

Data Journalism in Enterprise Reporting

COMM 4221~Wed/Fri 10:20-12:10
(Room 216 Journalism Bldg.)

Spring 2026

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COURSE DESCRIPTION/GOAL

This is the capstone of your journalism major!

Up to now, you've focused on mastering the skills that will prepare you for a career in storytelling: reporting, interviewing, writing, editing, and photography. This course will add a final set of tools that are increasingly in demand among news outlets that desire the most talented job candidates.

In this class, we will practice data journalism, also called computer assisted reporting. This reporting strategy uses computers to analyze the ever-growing amount of publicly available data to produce unique and compelling stories. This course will teach the fundamentals of such techniques and combine your data analysis enterprise reporting project. You will create a story that springs from the records you analyze.

We will set a project goal and then you—individually or with a partner—will acquire and analyze that data to help produce the basis of the story.

You will then tell this story with the skills you've developed in previous journalism classes: reporting, writing, photography and the strategic use of social media.

Aside from data analysis, which you will learn here, the skills you need for this class will come from your prior classes, and you will use all of them to:

1. Find and research a topic that's compelling and important.
2. Use the results of your analysis to identify and connect with sources and people who will help tell the story your data reveal.
3. Interview and spend quality time with those sources.
4. Use the data and interviews to write a powerfully written, streamlined article that has a bold, clear narrative structure.
5. Create supporting multimedia pieces, which can include photos, visualizations and graphics built from your data.

6. Create a rough draft, edit your story.
7. Present your project to the class.

Textbook (suggested)

Computer Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide, Brant Houston – is a great resource, but not required.

Similar to the Practicum class (COMM 2223), I will provide numerous links to access through Carmen, which you will be responsible for reading and reviewing prior to each class period.

Also, you will need:

A computer (including Internet and word processing) access
Cloud storage, a thumb drive and/or computer hard drive capable of storing large amounts of data.

GRADING (points) Percent Final Grade

Professionalism (50) 5%
Final Presentation (100) 10%
Pitch Outline (150) 15%
Digital Journal: (150) 15%
Midterm draft (150) 15%

Final Project (400): Story development (100) Research (100) Writing (100)
Multimedia (100) **40%**

These points tallied together will give you your final grade of the following (100-93=A; 92-90=A; 89- 88 B+; 87-82=B; 81-80=B ; 79-78=C+; 77-72=C; 71-70=C ; 69-68=D+; 67-60=D; 59 and below=E).

Please note: I am not able to negotiate grades, either during or after the semester.

DATE OF FINAL EXAM: This class has no final exam but a final presentation.

Instructor Methods

You must prepare for each class by reading the required links in Carmen. Our class time, particularly at the beginning of the semester, will be divided by a short presentation followed by one-on-one consultation on your projects and hands-on practice with data analysis software.

I believe that this will help you quickly master a reporting technique that might be new for you, but is increasingly expected of new reporters entering the field. Many of the courses will work like a computer lab.

This will help us work more closely and will help me to assess and understand your individual needs and goals. Each project is different and no one lecture can handle everything.

Since this class involves data analysis techniques and those techniques advance and evolve, changes in Carmen modules and schedules are likely. Any such changes will be announced through emails. Please let me know if you have other ideas for what might augment our class or better serve your learning experience.

I encourage you to email and tweet any and all questions that arise, and to share any information you find useful outside our class content, and to meet with me during office hours. Office hours are listed, but I am also in the newsroom 9-5 most weekdays, outside of class. If the door is open, I'm most often available.

Class Tools

To better serve the needs of the class, the classroom-provided computers will include all of the applications needed to learn the basics of data journalism. These will include Microsoft Excel, the Access database manager, and ArcMap, a data mapping program. We also will work with a popular data visualization platform, Tableau, and with Google-Drive based web scraping tools. If your personal computer lacks these applications there will be time allotted during classes to do the work needed to complete your stories.

The Microsoft applications are available for free download through the university's site license program. Information on how to request the software for student use is available here. <https://ocio.osu.edu/software> Students should note, however, that Microsoft does not make its database manager, Access, available for Apple products. Likewise, you should be wary of any program available on the web that offers to make Access functional on Apple computers.

It is important, however, that you be able to store and back up your data on something that's yours, a cloud/flash/thumb drive or your own computer's hard drive so that they are not lost to the whims of the computer gods, power surges or usually reliable Ohio State computing equipment.

CLASS PROFESSIONALISM

College is intended to prepare you for the real world. You can and will make a lot of mistakes here, but the goal is to learn from them and not to make them again. To that end, I will treat you professionally and I need you to do the same.

