COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course will give you the opportunity to work as a freelance journalist. You will research, develop and propose story ideas to campus and professional publications. You will conduct interviews, gather information and write and rewrite news and feature articles for publication. You will work individually at times (as a freelance journalist would) and collaboratively at times, as part of our class "newsroom" (as a full-time staff reporter would). In short, you will learn what it takes to be a professional in this field and will hone your skills through a constant work cycle. This is your opportunity to write meaningful stories for publication in The Collegian and/or other local, regional or national print or online publications. In so doing, you will be building a portfolio to showcase your abilities for future publishers, employers or graduate schools. Most of you have not had an opportunity like this before. Make the most of this one, and you will be prepared to enter the industry in a part- or full-time capacity.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
In this course, you will learn how to think, act and react like a professional journalist. You will learn how to identify and present solid story ideas; how to gather meaningful information about your chosen topics; how to conduct effective, valuable interviews; how to compose effective, powerful ledes; how to write compelling news and feature articles that are clear, interesting, accurate, informative, meaningful and fair; and how to edit and rewrite stories so that they are succinct and direct. Your goal is to publish as many articles as possible in The Collegian and local, regional or national professional publications. You should plan to spend more than 10 hours each week preparing for class, participating during class, reading and studying course-related materials and completing course assignments.

ASSIGNMENTS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Writing assignments: 50 percent
During the course of the semester, eight articles of yours totaling at least 5,000 words must be published by campus, local, regional or other print or online publications. (Collegian editors will be required to publish a minimum of six articles that total 3,500 words.)

I strongly encourage you to seek publication for more than eight articles. If more than eight are published, only your top eight grades will count, provided that collectively they meet the 5,000-word requirement.

You will be graded on the version(s) of the articles that you submit to me – not on the final versions that appear in publication. **Articles that are not published by Nov. 30 will not count toward the eight-article/5,000-word minimum requirements. (Exception: If your article has been accepted for publication by Nov. 30 but will not appear until after that date, you may provide me with written confirmation from the editor by Nov. 30 indicating as much.)**

Your articles may result from story ideas that you devise and pitch to publications yourself; assignments given to you by Collegian editors; and occasional assignments that I provide you with.
You will be required to submit for publication a minimum number of articles during each period shown below:

- **Through Sept. 30** – 2 articles
- **Oct. 1-31** – 3 articles
- **Nov. 1-30** – 3 articles

Each time you fail to submit the required number of articles during a month, you will lose 2 points from your overall writing grade for the course. (You must submit the minimum number of articles each period to me even though they all may not be published during that period.)

I strongly encourage you to submit draft versions of your articles to me prior to your deadlines. I will provide thoughts and advice about each one, and we will discuss your draft stories in class so that other students may contribute ideas as well. Once you are satisfied with your story and submit it for grading, your grade will be final.

Your articles will be graded according to following professional standards established by The Poynter Institute for Journalism:

A: Publishable in current form with few or no revisions
A/B+: Publishable with minor work
B: Solid elements; will be publishable with some rehabbing
B/C+: Some serious flaws but other strengths; will be publishable with reasonable work
C: Major flaws; needs overhaul before being publishable
D: Critical errors; could not be considered publishable without dramatic change
F: Work not completed, lacks merit over-all, was late, or included factual errors or misspelled names.

*Please note:* You will receive an automatic "F" if you misspell the name of a person, business, organization or other entity referenced in your article. You will receive an automatic "F" if you include factual errors in your article. You will receive an automatic “F” if you submit a one-source story. These are mistakes that would affect your reputation as a professional journalist and/or, in some cases, potentially lead to a lawsuit against you and the publication. Accuracy and attention to detail are critical components of good journalism. Always check your facts! (An "F" earned for one of these reasons will be scored as a 59, not a 0.)

I may choose to award extra credit for articles that are published in professional publications with larger audiences.

Send your stories as email attachments in a Microsoft Word document, double-spaced. On the first page of each assignment use a “slug” in the upper left corner, listing your name, a one-word description of the piece, the date and the word count.

For example: Thompson – Schools – 9/16/18 – 850 words

Name your Word documents to include your last name, a one-word story description, and the date in the MMDDYY format. Example: THOMPSON_Schools_091616. Use a # at the end of each article to indicate its conclusion.

On the last page of each article, list all sources with whom you spoke, the method by which you spoke (in-person interview, phone interview, e-mail/text conversation, etc.) and the date(s) on which you spoke.

