

JOMC 570.2 (Campaigns & Elections Focus)
Data Driven Journalism
Fall 2019

MW – 11 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.
Carroll Hall 253
office hours: 1:30-3:30 p.m. MW, CA 215
Office Phone: 919-537-3681

Ryan Thornburg

PRE-REQUISITES: Experience reporting news in a professional or classroom setting, including clear news judgment and ability to communicate with clarity and brevity.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this skills-based course students learn how to acquire, clean, analyze and present data in a journalistic setting.

Your decision to take this course indicates that you are interested in learning the skills and concepts of data-driven reporting. The class starts from the assumption that you've never or rarely used even a basic spreadsheet to aid either your reporting or storytelling. That's where the semester will begin. Along the road to data literacy we will also go over some basic statistics and basic data visualization concepts.

OBJECTIVES:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to acquire, organize, analyze and present data to a general news audience. Students will learn how to use the tools of data-driven journalism as a means to developing and testing hypotheses that lead to transparent and reproducible data-driven stories.

Through the study of quantitative reasoning and methods, students in this course will acquire and reinforce the ability to use analytic and quantitative ideas as they are applied in the context of professional journalistic reporting. In today's world of fast-paced advances in the use of data, the importance of such skills cannot be overstated.

This course focuses especially on the ways that quantitative reasoning can be applied to the kinds of data that professional news reporters use in a variety of media presentation formats.

Students in this course will learn how to collect and interpret quantitative data, apply mathematical analysis in a news reporting context and use numerical reasoning to organize and present a story to general news audiences.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

As part of their grade, students will submit after each class session one question they wished they had asked about the material covered in class. These submissions will be used to track attendance and will be part of the “daily work” grade, along with homework exercises and reading summaries described later. Students who do not attend a class session will not be allowed to submit a question about the session they missed.

COURSE MATERIALS:

Your laptop is the tool of your craft, and its care and maintenance reflect upon you and your readiness to work in the professional settings for which this course prepares you. Just like a guitar player wouldn't show up to rehearsal with a broken string, you also need to ensure your computer is in good working order each and every class. Laptops – like guitar strings – will break. Having a backup plan demonstrates maturity and professional preparedness.

You will need the following software installed on your laptop. I will help you install the software during the first week of class. You are responsible for keeping the software up-to-date by downloading and installing all patches or updates as they are released:

- Excel 2016 (available free to students from <https://software.sites.unc.edu/software/microsoft-products/>)
- R (<https://rweb.crmda.ku.edu/cran/>)
- R Studio (<https://www.rstudio.com/products/rstudio/download/#download>)

Many readings from the class will come from the Web and from book chapters I will place on digital reserve through the UNC Libraries.

I strongly encourage you to purchase a \$25 IRE student membership (<https://www.ire.org/membersonly/join/register>). This will give you access to dozens of tip sheets and resources that will be useful to you in class and as part of your broader professional development.

DETERMINATION OF GRADE:

Throughout the semester, students will earn points for completing various assignments. At the end of the semester, points will be summed and grades will be assigned.

Undergraduates

- 30% - Daily Assignments (Quizzes, reading summaries, class attendance questions, homework exercises)
- 15% Beat Report (Sept. 9)
- 15% - Story Pitch (Oct. 7)
- 15% - Data visualization (Nov. 11)
- 25% - Final Story (Dec. 10, 3 p.m.)

Additional Expectations for Graduate Students

Graduate students in the class will work separately from undergraduate students. The graduate will have higher standards for quality of presentation and depth and breadth of reporting. The work products they submit for grading are expected to be of appropriate quality and relevance to be used in their thesis project.

- 15% - Daily Assignments (Quizzes, reading summaries, class attendance questions, homework exercises)
- 15% Beat Report (Sept. 9)
- 15% - Story Pitch (Oct. 7)
- 15% - Data visualization (Nov. 11)
- 40% - Final Story (Dec. 10, 3 p.m.)

Details on specific deadlines and grading rubrics for specific assignments will be available on the course Sakai site.

Please see “Undergraduate Grade Definitions” and “Graduate Grade Definitions” at <https://registrar.unc.edu/academic-services/grades/explanation-of-grading-system/> for a better understanding of what letter grades mean at UNC-Chapel Hill.

STUDENT HONOR:

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has had a student-led honor system for over 100 years. Academic integrity is at the heart of Carolina and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system.

All academic work in this course, including homework, quizzes, and exams, is to be your own

work, unless otherwise specifically provided. It is your responsibility if you have any doubt to confirm whether or not collaboration is permitted. If the work is truly your own, you will be able to explain and demonstrate to my satisfaction how you did it.

Do not represent someone else's words, thoughts, or ideas as your own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.

If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean C. A. Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Further information about the student Honor Code is available at <http://honor.unc.edu>

Seeking Help:

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity:

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Special Accommodations:

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Department of Disability Services website at <http://disabilityservices.unc.edu/>

ACCREDITATION:

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on the last six bullet dots under "Professional values and competencies" in the link above.

WEEKLY CLASS SCHEDULE:

Weeks 1-3: Getting into a data state of mind with spreadsheets

Weeks 3-7: Data analysis for story idea generation using R

Weeks 7-11: Visualization to explore and present data using R

Weeks 11-15: Intro to advanced techniques: Spatial data, public records and scraping

FINAL EXAM:

Tuesday, Dec. 10, 12-3 p.m. – Peer edits and final presentation of stories replaces final exam.