1. You will be graded primarily on your writing and editing, and how you work as a writer.
2. Fact errors are also VERY important in the pursuit of journalistic skill.
3. Come on time and ready to work on the material for the day. This is increasingly an issue and weighs heavily on your professionalism grade.
4. You are missed when you are absent: Twitter attendance, described later only works when you are here and attendance is part of your grade.

5. Treating classmates/coworkers with respect: Everyone's ideas have merit, and allowing a civil discussion, even when we disagree, is a key to future success.
6. Dressing for success: I know this is college, but you never know who might come to class who could help you with an internship or guide your academic or professional career. Please know I don't want to discuss appropriate class dress with you, but I will if need be.
7. **Deadlines are deadlines:** Assignments must be submitted in the Dropbox by the pre-determined time and cannot be accepted late, barring a medical excuse or an attempt to reach me prior to the deadline.
8. I believe in using social media in class. I encourage you to use your devices, and require Twitter for attendance, and our research in class will use all electronic devices. Remember, if I can see what you post—so can future employers. Be responsible in how you present yourself online.
9. We never interview or quote friends, relatives, roommates, etc. In our industry, it's considered a conflict of interest.
10. We never write on topics of which we have a personal stake or relationship (places where we work, groups of which we are a member, etc...)
11. We always tell sources we are interviewing them for an article ***that could be pitched to The Lantern.***
12. That means we do not tell sources we are “writing for a class assignment.”
13. Lying, cheating or stealing will get you fired: In this class, if you plagiarize anything you will fail the course and I will report you to academic misconduct.

WITHDRAWAL POLICY

Not all classes fit your schedule or your academic plan. However, I very much wish to meet with you before you drop to see what we can do to work through any challenges you face. If you do have questions about how to drop or the impact on your transcript or financial aid, please visit the Academic Advising website.

EQUIPMENT

You will be able to use the cameras and video cameras from the Lantern news room locker. You are welcome to use your own equipment, but please know that it is up to you to determine if it is compatible with our computers and software, and you will need to do any necessary conversions. Just a reminder the camera locker is in room 275 Journalism and checkouts are during posted hours.

ASSIGNMENTS

Professionalism (50 points)

Treating this class like a job will go a long way toward helping you be prepared for your post-graduation life. Yourability to come to class on time, contribute to discussions, turn in work on time, treat classmates with respect, dress appropriately, and communicate respectfully and clearly in person, email and in writing will earn you professionalism points.

Final Presentation (100 points)

Each individual or team will share the final project with class. Team members must both be present and able to discuss their work to receive the same grade. The schedule for the presentation will be determined as the semester draws to a close.

Digital Journal (200)

Spending time analyzing data, researching records and the notes you take from interviews are key parts of this story. You will keep a digital journal of your participation, describing in detail the progress you've made in three areas: data acquisition and analysis, reporting and sourcing, and efforts to develop photos and data visualizations. Aside from one-on-one sessions these journals are critical to assessing your progress and for your final grade.

Pitch Outline (100)

Your first major grade will mimic a real-life exercise many professional journalists follow to gain the time and resources to work on a long-term project and free themselves from the rigors of daily reporting. You will prepare a pitch based off your initial reporting and analysis and then outline your vision for the story and the different elements, photos, graphics and any sidebar stories that might accompany it. An example of how to do this is found in Carmen.

Midterm (150)

As a midterm, you will turn in your first draft of the written portion of your project to Carmen. This should have the look and feel you are intending for your final project, but it is open for editing until the final version is complete. This will mark the first attempt at a writing style that is not inverted pyramid. The rough draft will then become the living document you continue to revise and develop into the final story. No project story is written the night before it is published. If it takes months to report, it will take weeks to write.

Final Project (400)

Here you will file the final version of the story along with the photos, graphics and social media strategy in their full and completed forms. This represents the story, and story elements that a reporter feels is their best work and are ready to hand in for final editing. The story, photos, graphics and social media plan can be handed in as they are to editors, in a single file. Final projects that combine each of these elements into a single document are acceptable, as long as each element can be fully read and assessed by the instructor. Please note: *Each person in a team must equally participate in the research, creation and presentation to receive full credit.*

Multi-Step Process

No matter what issue or topic you identify for your capstone project, you will follow this process to produce it

