JRN 3014: COMPUTER ASSISTED REPORTING

Data Journalism & Investigative Techniques

PLNU • SPRING 2024
Wednesday | 6 to 8:45 p.m.
Liberty Station Conference Center • Room 201
FINAL EXAM: May 1. 2024 • 7:30-10 p.m.

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BAC 127 • Office hours by appointment.

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**: JRN 2050.

COURSE CREDIT HOUR INFORMATION

In the interest of providing sufficient time to accomplish the stated Course Learning Outcomes, this class meets the PLNU credit hour policy for a 3-unit class delivered over 15 weeks. It is anticipated that students will spend a minimum of 37.5 participation hours per credit hour on their coursework. For this course, students will spend an estimated 112.5 minimum hours meeting the course learning outcomes.

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. These specialized topics and skills 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, so if it seems easy, you're probably not doing it right.

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

ATTENDANCE + PARTICIPATION POLICY

Because discussion will be an important part of our class, your regular attendance and participation at all classes—remote, virtual, in-person—is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. I will use tools to measure your attendance, participation and engagement in the course. **On-camera participation during Zoom meetings is required.**

ABSENCES

If a 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.] **Two [2] or more absences** may result in your de-enrollment without proper documentation of accommodations. **Three [3] or more absences** [the equivalent of 3 weeks of class] 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.

PARTICIPATION & PROFESSIONALISM

Participation and professionalism include finishing your reading, coming prepared with your R&Rs completed and appropriately formatted, joining in on in-class discussions, listening actively, ignoring the chatter going on around you that fights for your attention, and taking notes in class—just as you would if you were in a meeting or interview on the job. Coming to class unprepared, staring at your phone, or being distractive or disruptive in class may count against your participation score. If you already know that you'll be missing more than two classes due to a pre-existing schedule conflict (e.g. athletics, work, childcare, medical appointments), you should reconsider taking this course at this time. If you arrive late to an in-person class, please take a seat closest to the back door and be respectful of those around you.

COURSE TEXTS, SOFTWARE, RESOURCES + EQUIPMENT

Please consult the list below for required courses texts, technology and resources.

- ☑ **[Required]** B. Houston. ***Data for Journalists***. 5th Ed. Kindle. 2018. ISBN 0815370407.
- ☑ **[Required]** D. Cuillier and C. Davis. ***The Art of Access***: *Strategies for Acquiring Public Records*. 2nd Ed. Kindle. 2019. ISBN 1506380700.
- ☑ **[Required]** Microsoft **Excel** (no substitutions).
- ☑ **[Required]** A **laptop or desktop computer** with at least 15" screen size for data analysis.
- ☑ **[Required]** Microsoft **Excel** (no substitutions).
- ☑ **[Required]** Functional **internet** connection, **microphone** and **camera** for Zoom meetings if needed.
- ☑ **[Extra Credit]** P. Modiano. *Dora Bruder* (FR, 1997, ISBN 9782070408481). *The Search Warrant* (UK ISBN 9781784876388). ***Dora Bruder*** (US Kindle ISBN 9780520214262).

ONLINE PLATFORMS + TECHNOLOGY

We will be using Canvas for our course work, including class-wide emails, announcements, file sharing, assignment uploads and Zoom (if needed). Reminders:

- ☑ **Check Canvas regularly** for all course material, announcements, communications that are distributed via these sites. I will send messages only to these sites. If you want to reach out to me about our course, please do so in Canvas email. Please let me know immediately if you encounter any technical problems with these sites so that I can address the technical issues on my side.
- ☑ **Submit all coursework in acceptable, viewable/audible, Canvas-compatible, digital form (doc, docx, pdf, xlsx).** Pages documents are not readable in Canvas/Google Chrome. If I cannot open your document or read it, I cannot assign it any credit.
- ☑ **Keep backup copies** of your work so you can recover/provide one if necessary.
- ☑ Problems with technology do not relieve you of the responsibility of participating, turning in your assignments, or completing your classwork.