For example:

Jacob Smith, phone interview – 9/10/18

When speaking with subjects for your articles, present yourself as a freelance journalist (unless you are a Collegian staff member) and ensure that your subjects understand that your article is for publication.
**Story ideas: 25 percent**
You will be required to submit at least one story idea per week (a minimum of 13 in total). Each will be graded, and your final grade will be the average of your highest 12 scores. These must be emailed to me at tlappas@richmond.edu by 6 p.m. each Sunday (beginning Sept. 2). (Exceptions: Story ideas will not be required Oct. 14, during Fall Break, and those normally due Sunday, Nov. 25 will instead be due Monday, Nov. 26, following Thanksgiving Break.)

Meeting a deadline is an essential aspect of being a strong reporter, so any story ideas received after these deadlines will not be considered for that week’s requirement – no exceptions. If your pitch arrives in my inbox at 6:01 p.m. on Sunday, you will receive a 0 for that week. Don’t wait until the last minute! Send your story ideas early to avoid any possibility of missing a deadline. You may submit more than one story idea per week to be graded, but only the highest grade will count; the additional ideas will not count toward your weekly requirements (i.e., you cannot submit 13 story ideas the first week and none the rest of the semester).

Your pitches may be made with any campus, local, regional, national or international publication in mind. Make them to me as if I were the editor of the intended publication, and identify that publication by name within your pitch. You should make pitches for articles that you want to write and intend to write if your pitch is successful. *(Exception: If your pitch is intended for The Collegian, please make it directly to The Collegian editor and CC or BCC me on the e-mail by the weekly deadlines outlined above.)*

Your story pitches should be:

- **Compelling** – Explain why this idea is a great fit for the publication to which you are pitching it. This means that you must understand the readership and reach of the publication. If you cannot effectively demonstrate this connection in your pitch, your grade will suffer.

- **Convincing** – Demonstrate why YOU are the best person to write this particular article for this particular publication. Contact potential sources and/or conduct research in advance, and explain in the story pitch what you’ve learned.

- **Concise** – Make your points effectively and succinctly. This is your opportunity to grab an editor’s attention and showcase your writing abilities at the same time. Be clear and direct. Editors receive hundreds of emails every day – you have a limited opportunity to stand out. Don’t waste it.

Your pitches will be graded according to these three standards.

You may submit your pitches to publications at the same time you submit them to me (by BCCing me on the e-mail), or wait until after you’ve received your graded pitch back from me. You will not be required to write each article that you present as a story idea, but you must let me know about each one that you do intend to write.

**Class participation/assignments: 25 percent**
It is imperative that you attend class. Class time will be dedicated to discussing the key elements of journalism – identifying, pitching and researching stories; conducting effective interviews; writing accurate, fair, interesting and relevant articles; editing and rewriting articles. During class, we will evaluate and critique pitches, articles in progress and other outside stories. You will complete (individually and in groups) in-class and out-of-class assignments and exercises designed to hone your journalistic skills. These will be graded according to the Poynter standards described above.

All necessary materials will be distributed in advance through e-mail or Blackboard, and you should be prepared to discuss these items during class. Your class participation grade will be
determined through your active involvement and contributions during class time, your contributions and work – both independently and collaboratively in our "newsroom" setting – and the quality of work you produce for in-class and out-of-class assignments.

Your attendance is expected. If you must miss class for some reason (a school-related event or competition, illness, family emergency, etc.), you must contact me at tlappas@richmond.edu by 9 a.m. the day of the class to let me know. You will be responsible for finding out what was covered in class and for completing any assignments by the dates on which they are due.

If you have perfect attendance during the semester, I will raise your overall final grade for the course by one point.

**GRADING SCALE**
The following numeric grading scale will apply for this course:

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<td>59 and below</td>
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**ACADEMIC HONESTY**
Observe the honor code. Cite and credit all of your sources accurately. All work submitted should be your original work for this specific course. You may not, for example, hand in a story for this class that you are also preparing for another course. Evidence of plagiarism or cheating of any kind will result in an “F” on the assignment and may be reported to the university administration for further consideration. Contact me immediately if you have difficulty understanding how to cite sources or have questions concerning any of the above.

**DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION**
Students with disabilities who have been formally granted accommodations by a University of Richmond Disability Advisor must show their “Disability Accommodation Notice” to me within the first week of the academic term. The student and I will agree upon an accommodation in advance of each scheduled major assignment. You are encouraged to meet with me at least one week before any major deadline to discuss your accommodation.

**OFFICE HOURS**
I do not have regularly scheduled office hours but am available to meet by appointment. Please see me after class or e-mail me at tlappas@richmond.edu to schedule a time to meet.