JRN 3014: COMPUTER ASSISTED REPORTING

PLNU • SPRING 2021
Wednesdays | 5PM to 7:45PM
REMOTE SYNCHRONOUS COURSE DELIVERY
FINAL EXAM: Wed., June 11, 5PM to 7:30PM00

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

JRN 3014: Computer Assisted Reporting [3 units] introduces students to data and investigative journalism through hands-on laboratory work, including advanced public records, internet and deep-web research; public records requests; and statistical analysis using spreadsheets, databases and maps. Prerequisite(s): JRN 2050.)

EXPECTATIONS + OUTCOMES

This course invites you to improve their technological and research skills to thrive in 21st century journalism. You should be curious, eager and willing to think both creatively and analytically to solve problems. You will be introduced to forensic and investigative research, open records law, newsroom math, spreadsheets, database management and if time permits, mapping and/or coding for stories—topics and skills that are rare in traditional journalism programs and thus set you apart immediately from the pack. No advanced math, coding, or statistical knowledge is required to get started *today*. You may endure some growing pains or feel uncomfortable experimenting and learning by trial and error, but that is essential to both good journalism and personal growth. Journalism is constantly evolving, and if it seems easy, you may not be doing it right.

What you need to know and do to perform this advanced work, you will learn one step at a time with my expert and experienced guidance. By the end of the course, you will have two important types of stories added to your portfolio to help get you the best internships in San Diego and elsewhere: [1] a deep profile on an elected official using background research and [2] a campaign finance story using Excel and/or Access. For my part, I commit to offering you an engaging, safe, fun and rigorous course! #watchpupsforlife

REQUIRED TEXTS, SOFTWARE, RESOURCES, + EQUIPMENT

- ☑ B. Houston. ***Data for Journalists***. 5th Ed. 2018. ISBN 0815370407.
- ☑ D. Cuillier and C. Davis. ***The Art of Access***: *Strategies for Acquiring Public Records.* 2nd Ed. 2019. ISBN 1506380700.
- ☑ P. Modiano. *Dora Bruder* (F). ***The Search Warrant*** (E). 2010. ISBN 184655361X.
- ☑ Microsoft **Excel** (latest version; no substitutions)
- ☑ Functional **internet** connection, **microphone** and **camera** for zooms
- ☑ At least 15" **screen size** for main screen; preferably a second or device

GRADING PRACTICES + POLICIES

Grade Composition

Quizzes	25 %	**In-Class Activities, Labs**	10 %
Public Records Request	10 %	**Final Exam**	10 %
Bulletproofing Exercise	10 %	**Participation/Attendance**	10 %
Investigative Memo/Story	15 %	**Extra Credit Potential**	10%
Excel Memo/Story	10 %		

Grade Ranges

A	95-100%	**B+**	87-89%	**C+**	77-79%	**D+**	67-69%
A-	90-94%	**B**	84-86%	**C**	74-76%	**D**	64-66%
		B-	80-83%	**C-**	70-73%	**D-**	60-63%

Attendance & Participation Policy

Regular attendance at all classes is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. I will use tools to measure your attendance, participation and engagement in the course. This course will be taught and learned remotely. **Synchronous on-camera participation at weekly Zoom meetings is required for this course.**

Because we are on schedule that reduces our number of Wednesday meetings by two weeks, **two [2] or more absences** may result in your de-enrollment without proper documentation from the DRC. **Three [3] or more absences** may result in you failing the course. Please communicate with me about any challenges that are impeding your attendance or participation, and we will be able to avoid a crisis.

If you are absent and miss a quiz, group activities, or lab work, there are **no makeups**, and your scores for that day will be a zero unless you have a doctor's note or exemption.

Detailed information on PLNU's class attendance policy is available online: PLNU Class Attendance Policy.

Extra Credit Policy

You can earn as much as a 10% boost overall between a number of extra credit opportunities. There's one catch: to be eligible for extra credit, you need to maintain at least a C- in the course (70% average or higher), and you can have no more than one [1] unexcused absence.

I do not drop grades wholesale, but **I use several other strategies to determine the most generous calculation of your grade.** I am on your side and genuinely desire that you succeed and be proud of your work in this class this semester. Your honest effort and positive attitude may make all the difference when I consider these variables or if you are hovering between grades (e.g. B+/A- or B/B+). Extra credit counts only if you participate in class and turn in your regular assignments. Extra credit is a grade enhancer, not a substitution for missed work. It offers some grace if you have a "bad" day, or if you want to keep improving on an already good effort (for those perfectionists out there!), but it won't solve catastrophic situations if you get behind in your work.