ASSESSMENT + GRADING

Your success in making meaning of the course and its texts will be measured by your:

- ☑ close reading of texts (annotations),
- ☑ thoughtful reflection on texts and practices (R&Rs)
- ☑ engaged participation (annotations, discussions in-person or online)
- ☑ completion of assignments in a timely manner (R&Rs, quizzes)
- ☑ posing your own questions on texts and practices (annotations, analysis)
- ☑ seeking answers to your questions (annotations, discussions, research, analysis)
- ☑ connecting our professional vocation to our faith and ethics (discussions, analysis)

Grades will be based on the scale in the table following these reminders:

- ☑ Student grades will be posted in **Canvas Grades** according to the weighted components of our course. Grades will be frequently updated. Please don't panic! Know that your totals/percentages may go up and down while I make adjustments on assignment scoring and work the numbers to find the most gracious curve. You may want to turn off notifications of grade entry/changes if this bothers you.
- ☑ For your work to improve, it is vital to **read the comments** I post in the gradebook and the hand-written annotations I write inside the body of your assignments.
- ☑ If you are **absent and miss** a quiz, group activity, or lab work, there are no makeups, and your scores for that day will be a zero unless you have an official exemption for school business.
- ☑ I drop your lowest R&R and lowest quiz scores. Quizzes cannot be made up or taken late (after class has started) because we will discuss the answers immediately when class starts.
- ☑ **Late assignments** are accepted but with daily penalty assessed (5%).
- ☑ Submit all coursework to me **typed** in the proper Canvas-compatible digital format (e.g., doc, docx, pdf, xlsx). Pages documents are not readable in Canvas/Google Chrome. **If I cannot open your document or read it, it will earn a zero.** Do not submit any **images** (e.g., jpg, png, tiff) of typed or hand-written work unless an assignment expressly asks for you to upload an image of hand-written material (e.g. the Circle of Light).

GRADING SCALE	
A = 95-100 **A- = 94-90**	Exceptional work that goes above and beyond the requirements of the assignment; accurate, thoughtful and sophisticated analysis that offers the reader something to consider; excellent logic, structure, and organization; virtually no grammar and punctuation errors; not a single factual error.
B+ = 87-89 **B = 83-86** **B- = 80-82**	Good work that exceeds the minimum requirements of the assignment; no major problems with logic, structure, and organization; very few grammar and punctuation errors; accurate facts and no more than one error.
C+ =77-79 **C = 73-76** **C- = 70-72**	Average work that meets the minimum requirements of the assignment; may have minor problems with logic, structure, and organization; may have some grammar and punctuation errors; multiple inaccuracies.
D+ = 67-69 **D = 63-66** **D- = 60-62**	Poor work that does not fully meet the minimum requirements of the assignment; may have some problems with logic, structure, and organization; grammar and punctuation errors may hinder meaning; significant inaccuracy.
F = 0-59	Plagiarization: zero tolerance; **use of any/all AI tools** in written assignments; copying another's work (either with or without permission; any/all students involved will fail the assignment); poor work that does not fulfill the assignment; may have serious problems with logic, structure, and organization; grammar and punctuation errors may obscure meaning; wildly inaccurate.

COURSE COMPONENT	FREQUENCY + TIME INVESTMENT	SEMESTER INVESTMENT [OUTSIDE CLASS]	GRADE DISTRIBUTION
Learning Engagement / Activities & Labs (R&Rs)	1 worksheet of 15-20 questions on course content and application, 2-3 hours *before* class	**30-45 hours**	**40%**
Public Records Request	1 written PRA letter, negotiation over 2-3 weeks	**6-8 hours**	**15%**
Investigative Backgrounder & Story Pitch	1 presentation based on investigative research on Final Exam day	**30 hours**	**20%**
Data Analysis Minimum Story	1 minimum story based on data analysis	**20 hours**	**10%**
Weekly Assessment	20-minute quiz online *before* class	**3-4 hours**	**15%**
Comprehensive Final Exam	1 hour online; optional if quiz average is an A (95-100%) *before* extra credit	**1 hour**	**≦10%**
Preparation & Professionalism	course engagement, reading and exploring resources *before* class to support assignments and discussions; well-presented deliverables	**20-30 hours**	**≦5%**
Participation / Attendance	each class weekly	-----	**≦5%**
Extra Credit	2-3 opportunities, 1-2 hours each	**2-5 hours**	**≦5%**
TOTAL	**3 UNITS**	**110-140 HOURS**	**≦100%**

ACADEMIC WRITING & MLA STYLE

For written work, follow MLA Style and its standards for academic literary and inclusive writing. Points will be lost for errors in MLA Style use.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Because the Literature, Journalism, Writing and Languages Department recognizes the power of language, all public language used in this course, including written and spoken discourse, should 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.

