JRN 3014: COMPUTER ASSISTED REPORTING

PLNU • SPRING 2020
6:00-8:30 p.m. Weds. • BAC 155
FINAL EXAM: Monday • May 6, 2020 • 7:30-10 P.M.

SYLLABUS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION + PREREQUISITES

JRN 3014: Computer Assisted Reporting (3 units)
Introduces students to investigative journalism through hands-on laboratory work, including advanced Web research, public records requests, statistical analysis, databases, mapping, visual aids and data interactives. Prerequisite(s): JRN 250 (unless appoved by professor).

BACKGROUND + RATIONALE

CAR practitioners have **borrowed tools and skills** from business, social science, engineering, demographics and computer science— including database management, GIS mapping, statistical analysis and the development of web applications—to do better journalism.

News organizations now demand journalists work increasingly with data, yet very few journalists understand what data *is*, *does*, or *means* to reporting and news production. Best practices with data and journalism evolve from a specialty called **computer-assisted reporting** (CAR), which originated in **investigative and watchdog journalism**.

CAR gives a journalist a unique and powerful toolkit that can provide a **distinct news market advantage**, increasing salary and compensation and making the reporter an indispensable resource in today's shrinking newsrooms. More importantly, good storytelling and backgrounding coupled with CAR help journalists tell more **compelling stories** and **bring change** to communities.

EXPECTATIONS

This course invites students to improve their **technological and analytical skills** for modern newsroom work. Students should be curious, eager and willing to **think both creatively and analytically** to solve problems. No advanced computer knowledge is required. Students will be expected to do significant **reading** and some **film-watching** on their own time, even if we are not able to discuss the material together in the classroom. Students will be introduced to forensic and investigative research, open records law, newsroom math, spreadsheets, database management and mapping and/or coding for stories—topics that are foreign to traditional journalism courses. Students may endure some growing pains or feel uncomfortable experimenting or learning by trial and error, but that is essential not only to learning CAR but to growing as students and journalists.

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who complete the program in Journalism will be able to:
- Exhibit effective research and reporting practices.
- Display strong interpretive, analytic, and critical thinking skills.
- Communicate ideas clearly and accurately in forms appropriate to the purpose, medium, and audience.
- Employ appropriate ethical and legal standards and professional codes in their service to their communities and cultures.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Following Bloom's taxonomy and aligned to the program-level outcomes for journalism (J), writing (W) and broadcast journalism (BJ), students who complete JRN314 will be able to:
- demonstrate (**application**) proficiency in internet research (J PLO 1 | BJ PLO 2,3 | W PLO 2);
- create, examine and analyze (**synthesis**, **evaluation**, **analysis**) spreadsheets, databases, statistics and maps (J PLO 1 | BJ PLO 2,3 | W PLO 2); and
- read and report on (**knowledge**, **comprehension**) the history, philosophy and expert community of computer-assisted and investigative reporting. (J PLO 2 | BJ PLO 1, 6 | W PLO 1)

SIGNIFICANT MATERIALS + SOURCES

REQUIRED
- **DFJ** – *Data for Journalists, 5th Edition* (2019), B. Houston (ISBN 0815370407)
- **AOA** – *The Art of Access: Strategies for Acquiring Public Records*, D. Cuillier and C. Davis (ISBN 1604265507)
- **IRH** – *The Investigative Reporter's Handbook, 5th Edition, B.* Houston, L. Bruzzese and S. Weinberg (Reserve)
- **Various handouts/tip sheets developed by your professor**

SUGGESTED
- **NITN** – *Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News* by Sarah Cohen (ISBN 0976603713 / order via IRE/NICAR)

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

You will need access to a **PC** with Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access software. **Please note: Mac or open-source versions of similar software are not acceptable and the instructor cannot accommodate multiple technological teaching tracks during class time.**