- 1. Identify the story.** Use traditional print library resources, Web sites and social media like Facebook and Twitter to find your topic/subject/issue.
- 2. Research/analysis.** Using the sources above, along with in person or telephone interviews, write a 1- 2 page pitch/outline of the subject selected. The pitch should include likely sources of data local, national and/or international that will help form the basis for the story.
- 3. Reporting.** Your data analysis is just a starting point. Your story will grow from the places that data point to. Statistics are dry and impersonal. The people who are affected by them are not. Regularly update your progress in the Google file and write entries that will help you write your midterm and final stories.
- 4. Write/produce.** Start putting everything together into a story package that includes as many of the following as possible: text, photos and graphics. This includes a rough draft that will serve as the midterm grade.
- 5. Review/edit.** You should be doing this constantly. Class time also will be used to do it in your partnerships.
- 6. Rewrite, re-research and redo** anything needed to complete the final project. Your continuing reporting, as well as discussions with the instructor should aid this process.
- 7. Completion.** Put it all together in the most effective way possible.

OFFICE HOURS

My office hours are listed on the front of the syllabus, and I would love to meet with you to get you extra, article assistance. I am always available to provide feedback on rough drafts before they are submitted. Keep in mind that you should look for the feedback, days, not hours before the submission deadline.

Chat GPT/AI in the classroom

The use of AI in the writing of emails and messages is glamorized in commercials, but seldom are successful in writing new stories. Programs like ChatGPT are designed to provide assistance in generating human-like text responses based on given prompts. In this course, you may use AI tools to brainstorm, come up with ideas, improve your writing, or explore complex concepts. However, it is essential to remember the programs like ChatGPT should complement your efforts, not replace them.

You are permitted to use AI tools in the following ways:

- Brainstorming: Used to generate ideas, concepts or potential solutions to specific problems or assignments.
- Writing Assistance: Used to enhance your OWN writing, receive suggestions on sentence structure, grammar and style.
- The best use of AI to assist with your writing is to have it identify style and grammar issues for YOU to fix, as this will help you gain insights into how to improve your writing.

Responsible Use and Academic Integrity

Though AI can be a valuable resource, it is crucial to uphold academic integrity and responsible use. Plagiarism and cheating are strictly prohibited and will result in a report to COAM. When using AI tools, you must always provide appropriate attribution if you incorporate any generated content into your assignments or projects.

Limitations of AI

Keep in mind that an AI is a machine-learning model and has its limitations. It may not always produce accurate or reliable information. As such, you must critically evaluate the responses generated and verify that information from reliable sources before incorporating it into your work.

Support and guidance

If you are unsure about the appropriate use of AI tools or have any questions related to its use, please ASK before you use and submit!

SYLLABUS

Every effort has been made to create a syllabus that is as comprehensive and accurate as possible, but each class is a living entity and changes may arise. Most things will work as planned, but some things may need to be adjusted as the semester proceeds. If that happens, I will notify you in writing of the changes to be sure everyone is aware and can adjust accordingly.

SAFE & HEALTHY

Keeping students healthy and preventing the spread of illness is important to your University—and to me. You are encouraged to stay home if you are sick, and you may be asked to leave class if you are coughing/sneezing. Students who are sick and cannot attend class must contact me BEFORE class to receive class any materials and turn in assignments via the drop box or email. If you do not notify me, your assignment will not be accepted.

MANAGING STRESS

College can be a stressful time, and I am always here to help you—in this class and beyond. If, however, you feel you need more support, I encourage you to reach out to the Student Advocacy Center at 292.1111. They will always work with professors on your behalf.

HONOR CODE & CODE OF ACADEMIC CONDUCT

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335 31 02). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp).

I will vigorously pursue any suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating or other violations of the University Code of Academic Conduct, whether completed or merely attempted.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

I am happy to make academic adjustments for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Center for Students with Disabilities if this applies to you. The Center for Students with Disabilities is located in Room 101 of the Admissions/Student Services Complex, located on the north side of Main campus, next to Admissions. For more information, call (310) 434-4265 or (310) 434-4273 (TDD)

DAILY SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Before Class Reading (Links in Carmen)	Assignment/Due
		Activity	
Week 1 W 1/14	1-1 Introduction to class	<p>Read: How Data Journalism is Different, Intro to Investigative Reporting</p> <p>Activity: Review syllabus discuss grades, projects and computer assisted reporting.</p>	<p><i>Assignment: create a short list of ideas or issues you'd want to spend weeks on to develop into an enterprise story. Reach out to prospective teammate if desired.</i></p>
F 1/16	1-2 Understanding /Intro to Data Reporting	<p>Read: C.A.R. Why Data Journalism is Important, The Benefits of C.A.R.</p> <p>Activity Declare partnerships or single project</p>	<p>Due: Declare partnerships or single work project.</p>
Week 2 W 1/21	2-1 Developing your Story. How to identify, plan an enterprise story	<p>Read: Choose 1 Enterprise Story to read and discuss in class</p> <p>Activity: Discussing story ideas, hurdles</p>	<p><i>Assignment: Narrow down list of story ideas. Identify potential sources of records and data.</i></p>
F 1/23	2-2 Getting your Data and Records	<p>Read: Top site with free data sets, Your right to data. Activity: How to file FOI requests and other strategies to pursue information and records.</p>	<p>Due: Identify data source file request if needed. Get Data or ETA for it.</p>

