

JOU3305 Data Journalism

Fall 2020 | Class 15259 | Periods 3-5 Thursdays | Synchronous online



Associate Professor Norman P. Lewis, Ph.D.

Office: Virtual in fall 2020 (normally, Weimer 3052)

Office hours: Wednesdays 4:00 to 6:00 pm via Zoom

Phone: 352-392-5137 (I respond within 24 hours most days)

E-mail: nplewis@ufl.edu (I respond within 24 hours most days)

Office hours are times devoted to being available via Zoom for one-on-one sessions. However, I am happy to meet with you at any mutually agreeable time.

ABOUT THE COURSE

Course Purpose

To enable you to work professionally as a data journalist who acquires, cleans, and analyzes data using spreadsheets and SQL databases.

Course Description

This course focuses on the numbers side of data journalism. You will learn how to find data to tell stories and how to find stories in data. No experience in spreadsheets or databases presumed. Pre-requisite: Journalism 3101 (reporting) or permission of instructor; course open to non-majors with an aptitude for journalism. For journalism majors needing a two-course sequence, this course pairs with JOU 3121 Data Visualization and Mapping.

Course Outcomes

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Evaluate the reliability of data sources and methods.
- Discover stories in data by detecting meaningful patterns.
- Find data to answer audience questions and test assertions by those in power.
- Acquire data by scraping websites and PDFs without custom programming.
- Clean messy data so it can be categorized and analyzed accurately.
- Acquire and analyze Census Bureau data.
- Write SQL queries to sort and filter data, and to join databases.
- Produce a professional data story suitable for publication.

IRE Membership



For just \$25, the student rate, [join](#) Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) (which includes NICAR, the premiere association for data journalists) for one year. You free software, access to inspiration, and help for your data story through great models, tip sheets, data sets, and advice. It's the best \$25 you'll ever spend.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Tentative Schedule

| Wk | Date | Subject | |
|----|----------|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | Sept. 3 | The Data Story | How to Create and Write a Data Story |
| 2 | Sept. 10 | Excel 1, Intro | Elements of data, importing data |
| 3 | Sept. 17 | Excel 2, Formulas | Formulas, functions, sorts, filters |
| 4 | Sept. 24 | Excel 3, Grouping | Pivot tables |
| 5 | Oct. 1 | Excel 4, String Functions | Parsing cells, joining cells, fixing poorly formatted sheets |
| 6 | Oct. 8 | Data Cleaning | Using Excel and Open Refine to fix inconsistencies in data |
| 7 | Oct. 15 | Data Scraping | Parsing data from PDF and websites without coding |
| 8 | Oct. 22 | Exam 1 | Cleaning and using Excel |
| 9 | Oct. 29 | SQL 1, Basics | A gentle introduction to database queries in SQLite |
| 10 | Nov. 5 | SQL 2, Functions | Aggregate and intermediate queries |
| 11 | Nov. 12 | SQL 3, Relational Joins | Relational joins of 2 tables |
| 12 | Nov. 19 | SQL 4, Enterprise Joins | Enterprise joins of 2 tables |
| | Nov. 26 | (no class; Thanksgiving) | |
| 13 | Dec. 3 | Exam 2 | SQL |

Semester Grade Allocation

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Homework (low score drops) | 40% |
| Exam 1 | 15% |
| Exam 2 | 15% |
| Data story | 20% |

Homework

Homework is assigned after each class. The lowest score from the semester drops. Because you will have at least 3 days to complete each assignment, and most will take about 1 hour, no extensions will be allowed unless you have an exemption covered by UF policy for the entire time period.

Exams

Each exam is timed and replicates how data journalists work in a newsroom. You take it remotely during the assigned class time (9:35 am to 12:35 pm on Thursday). You can use your notes or search the Web. However, you cannot ask each other or another human.

A makeup exam is possible only if (a) the absence is covered by [UF policy](#), (b) you contact me at least 30 minutes before class begins (phone preferred), and (c) you promptly provide written documentation.

Data Story

The story is due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 15.