FINAL EXAMINATION POLICY

Successful completion of this class requires taking the final examination on its scheduled day, unless the University announces alternative methods or dates. The final examination schedule is posted on the Office of Records website. No requests for early examinations or alternative days will be approved without the Dean's pre-approval.

PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Much of the work we will do in this discussion-based class is interactive. The nature of Canvas discussion board posts and replies and any recorded Zoom meetings are public discourse. By continuing in this class, you acknowledge that your work will be viewed and/or heard by others in the class and is thus, public.

EXTRA CREDIT POLICY

Extra credit counts only if you participate in class and turn in your regular assignments. It 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. **You can earn as much as a 5% boost overall between extra credit opportunities.** There's one catch: to be eligible for extra credit, you need to maintain at least a C average (74% or higher) in the course, 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+).

PLNU ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY

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. **Use of AI to write assignments is absolutely prohibitive.** <mark>See AI Policy below.</mark> Cheating of any type (even "accidental") will result in the automatic failure of the assignment or quiz. A second occurrence will result in the automatic failure of the entire course. See course Grading Scale for more detail. 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 university academic policies for definitions of kinds of academic dishonesty and for further policy information.

ACCOMMODATIONS + MORE

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

While all students are expected to meet the minimum standards for completion of this course as established by the instructor, students with disabilities may require academic adjustments, modifications or auxiliary aids/services. PLNU is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all its programs, services, and activities. Students with disabilities may request course-related accommodations by contacting the Educational Access Center (EAC), located in Ryan Learning Center (EAC@pointloma.edu or 619-849-2486). Once a student's eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, the EAC will issue an academic accommodation plan ("AP") to all faculty who teach courses in which the student is enrolled each semester PLNU highly recommends that students speak with their professors during the first two weeks of each semester/term about the implementation of their AP in that particular course and/or if they do not wish to utilize some or all of the elements of their AP in that course. Students who need accommodations for a disability should contact the EAC as early as possible (i.e., ideally before the beginning of the semester) to assure appropriate accommodations can be provided. It is the student's responsibility to make the first contact with the EAC.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND DISCRIMINATION

Point Loma Nazarene University faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students. If you (or someone you know) have experienced any form of sexual discrimination or misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available through the Title IX Office at pointloma.edu/Title-IX. Please be aware that under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, it is required to disclose information about such misconduct to the Title IX Office. If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact Counseling Services at counselingservices@pointloma.edu or find a list of campus pastors at pointloma.edu/title-ix.

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, Writing and 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.

SPIRITUAL CARE

PLNU strives to be a place where students grow as whole persons. To this end, we provide resources for our students to encounter God and grow in their Christian faith. If you have questions, a desire to meet with the chaplain, or if you have prayer requests, you can contact the Office of Student Life and Formation. (I am here for you, too!)

STATE AUTHORIZATION

State authorization is a formal determination by a state that Point Loma Nazarene University is approved to conduct activities regulated by that state. In certain states outside California, Point Loma Nazarene University is not authorized to enroll online (distance education) students. If a student moves to another state after admission to the program and/or enrollment in an online course, continuation within the program and/or course will depend on whether Point Loma Nazarene University is authorized to offer distance education courses in that state. It is the student's responsibility to notify the institution of any change in his or her physical location. Refer to the map on State Authorization to view which states allow online (distance education) outside of California.

PLNU COPYRIGHT POLICY

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law.

COURSE TOPICS, SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS

See R&Rs posted to Canvas for detailed assignments and labs. The following table is a general guide to the course's content and schedule which may require changes or adjustments for time.