Week 3 W 1/28	3-1 Data and how it works	<p>Read: History of spreadsheets in Module 3-1</p> <p>Activity: Basics in Excel and data analysis</p>	
F 1/30	3-2 Data Friday! Working with Excel	<p>Read: Basic Steps in Working With Data.</p> <p>Activity: Basic functions, pivot tables.</p>	Due: First journal entry
Week 4 W 2/4	4-1 Beyond Inverted Pyramids	<p>Read: The Hourglass, The Nut Graf Story Approach</p> <p>Activity: How to organize notes, records and data. Wrapping database management training.</p>	<i>Assignment: Prepare online journal and entries for review.</i>
F 2/6	4-2 Scrape your data	<p>Read: Links in Carmen Module 4-2</p> <p>Activity: Linking lottery and census data tables and analyzing them using access</p>	Due: 2nd Journal Entry
Week 5 W 2/11	5-1 The Pitch: Outline your project	<p>Read: Pitch Me a Story; Pitch Guidelines for the WCJ</p> <p>Activity: Finish creating story outline in class for submission. Wrapping up how to recognize deal with bad data.</p>	<i>Assignment: Refine outline. Prepare online journal for second check</i>
F 2/13	5- 2 Working with Access	<p>Read: Links in Carmen</p> <p>Activity: In class web scraping exercise.</p>	Due: 3rd Journal Entry

Week 6 W 2/18	6-1 Photos and the Long-Form Story	Activity: Spending class time working on the pitch.	
F 2/20	6-2 Clean your data	Read: Carmen Links Activity: Cleaning Lottery data for analysis	Due: PITCH/OUTLINE
Week 7 W 2/25	7-1 Sources and the Longform Story		
F 2/27	7-2 Data Visualization	Read: Data Visualization DIY Activity: Learning various options for data viz	Due: 4th Journal Entry
Week 8 W 3/4	8-1 Bias and Truth in the Long-Form Story	Activity: Class discussion involves three enterprise story examples.	
F 3/6	8-2 Mapping your data	Read: Carmen Links on ArcView GIS Activity: Working with ArcView shapefiles and EPA	Due: 5th Journal Entry
Week 9 W 3/11	9-1 Finding those sources	Activity: You have more resources, to get sources.	

F 3/13	9-2 Writing with Data		Due: 6th Journal Entry
Week 10 W 3/18	NO CLASS	SPRING BREAK	NO CLASS
F 3/20	NO CLASS	SPRING BREAK	NO CLASS
Week 11 W 3/25	11-1 Writing with Data 2	Read: Pulitzer winners Dedman and Armstrong	
F 3/27	11-2 The Exit Interviews	Re-Read: Look at enterprise stories from Carmen module 2-1 to see how officials respond to challenging findings	Due: 7th journal entry
Week 12 W 4/1	12-1 STORY V. PAPER (how to not write a paper)	Activity: Reviewing and discussing the challenges of organizing and writing a strong, compelling story.	
F 4/3	12-2 Final Prep for the Draft	Activity: Short Presentation. Class room available for data work, research, draft review	<u>DUE: ROUGH DRAFT, by end of day (EOD)</u>

Week 13 W 4/8	13-1 Your Social Media Strategy	Reviewing the requirements for this last piece of the final.	
F 4/10	13-2 Your final presentation: Elements of a strong last effort	Activity: What works, and does not, in an effective final presentation	Due: 8th journal entry
Week 14 W 4/15	14-1 Wrapping up, dealing with challenges and “no comment”	Activity, The spectrum of verification and dealing with what you don’t know or can’t confirm	
F 4/17	14-2 Past presentations	We’ll take a look at past presentations. Time in-class to review drafts and presentations	
Week 15 W 4/22	PRESENTATIONS	DAY ONE	PRESENTATIONS
F 4/24	PRESENTATIONS	DAY TWO	PRESENTATIONS
Week 16 MONDAY 4/27	FINAL STORY <u>Due by midnight</u>	FINAL STORY <u>Due by midnight</u>	FINAL STORY <u>Due by midnight</u>

