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I participated in Columbia University's investigative journalism course in the summer of 2023. The course was very useful and I learned a lot of new skills that will be useful in my everyday work.

The content of the course could be divided into technical skills and "people skills". For example, we focused on journalism tools that can be used to clean, organize and analyze large datasets, find news in databases and verify the authenticity and locations of images. On the other hand, we learned the attitude of investigative journalism, finding sources, interview techniques, the structure of an investigative story and fact-checking. The different elements were nicely balanced.

To my own surprise, I was the only one of the participants who does investigative journalism on an everyday basis. The group included news and financial journalists and podcast creators from newspapers to broadcasting companies. The different backgrounds of the participants created an interesting group, which broadened the perspectives of dealing with different topics. The course participants had a good team spirit from the beginning and everyone was ready to help each other. The group was also suitably small, which enabled active discussion.

Some of the themes were familiar to me from past training and I face some of the problems we talked about in my everyday work, but I still learned something new from each session. The most useful sessions for me were the data journalism classes and the "visual investigations" based on open sources, such as satellite images, which the editors of the New York Times taught with finesse.

A large part of the course's lecturers are journalists. The catering was impressive. In addition to the NY Times, Bellingcat, New Yorker, ProPublica, NBC and Reuters were also represented. I especially liked that the speakers spoke openly about their own projects and used them as examples in teaching. The sessions also included a lot of practical exercises, which was excellent. This is, at least for me, the only way to get a lasting memory of the teaching. Some of the content was quite US-centric, but I don't think one can completely avoid this.

The quality of the teaching was of a high standard across the board, but compared to a Finnish university, it wasn't mind-blowing. Perhaps the biggest difference was that the vast majority of the speakers knew how to tell things in an inspiring way. Instead of just showing PowerPoint slides, the performances were well-rhythmic and contained different elements. There was plenty of time to discuss each topic which was great.

The arrangements of the course worked like a charm, including the food supply. I would start the day earlier though. Sessions lasted from ten in the morning until the evening and often stretched beyond that, which left the evenings short. Teaching could have started at eight or at the latest at nine. Returning to the "school" felt quite intense, when you absorbed a new thing for eight hours a day, but at the same time I was excited all the time. There was no actual homeworks in the course, but we sometimes read a couple of articles to get ready for the next day. This was good because the days were packed anyway.

Each participant had to have his own story idea, which was refined with the help of the group and "story coaches" throughout the course. The purpose was to write the article back home. This idea itself could be refined a bit. One can only refine the idea for so long. At some point one should be able to do it, because most of the questions usually come up while doing the story. Now the participants presented their topic to different speakers and to each other numerous times. On the other hand, the course didn't really have time to work on the story. The idea of a story idea as a supporting element of the course is good in itself. Could the participants start working on the article before the course? This was discussed, but in practice this is not realistic for many.

The course does not turn the participant into an investigative journalist, but during the three weeks you get a good starting point to become one, or use the lessons learned in regular news work. The course provides a versatile package for investigative journalism, but the rest is up to you. One gets the most out of it by continuing to practice the skills independently.