Cheating

Don't test me. Now more than ever our profession and audiences crave the highest ethical and truth standards. Investigative and data journalism require even higher standards for accuracy and ethics. I have a zero tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, or shortcuts that matches current professional standards and best practices. Review our University Academic Honesty that outlines the myriad ways in which gaming the system is a very bad idea for you: **PLNU Academic Honesty Policies & Definitions.**

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 the DRC website for additional information: **Disability Resource Center**.

JRN 3014: OVERVIEW OF WEEKLY TOPICS

CLASS MEETING	TOPIC	MATERIALS + RESOURCES	PROJECT DEADLINE
WEEK 1 MARCH 3	**Course Welcome & Orientation:** Introductions, objectives, expectations, policies, course topics	• Syllabus • Topics Overview	
	Computer-Assisted Reporting / Data Journalism: Investigative origins; watchdog contexts; CAR experts, tools and best practices	• DFJ: Ch. 1, 11	
		• *All the President's Men*	**Extra Credit Worksheet**
WEEK 2 MARCH 10	**Numeracy:** Math for journalists and "columns and rows" (data) fundamentals	• DFJ: Ch. 4 • Math PowerPage PDF • Excel Geek Glosary PDF • MS Excel • NITN (lecture only)	
	Excel I : Calculating descriptive and frequency statistics (count, sum, average, median, mode, percent change)		
WEEK 3 MARCH 17	**Research & Deep Backgrounding:** The "Three 'I's" (individuals, institutions, issues), the two meanings of "public" records, how the internet and deep web work, the due diligence process, bulletproofing	• DFJ: Ch. 2 • IRH (lecture only) • DDO	
	Due Diligence Outline	• *The Search Warrant* (novella) by Patrick Modiano	**Extra Credit Worksheet**
WEEK 4 MARCH 24	**Investigating Individuals I:** Compiling background material on individuals using news clips and vital records, social media, etc.	• DFJ: Ch. 3 • IRH (lecture only) • DDO	
WEEK 5 MARCH 31	**Mental Health Day:** No class!	• *Spotlight*	**Extra Credit Worksheet**
WEEK 6 APRIL 7	**Investigating Individuals II:** Compiling background material on individuals using criminal and civil case filings, property records, assets and professional links	• IRH (lecture only) • DDO	**Backgrounder Pitch**
WEEK 7 APRIL 14	**Investigating Institutions:** Compiling background material on businesses, industries, non-profits and schools using criminal and civil case filings, property records, corporate assets, tax filings, regulatory actions and fines and more	• IRH • DDO • Biz Profiling PDF	**BKG Draft I**
WEEK 8 APRIL 21	**Following the Money:** Political and election records, filings and disclosures for individuals and institutions	• FTM PDF • DDO • IRH	**Campaign Finance Pitch**
WEEK 9 APRIL 28	**Transparency & Open Records Laws:** Knowing your rights and responsibilities and making a case for information and data using the CaPRA, FOIA, Brown Act and other transparency laws	• AOA • DFJ: Ch. 8 • LRO	**CF Draft I**
WEEK 10 MAY 5	**Mental Health Day:** No class!	• *The Post* • *Erin Brockovich*	**Extra Credit Worksheet**
WEEK 11 MAY 12	**Excel II	Finding Trends:** Sorting and filtering data to summarize and report trends	• DFJ Ch. 4-5	**BKG Draft II**
WEEK 12 MAY 19	**Excel III	Pivot Tables:** Wrangling Excel's most useful tool for journalists	• DFJ Ch. 4-5, 9	**PRA Filing**
WEEK 13 MAY 26	**Access I	Database Fundamentals:** Working with relational tables, "interviewing" data and reporting the 5Ws, identifying trends connections	• DFJ: Ch. 6, 9	**BKG and CF Bulletproofing I**
	**Access II	Enterprise Analysis:** Digging deeper into relationships, designing queries and performing joins	• DFJ: Ch. 7, 9	
WEEK 14 JUNE 2	**Publishing Workshop:** Bringing it all together to tell your story most accurately and compellingly	• DFJ: Ch. 10	**PRA Results Bulletproofing II**
	Final Exam Review	• *The Truth*	**Extra Credit Worksheet**
WEEK 15 JUNE 9	**Comprehensive Final Exam & Course Evaluations**		**Publish BKG and CF Stories**