

Jour 405V: Database Journalism

Fall 2016

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. in Kimpel 115

(V. 8-22-16)

Instructor: Rob Wells, Ph.D.
Office: Lemke Department of Journalism, Kimpel 109D
Office phone: 479-575-2000
Office hours: Tuesdays-Thursday 10 a.m. - 11 a.m. or by appointment
E-mail: rswells@uark.edu

Course Description: This introductory class on basic data reporting skills is much more than learning software and pressing buttons. This class will describe how to use data to guide and inform your reporting, and how this will change your relationship with sources and the people you cover. This semester, we will explore a dataset concerning a major issue for families in Northwestern Arkansas: whether they can get a loan to buy a house. The weekly coursework will lead to an article and graphics suitable for publication. At each step, this class describes real-world examples of ethical issues and best practices in data reporting. The end goal is not just a fancy spreadsheet or a sparkly chart; the end goal is to use data to advance important journalism that helps us tell stories that better serve the public.

Texts:

- Cohen, Sarah. *Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News*. 2nd ed. Columbia, Mo.: Investigative Reporters & Editors Inc., 2014.
<http://store.ire.org/collections/books/products/numbers-in-the-newsroom-using-math-and-statistics-in-news-second-edition>.
Cost: \$25

(Print version recommended — easier for students to follow. Earlier editions, ebooks are ok but not recommended.)

Online Material:

- NICAR CoursePack
<http://store.ire.org/products/nicar-courses-rob-wells-jour-405v-database-journalism>
Cost: \$20
- Data Journalism Handbook
<http://datajournalismhandbook.org/1.0/en/>
Cost: Free

Software:

- Excel
- Tableau Public (free version),
- Data Cleaning: Tabula, Google Refine
- Database: Access.

Optional Materials:

- Student membership to Investigative Reporters and Editors, \$25:
<https://www.ire.org/membersonly/join/register>
—This provides access to IRE’s vast library of tipsheets and how-to guides. IRE and the National Institute for Computer Assisted Reporting are at the cutting edge of data journalism.
- Google Sheets Infogr.am. BatchGeo

Learning Outcomes:

- Proficiency with Excel.
You will be able to import text and csv files into Excel, format the data properly, and perform numerous calculations.
- Basic proficiency with data visualization. Best practices with charts, graphics
You will be able to create a chart ready for publication from a basic spreadsheet.
You will create a basic interactive map from a dataset
- Basic proficiency with relational databases.
You will be able to interpret basic database dictionaries and be able to link tables in Access and perform basic calculations.
- Numeracy & Data Literacy
You will learn basic numeracy and how to avoid common problems with numbers. You will learn best practices for fact checking data
You will learn basic statistical concepts and best practices, and how they apply to data journalism.
- Data story telling
You will have the basic skills to learn the benefits and pitfalls of using data to report stories.

Cultural Diversity Policy:

- The Lemke Journalism Department provides a learning atmosphere that represents a variety of perspectives. Good journalism creates well-rounded, whole pictures that tell stories from multiple points of view. For that reason, this course will examine data sources that describe a diversity of sources and viewpoints, ranging from people of different color to different income levels, different sexual orientation, and different backgrounds. For example, this class will explore datasets that describe disparities in home mortgage lending to various racial and ethnic groups in northwest Arkansas, the state and nation. In the course of this class, students will learn the basic

reporting and statistical tools to ask questions about how to determine such disparities. We will explore how a major government agency categorizes race, the pitfalls with this data collection problem and consequences for society. We will be speaking with members of the Native American, African American and Hispanic communities about the housing data we develop and solicit their perspectives on our findings. We will also speak with members of the business community about the problems with collecting data by race and the consequences for credit availability. These activities will permit an exploration of questions about income inequality among gender and racial lines.

The University of Arkansas, nor Dr. Wells, will not tolerate statements, behavior, tokens or insignias that deride or disparage an individual or group because of race, ethnicity, creed or personal lifestyle, when such actions or statements fulfill no educational goal.

Prerequisites:

A university statistics course. News Reporting II or equivalent advanced writing in public relations or communications.

This course is designed for undergraduate journalism, public relations, advertising and communications majors. Non-journalism majors will find these skills and tools of data gathering and analysis useful in their professional fields as they enhance your ability to articulate a narrative and illustrate it with graphics.

Class meetings:

- Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. in Kimpel 115

Memos and quizzes:

- Six quizzes during the semester count for 30% of your grade. These are designed to be lower-stakes assessment to test your proficiency and build your skills for the relevant assignment. The quizzes flow into the memos and they flow into the assignments; the classroom work is iterative and helps students perfect the skills needed for the assignments.