WEEK	TOPIC	MATERIALS + RESOURCES	ASSIGNMENT
WEEK 1 JAN. 10	**Course Welcome & Orientation:** Introductions, objectives, expectations, policies, course topics **Computer-Assisted Reporting / Data Journalism:** Investigative origins; watchdog contexts; CAR experts, tools, best practices	• Syllabus • Topics Overview • Intro to CAR Lecture [PDF]	
WEEK 2 JAN. 17	**Numeracy:** How to report accurately with numbers; using data, math and statistics responsibly in journalism	• DFJ: Ch. 1-2 • IRH Ch. 4 [intro to CAR] • Math PowerPage [PDF]	**R&R-1** [intro/CAR 101]
WEEK 3 JAN. 24	**Excel I:** Columns & rows basics; calculating descriptive/frequency statistics (count, sum, mean, median, mode, percent change)	• Math PowerPage [PDF] • NITN Intro, Ch. 1	**R&R-2** [numeracy practice]
WEEK 4 JAN. 31	**Excel II:** Pivot tables	• DFJ Ch. 4 [spreadsheets] • NITN Intro, Ch. 2	**R&R-3** [lab]
WEEK 5 FEB. 7	**Excel III:** Advanced formulas and tricks	• DFJ Ch. 5 [spreadsheets] • NITN Intro, Ch. 3	**R&R-4** [lab]
WEEK 6 FEB. 14	**PRAs, Transparency & Open Records Laws:** Knowing your rights and responsibilities and making a case for information and data using the CaPRA, FOIA, Brown Act, transparency laws	• AOA Forword, Preface, Ch. 1 • AOA Ch. 2 [doc state of mind] • AOA Ch. 3 [legal expert] • AOA Ch. 4 [doc habitats] • AOA Ch. 7 [data requests] • DFJ Ch. 8 [data negotiation] • Legal Rights Overview [PDF] • Negotiating for Data [PDF]	**R&R-5** [PRA letter]
WEEK 7 FEB. 21	**Writer's Symposium** **JRN 3014 Office Hours [BAC 127 4-6 p.m.]**		
WEEK 8 FEB. 28	**PRAs, Transparency & Open Records Laws:** Knowing your rights and responsibilities and making a case for information and data using the CaPRA, FOIA, Brown Act, transparency laws	• AOA Ch. 5 [effective requests] • AOA Ch. 6 [denials] • AOA Ch. 8 [public officials] • Legal Rights Overview [PDF] • Negotiating for Data [PDF]	**R&R-6** [PRA letter]
WEEK 9 MAR. 6	**Spring Break!**		
WEEK 10 MAR. 13	**Public Records Basics & Due Diligence** 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	• Due Diligence Ouline [PDF] • Public Records Overview [PDF] • Public Records Terms [PDF] • Circle of Light (AOA)	**R&R-7** [public rex]
		• *All the President's Men* [film]	**Extra Credit Worksheet**
WEEK 11 MAR. 20	**Investigating Individuals I:** Compiling background material on individuals using news clips and vital records, social media	• IRH Ch. 2 [secondary sources] • DDO [PDF] • Circle of Light (AOA)	**R&R-8** [DDO]
		• *Dora Bruder* [Modiano novel]	**Extra Credit Worksheet**

WEEK 12 MAR. 27	**Investigating Individuals II:** Compiling background material on individuals using criminal and civil case filings, property records, assets and professional links	• DDO • IRH Ch. 3 [primary sources]	**R&R-9** [DDO]
WEEK 13 APR. 3	**Investigating Individuals III:** Compiling background material on individuals using property records, assets	• DDO • IRH Ch. 5 [people trails]	**R&R-10** [DDO]
WEEK 14 APR. 10	**Investigating Institutions I:** Compiling background material on businesses, industries, non-profits, schools	• DDO • IRH Ch. 13 [businesses] • DFJ Ch. 3 [unstructured data]	**R&R-11** [DDO]
		• *Spotlight* [film]	**Extra Credit Worksheet**
WEEK 15 APR. 17	**Investigating Institutions II: Following the Money:** Political and election records, filings and disclosures for individuals and institutions	• IRH Ch. 8 [executive branch] • IRH Ch. 9 [legislative branch] • Following the Money [PDF]	**R&R-12** [DDO]
WEEK 16 APR. 24	**MS Access:** Relational databasing; SQL; enterprise joins	• NITN Intro, Ch. 4 • DFJ Ch. 6-7 [databases] • DFJ Ch. 9-10 [data hygeine] • DFJ Ch. 11 [CAR storywriting]	**R&R-13** [lab]
	Course Evaluations [online; see email invitation]		**Extra Credit**
FINALS WEEK MAY 2	**Backgroundee Presentations** [in class] **Comprehensive Final Exam** [complete anytime online before 5/4/23]		**R&R-14** [presentation]