

Final report
24st of August 2017
Anu-Elina Lehti, Finnish Business Media
Summer Investigative Reporting Course
Columbia University, New York

I participated in the Summer Investigative Reporting Course in Columbia University between 10th and 28th of July. Three-week course was both intense and rewarding. Lectures were held at the University of Columbia's Journalism Institute, and in some days teaching was from 9am to 9pm. For homework, we had to watch a movie, prepare a small presentation and read numerous long articles.

Students were obliged to follow the strict Las Vegas rule: "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." This meant, that we were not allowed to refer content of the course or conversations to outsiders. Course leaders were really skeptical towards social media. For example, a Facebook status addressing any of the course topics would have caused immediate suspension from the course. This is also the reason why I only outline the content of the course.

The course was teaching investigative reporting from the scratch. We got advices how to create great ideas, how to form and test hypotheses and how to interview people. The main focus was on data journalism and information security. We, for example, spent a lot of time learning various data analysis and management programs. The course made it clear that in 2017, editor's main tool is Excel and one of the lecturers believed that journalists should also be able to animate (!)

For me, the best knowledge from the course was to understand, that for almost all difficult technical problems can be solved by tools that you can find from the web, often for free. Some of the students were advanced with technology and with the help of them I learned, for example, how to encrypt my emails and use Tor network.

The list of lecturers was long and prestigious. The first day was great fun. Our lecturer made us read reportages written by famous journalist, who had written false stories. Our job was to find logical errors and other hints, which would reveal his lies. I also was really impressed by private detective, who gave us advices, how to develop our interview technics. As a business journalist I was particularly benefiting from the tips like how to find information from company and business databases.

In Finnish point of view, the resources of the international media houses felt utopian. Many journalist who were teaching us told, that they have been researching and writing their stories over a year. They also had fact checkers and a credit card with no balance limit. Understanding this enormous resource gap was emancipating. Yes, of course we would made a world class journalism in Finland, if we would have five billion potential readers.

To me the most effecting way to learn was to first listen the lecturer and later do actively group

exercises. At two days we had to stay at university until 9 pm. These days were too much for my concentration. I strongly think, that everyone else felt the same. In this year Summer Course didn't made any visits to top-notch media houses, which was a slight disappointment for me.

The course had students from Finland, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, USA, Egypt and Australia. Some students worked in a major international publications, some in a small domestic publications or as a freelancer. All of them had a strong professional ambition. I felt that working my own idea with this group was very useful. At the moment we have a Whatsapp-group and a secret Facebook-group, so I believe that our cooperation will continue in future.

I thank Helsingin Sanomat Foundation for my scholarship. Without a doubt, this scholarship and the course will play a key role in achieving my journalistic dreams.

Anu-Elina Lehti
Finnish Business Media