OVERVIEW OF TOPICS + MAJOR PROJECTS | SUBJECT TO CHANGE

CLASS MEETINGS	TOPICS	TEXTS / FILMS	UNIT PROJECTS
WEEK 1	**Course Orientation | Intro to DJ/CAR**	• Award-winners • Journalism in the Age of Data (*JITAD*)	R&R
WEEK 2	**Introduction to Computer-Assisted Research/Reporting:** CAR's origins, tools and best practices. Case studies.	• DFJ: Ch. 1-2	R&R
WEEKS 3–5	**Investigative Research | Backgrounding individuals, businesses, organizations:** Compiling background material using vital records, locator databases, criminal and civil case files, incorporation and tax filings, professional information and social media.	• IRH Intro,1,2,5,6,7 • Various HOs • *ATPM / SPTL*	Backgrounder + Memo
WEEK 6–7	**Open Records & Watchdog Journalism:** Knowing your rights, the CaPRA, FOIA, local laws; public vs. private information and data. Making your own case for information and data.	• AOA • DFJ Ch. 7 • LRO	File PRA with a local public agency + Memo
WEEK 8	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS		
WEEK 9	**Excel I | Fundamentals and basic math:** Terminology and working with data. Summing, averaging, finding medians, percent change.	• DFJ Ch. 3	Lab work
WEEKS 10–13	**Excel II | Tools for finding trends:** Sorting, filtering and pivot tables to summarize data and report trends. Pulling it together to tell a story.	• DFJ Ch. 4	Story memo
WEEK 14	**Access | Working with databases:** Terminology and working with data. Reporting on what's in the database, answering the who-what-when-where questions, showing basic trends/connections.	• DFJ Ch. 5	Lab work
WEEK 14	**Access II | Enterprise analysis:** Digging deeper to test ideas, show relationships between different data and different tables/databases, designing queries. Enterprise joins. Pulling it together to tell a story.	• DFJ Ch. 6	Story memo
FINALS WEEK	COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM Wednesday, May 6, 2020 • 7 p.m. • BAC 155		

COURSE GRADING

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Knowledge development (R&Rs, in-class assignments)	30 percent
Assessment (Quizzes)	20 percent
Watchdog advocacy (Public records request, rex/data negotiation)	10 percent
Reporting (Backgrounder, Excel and/or Access memos)	30 percent
Final assessment (Comprehensive exam)	10 percent
Attendance. See below.	~5 percent

GRADE CALCULATION (EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGES)

A	95-100	**B+**	87-89	**C+**	77-79	**D+**	65-69
A-	90-94	**B**	83-86	**C**	73-7	**D**	63-64
		B-	80-82	**C-**	70-72	**D-**	60-62

EXTRA CREDIT POLICY

The instructor makes extra credit available to students who participate fully in class and consistently turn in their regular assignments. Extra credit opportunities are designed to improve students' grades where students fall short and if they are actively trying to improve their performance. ***In order for extra credit points to apply at the end of the semester:*** [1] a student may not be missing any project assignments, [2] a student may not have more than two (2) unexcused absences, and [3] the student must carry a C (74% or higher) in the course. **These terms can change at any time.**

ATTENDANCE POLICY

A student enrolled in JRN 314 is allowed one [1] unexcused absence (no questions asked). Beyond the first absence, the student will need to provide a doctor's note or proof of official school business to avoid the student's semester grade being reduced 1-2% for each additional unexcused absence.

Regular attendance at all classes is considered essential to optimum academic achievement**. If the student is absent from more than 10 percent of class meetings, the faculty member can file a written report which may result in de-enrollment.** If the absences exceed 20 percent, the student may be de-enrolled without notice until the university drop date or, after that date, receive the appropriate grade for their work and participation. See Academic Policies in the Undergraduate Academic Catalog.

DISCLOSURES + FINE PRINT | UNIVERSITY + LJWL POLICIES

PLNU MISSION STATEMENT: To Teach. To Shape. To Send.
Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service becomes an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we aspire to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

LJWL DEPARTMENT MISSION STATEMENT
Welcome to the Department of Literature, Journalism and Modern Languages. Embodying the core values of a Christian liberal arts education in the Wesleyan theological tradition, and focusing on the power of language and story to shape us and our world, the LJWL Department and programs will provide students with knowledge, skills, and experiences to equip them to understand, interpret, analyze, evaluate, and create texts as linguistic and/or artistic expressions of diverse human experiences. We value reading, writing, researching, speaking, and discussing as profound means of participating in the redemptive work of God in all of creation. The following document will provide you with the information sources and information guidelines to University and Departmental policies that apply to all courses taken in this Department.

UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC HONESTY
Students should demonstrate academic honesty by doing original work and by giving appropriate credit to the ideas of others. Academic dishonesty is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one's own when in reality they are the results of another person's creativity and effort. A faculty member who believes a situation involving academic dishonesty has been detected may assign a failing grade for that assignment or examination, or, depending on the seriousness of the offense, for the course. Faculty should follow

and students may appeal using the procedure in the university Catalog. See **Academic Policies** for definitions of kinds of academic dishonesty and for further policy information.

Cheating is the use of unauthorized assistance that results in an unfair advantage over other students. It includes but is not limited to: Bringing and/or using unauthorized notes, technology or other study aids during an examination; looking at other students' work during an exam or in an assignment where collaboration is not allowed; attempting to communicate with other students in order to get help during an exam or in an assignment where collaboration is not allowed; obtaining an examination prior to its administration; allowing another person to do one's work and submitting it as one's own; submitting work done in one class for credit in another without the instructor's permission.