Assignments:

- Five assignments count for 50% of your grade. Assignments are due by 11 a.m., uploaded into Blackboard.
- An assignment uploaded late (11:01 a.m., according to Blackboard) will be reduced by one grade, and will be reduced a full grade for every subsequent day.
- Students with excused absences should contact me immediately about making up missed assignments.

Grading:

- Quizzes and Memos: 30%
- Assignments (Includes Final Exam): 50%
- Class Participation: 20%

Plagiarism or fabrication will result in your dismissal from class with an F for the course and a recommendation you be dismissed from the college.

Your work will be marked on the following scale:

A+: 100 – 98
A: 97 – 93
A-: 92 – 90
B+: 89 – 88
B: 87 – 83
B-: 82 – 80
C+: 79 – 78
C: 77 – 73
C-: 72 – 70
D+: 69 – 68
D: 67 – 63
D-: 62 – 60
F: Below 60

A - The work is of professional quality (for journalism “professional” track students) or high academic quality (for others). It reflects a depth of research, clarity of writing, and a complete grasp of the main concepts presented in the class.

B - The work is good but needs editing or is flawed in one of the categories mentioned above.

C – The work is weak, needs major editing or reflects an average understanding of key concepts presented in class.

D - Work fails to meet requirements and needs a complete rewrite.

F – Unacceptable.

Libel:

Any story that includes libelous material will result in an F (55 percent) Examples would be if you describe someone as a murderer in your story before he or she is convicted, or if you mistype the name of a convicted murder and thereby implicate someone not guilty of the crime.

Attendance:

You are required to attend class and it will figure into your class participation grade. An excused absence requires notification by e-mail before the start of class.

Be prepared to submit documentation to validate your absence, especially if it is for an extended period of time.

Students who miss more than six classes will have their final grade reduced by a full letter grade.

Email Policy:

I use e-mail and Blackboard to communicate with students. I will post readings, announcements and grades on Blackboard. It is your responsibility to check your email and Blackboard announcements.

Classroom Etiquette:

Cell phone use, texting and non-class related social media are not permitted during class time. Please turn off all electronic devices during class, as it is rude and disrespectful to your instructor and classmates to engage in activities unrelated to class.

Academic Honesty:

Please refer to <http://provost.uark.edu/245.php> for the academic integrity policy.

Class Weather Policy:

If the university is closed, there will be no class. If I need to cancel class, for whatever reason, I will do my best to notify you by e-mail and notify the journalism office: 479-575-3601.

CEA, Center for Education Access:

If you are a student with special needs, contact the CEA at 479-575-3104. I will accommodate students who require assistance.

Emergency Preparedness Plan:

The university has a new emergency plan. Please see the policy on Blackboard or online at emergency.uark.edu.

Cultural Diversity Policy:

The Lemke Journalism Department is committed to providing a learning atmosphere that represents a variety of perspectives. Throughout the course, you will have opportunities to see how different cultural perspectives influence journalism. You are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities in your own work, and also learn from the information and ideas shared by other students. We will not tolerate statements, behavior, tokens or insignias that disparage an individual or group because of race, ethnicity, creed or personal lifestyle.

About the Instructor:

Rob Wells is an assistant professor of journalism. He earned his doctorate in philosophy in Journalism Studies at the University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism. As an adjunct instructor, he taught reporting classes at the Merrill College between 2010-2016. He was a 2012 Reynolds Visiting Professor at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, a program sponsored by the Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism.

Wells is the former deputy bureau chief for Dow Jones Newswires/Wall Street Journal in Washington, D.C., where he oversaw 22 reporters who covered real-time business, economics and financial news in the nation's capital. Prior to this, he was a business reporter for Dow Jones, Bloomberg News and The Associated Press. He holds a master's degree in liberal studies from St. John's College in Annapolis, where he studied philosophy, literature, history and political science. His 2015 paper on business journalism and financial history, "A Strong Sense of Outrage: Stan Strachan, the National Thrift News and the Savings and Loan Crisis" was awarded top student paper at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications in 2015. He is the co-author, with Dr. Kalyani Chadha, of a study on Twitter and newsroom sociology published in the January 2016 edition of Digital Journalism.

Rubric: Assessment of Student Class Participation

In this class, students must take responsibility for their own learning. Class participation/discussion represents 20% of your grade in Jour405V. This rubric is designed to give students a roadmap on how they will be assessed and graded on their participation and discussion.

1) Class Discussions

- Content. Students who excel will display some or all of the following qualities, such as relating the discussion to current affairs; speaking up when they do not understand; making relevant points; asking topical questions; displaying curiosity.

In addition, these students advance class discussion by offering alternative perspectives with supporting data/ evidence. They also can challenge the instructor's ideas, ideas of other students, or those presented in readings or other course materials.

