of cheating (defined below).

- **CHEATING:** The conscious use of unauthorized, prohibited, or unacknowledged materials or methods, including, but not limited to, checking mobile devices, computers, or notes during online courses, or copying others' work.
- **FABRICATING:** The conscious falsification or invention of information, quotes, sources, or any other material presented as non-fiction.
- **PLAGIARIZING:** The conscious representation of someone else's work as your own. Please note that any failure to accurately and completely document ALL uses of source material constitutes academic dishonesty. You may use a quote from another source, but it must be attributed in journalistic style. Background and contextual information may not be taken from Wikipedia or other online sites. When in doubt, discuss appropriate sourcing with the AD *before* submitting your assignment.

### **SIT Policies and Resources**

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.