Plagiarism is the use of an idea, phrase or other materials from a source without proper acknowledgment of that source. It includes but is not limited to: The use of an idea, phrase, or other materials from a source without proper acknowledgment of that specific source in a work for which the student claims authorship; the misrepresentation and/or use of sources used in a work for which the student claims authorship; the use of papers purchased online as all or part of an assignment for which the student claims authorship; submitting written work, such as laboratory reports, computer programs, or papers, which have been copied from the work of other students, with or without their knowledge and consent.

Falsification is the alteration of information or forging of signatures on academic forms or documents. It includes but is not limited to: using improper methods of collecting or generating data and presenting them as legitimate; altering graded work and submitting it for re-grading; falsifying information on official academic documents such as drop/add forms, incomplete forms, petitions, recommendations, letters of permission, transcripts or any other university document; misrepresenting oneself or one's status in the university.

Aiding academic dishonesty is assisting another person in violating the standards of academic honesty. It includes but is not limited to: Allowing other students to look at one's own work during an exam or in an assignment where collaboration is not allowed; providing information, material, or assistance to another person knowing that it may be used in violation of academic honesty policies; providing false information in connection with any academic honesty inquiry.

Malicious intent is misuse of academic resources or interference with the legitimate academic work of other students. It includes but is not limited to: removing books, journals or pages of these from the library without formal checkout; hiding library materials; refusing to return reserve readings to the library; damaging or destroying the projects, lab or studio work or other academic product of fellow students.

A student remains responsible for the academic honesty of work submitted in PLNU courses and the consequences of academic dishonesty beyond receipt of the final grade in the class and beyond the awarding of the diploma. Ignorance of these catalog policies will not be considered a valid excuse or defense. Students may not withdraw from a course as a response to a consequence.

LJWL ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY
The LJWL Department deems intellectual and academic integrity critical to academic success and personal development; therefore, any unethical practice will be detrimental to the student's academic record and moral character. Students who present the work of others as if it were their own commit plagiarism. Presenting another's work as one's own includes, but is not limited to, borrowing another student's work, buying a paper, and using the thoughts or ideas of others as one's own (using information in a paper without citation). Plagiarized work will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly for the course. In either event, a written report will be filed with the department chair and the area dean. The dean will review the report and submit it to the Provost and the Vice President for Student Development. It will then be placed in the student's academic file.

PUBLIC DISCOURSE
By continuing in this class, you acknowledge that your work may be viewed by others in the class. Unless students opt-out in writing, their work, such as final drafts of stories, research or analysis may be incorporated into instruction. Students' work might also be posted to any/all JRN 314 class blog(s) or online media for review. **If work is posted, please know that it may be scrutinized by the public or other journalists, and students may be required to show proof of sources and attributions.**

Some of the work we will do in this class is cooperative, by nature of the class discussions and general feedback given to written work and/projects; thus you should think of all your writing and speaking for and in class as public, not private, discourse.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE
Because the Literature, Journalism, and Modern Language department recognizes the power of language, all public language used in this course, including written and spoken discourse, will be inclusive. This standard is outlined by all major academic style guides, including MLA, APA, and Chicago, and is the norm in university-level work.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Point Loma Nazarene University is committed to diversity in the classroom, in its publications and in its various organizations and components. Faculty and staff recognize that the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of their colleagues and students are best served through respect toward gender, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture and other personal characteristics. In addition, the department of Literature, Journalism, and Modern Languages is committed to taking a leadership position that calls for promoting a commitment to diversity in and out of the classroom and in the practices of writing, journalism, and the study of literature.

FERPA POLICY (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act)

In compliance with federal law, neither PLNU student ID nor social security number should be used in publicly posted grades or returned sets of assignments without student written permission. This class will meet the federal requirements by distributing all grades and papers individually. Also, in compliance with FERPA, you will be the only person given information about your progress in this class unless you have designated others to receive it in the "Information Release" section of the student portal. See **Policy Statements** in the undergrad student catalog.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a diagnosed disability, please contact PLNU's Disability Resource Center (DRC) within the first two weeks of class to demonstrate need and to register for accommodation by phone at 619-849-2486 or by e-mail at **DRC@pointloma.edu**. See Disability Resource Center for additional information.

MAINTAINING CLASS SCHEDULE VIA ONLINE REGISTRATION

Students must maintain their class schedules. Should a student need arise to drop a course, they are responsible to drop the course (provided the drop date meets the stated calendar deadline established by the university) and to complete all necessary official forms (online or paper). Failing to attend and/or to complete required forms may result in a grade of F on the student's official transcript.