- Frequency. Students who excel display these qualities in every class session.
- Preparation. Students who excel have questions or observations prepared and they bring assigned readings to class. This class will closely examine texts we read for language, structure and argument. Students who fail to bring the text aren't prepared for class, even if they have read the assignment. Students also will view assigned videos and bring questions or observations to class.

Behavior That Impedes Class Discussion includes using Facebook/Twitter/WhatsApp (any social networking site), web surfing or texting in class. If you are absent or late to class, you miss the opportunity to participate, and this will be reflected in your grade.

- Student Self-Assessment. Students also will assess their own contributions in a one-page essay:
 1. Propose what grade you deserve for class participation thus far, and
 2. Defend your proposed grade with evidence from the classroom.
 3. Students who can't find enough evidence to make a case for an excellent grade can spell out specific steps they will take to improve.

2) Group Work

Active participation means assisting your fellow students to help solve problems in the workshops.

Student Peer Assessment for Group Work. Students may be asked to anonymously rate each other's work in group settings.

3) Preliminary Assessment

By Oct. 4, the instructor will post a provisional grade for class discussions/participation on Blackboard.

Schedule of Instruction (Subject to Revision):

Jour 405V Fall 2016 Schedule

Day	Topic	Reading	Exercise	Test/Assignment	Learning Outcome
23-Aug	Basic Excel	NICAR Coursepack	Email to students		
25-Aug		Dedman: The Color of Money http://powerreporting.com/color/	Population Change		Excel Proficiency
30-Aug	Importing Data	NICAR Coursepack; HMDA data http://www.ffiec.gov/hmda/pdf/2013guide.pdf	Analyzing Change	Quiz: Basic Excel	Excel Proficiency, Numeracy
1-Sep	Calculations	Cohen, "Numbers in the Newsroom"	Analyzing Student Fees		
6-Sep	Rates and Ratios	Cohen, "Numbers in the Newsroom"	Homework - Crime Rates and Ratios		Excel Proficiency, Numeracy
8-Sep	Rates and Ratios	Color of Money series		Quiz: Ratios	
13-Sep	Basic DataViz	Tableau; HMDA data http://www.ffiec.gov/hmda/pdf/2013guide.pdf	Graphics-Maps-Crime		DataViz, Excel Proficiency, Numeracy
15-Sep	Basic DataViz		University Crime		
20-Sep	Basic DataViz	— http://www.ffiec.gov/hmda/pdf/2013guide.pdf		Quiz: Graphics	
22-Sep	StoryTelling	Cohen, "Numbers in the Newsroom"	Crime Rates and Ratios	Guest Speaker: TBA	
27-Sep	StoryTelling	Cohen, "Numbers in the Newsroom"	Crime Rates and Ratios	Quiz: Pitch Story	
29-Sep	Data Analysis	NICAR Coursepack			
4-Oct	Data Analysis	NICAR Coursepack		Assign #1-Story & Graphic	
6-Oct	Review	Data Journalism Handbook	Fayetteville City Budget		
11-Oct	Data Analysis	NICAR Coursepack; Pivot Tables	Review Graded Papers		Excel Proficiency, Numeracy, Storytelling
13-Oct	Data Analysis	NICAR Coursepack; Pivot Tables		Guest Speaker: WSJ Recruiter	
18-Oct	Fall Break!				
20-Oct	DataViz	Tableau	Produce Graphic	Quiz: Excel	DataViz, Numeracy, Storytelling
25-Oct	StoryTelling	Tableau			
27-Oct	StoryTelling	Data Journalism Handbook		Quiz: Pitch story	Storytelling

Day	Topic	Reading	Exercise	Test/Assignment	Learning Outcome
1-Nov	Data Analysis	Data Journalism Handbook			Data Cleaning
3-Nov	Data Analysis	Cohen, "Numbers in the Newsroom"	Salaries		Excel Proficiency, Numeracy
8-Nov	Data Analysis		NBA Player Salaries	Assign #2-Story & Graphic	
10-Nov	Data Analysis	Data Journalism Handbook			Data Cleaning
15-Nov	StoryTelling	Data Journalism Handbook			Data Cleaning
17-Nov	StoryTelling	Class workshop on project			
22-Nov	Data Analysis	Access		Assign #3: Final Draft Story & Graphic	Relational Databases
24-Nov	Thanksgiving Break!				
29-Nov	Relational Databases	Access	Access drills: Nursing Home Data		Relational Databases
1-Dec	Relational Databases			Assign #5: Final Edits of Story and Graphics	Relational Databases
6-Dec	Relational Databases	Access	Access drills: Nursing Home Data		Relational Databases
8-Dec	Last Day of Classes	Access	Access drills: Nursing Home Data		Relational Databases
TBA	Final Exam		Review Assign #4, Proficiency Exam, Excel and Stats		