Data stories often take longer than expected. It's not the skills required; you will have most of the skills you need by the end of September. Instead, it's that the first and second ideas may prove unworkable because data are unavailable or unreliable. Therefore, start early.

To get ideas, start with the IRE website for how-we-did-that [tip sheets](#) and data-driven [stories](#) (both require membership).

The story must be your own work. It also must be unique to this class.

Because of our brave new, socially distanced world, this story can be complete without doing interviews. If you do them, you can get bonus points. But to relieve pressure, all you must do is specify and identify the (at least) two sources you would have interviewed.

The assignment has four parts.

Part 1: Data story (70 points)

About 400 words. Complete except for interviews. Criteria used for grading:

1. Driven by a meaningful question or a hypothesis of import to society.
2. Detects a meaningful pattern, such as UF doing better or worse than average or peers. (For example, crime rising because population is rising is expected, not a meaningful pattern.)
3. Relies on data you obtained or generated.
4. Involves enough data with enough complexity that it required a spreadsheet.
5. After analysis, centered by a single data point. (For example, Blacks in Gainesville are twice as likely to be ticketed as are whites.)
6. Writing minimizes the use of numbers: no more than 1 number in a sentence, and no more than 5 numbers overall. If the data are more complex, offer a simple chart.
7. Tone is journalistic: neutral, based on facts, and all sources specifically cited.

Part 2: "Nerd" sidebar (10 points)

Sidebar of about 100 words describing how data was obtained and analyzed.

Part 3: Sources (10 points)

1. Identify a specific type of person (if not by name, how you would find this person) who exemplifies the story or who is affected by the story.
2. Identify a specific expert sources (by name and occupation) you would interview to offer a broader perspective to the pattern you found.

Part 4: Raw materials (10 points)

(1) Spreadsheet and (2) data diary (what you did with the data) are submitted for verification.

Grading Scale

| | Percent | | Percent | | Percent | | Percent |
|----|---------|----|---------|----|---------|----|---------|
| | | B+ | 89-87% | C+ | 79-77% | D+ | 69-67% |
| A | 100-93% | B | 86-83% | C | 76-73% | D | 66-63% |
| A- | 92-90% | B- | 82-80% | C- | 72-70% | D- | 62-60% |

Scores are rounded to the nearest whole point: 89.4 rounds down to 89 (B+) while 89.5 rounds up to 90 (A-). The [UF grading policy](#) details how GPA is computed.

OTHER VERY IMPORTANT DETAILS

Academic Integrity

UF students pledge to abide by an [honor code](#) that prohibits academic dishonesty such as fabrication, plagiarism and cheating. You have an affirmative obligation to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. You also must report to appropriate personnel any condition that facilitates academic misconduct. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

When I discover cheating, my default policy is to fail all involved for the entire course and report the details to the Dean of Students Office.

In the Zoom Room

Please be engaged, which is to say:

1. Be in a quiet room. Don't Zoom and drive.
2. Be upright and dressed. Lying in bed is suboptimal, unless you're [John and Yoko](#).
3. Put down the Mobile Distraction Device, also called a "phone."

Live video facilitates learning. But it's not mandatory. You decide what's best for you.

Diversity

The College of Journalism and Communications embraces an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along several dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class, and religion. Each course is expected to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communication in a global society. To that end:

1. Please let me know if you find any material in the course violates that expectation.
2. Please alert me if you have a name or preferred pronouns that differ from the class roll information, which is my only source of information about you.
3. If you have any concerns involving diversity in this course that you feel uncomfortable discussing with me, I encourage you to contact Professor Joanna Hernandez, CJC director of inclusion and diversity, at jhernandez@jou.ufl.edu.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.afl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.afl.edu/public-results/>.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center by visiting disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Health and Wellness

- U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care [website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center [website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center [website](#).
- University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department [website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 911 for emergencies).
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville. Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center [website](#).

Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk [website](#), or phone 24/7 at 352-392-4357, or email helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- Career Connections Center: Career assistance and counseling services. Visit the [website](#). Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601.
- Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. Visit the [website](#).
- Teaching Center: General study skills and tutoring. Visit the [website](#). Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420.
- Online Student Complaints: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process [website](#).