JOU 4930 News & Numbers
Spring 2015 / Section 1G51 / Period 4 Wednesdays, Weimer 1070 / 1 credit

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Office hours: Tuesdays periods 3-4 (9:30 to 11:30 a.m.); Wednesdays periods 9-10 (4 to 6 p.m.)
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“Office hours” are times I dedicate to being in the office and are first-come, first-served. Otherwise, make an appointment or drop in.

ABOUT THE COURSE

Course Description
This course in numeracy for media professionals will help you avoid common mistakes involving numbers and accurately communicate data to the public.

This is a “flipped” course: You’ll receive instruction online on your own time while class time will be for applying/practicing those concepts and communicating data.

Course Objectives
By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Appraise the reliability and validity of data.
- Discern when data is abused or misrepresented.
- Calculate average, percent and simple probabilities.
- Distinguish between random events and meaningful patterns.
- Simplify large numbers.
- Interpret and evaluate public opinion polls.
- Evaluate assertions about causation, evidence and proof.
- Identify cognitive biases that cause people to misinterpret numbers.
- Use a spreadsheet for basic calculations and simple data visualizations.

For Example ...
By the end of the course, you should be able to spot these mistakes made in the news:

- The unemployment rate fell by 1 percent, from 9 percent to 8 percent.
- The poll showed the incumbent likely to win, 52 percent to 48 percent.
- Coaches agree the ball should go to the player with the hot hand.
- The president said his tax cut would save the average family $1,015 a year.
- A study showed eating red meat increases your death risk by 20 percent.
Required Textbooks

Permissible Calculators
You may use a calculator in class for quizzes and tests. It must be a dedicated calculator; no smartphones allowed. Also, the calculator cannot have memory or be programmable, so that graphing calculator from calculus is verboten. OK are solar-powered devices or business/scientific calculators. Bottom line: If the calculator display shows only one row of numbers, it’s acceptable.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Tentative Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 7</td>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>Read Best, intro thru ch. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 14</td>
<td>2. Data Reliability</td>
<td>Read Best, ch. 4 thru end; read Cohen ch. 1</td>
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<td>January 21</td>
<td>3. Data Abuse</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s); read Cohen ch. 2</td>
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<td>January 28</td>
<td>4. Percent</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s)</td>
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<td>February 4</td>
<td>5. Average</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s)</td>
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<td>February 11</td>
<td>6. Simplifying Large Numbers</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s); read Cohen ch. 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 18</td>
<td>7. Probability and Risk</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s); read Cohen ch. 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 25</td>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>March 4</td>
<td>(No class; spring break)</td>
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<td>March 11</td>
<td>8. Polling</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s); read Cohen ch. 5</td>
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<td>March 18</td>
<td>9. Causation, Evidence &amp; Truth</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s); read Cohen ch. 6</td>
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<td>March 25</td>
<td>10. Number Biases</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s)</td>
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<td>April 1</td>
<td>11. Spreadsheets 1: Formulas</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s)</td>
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<td>April 8</td>
<td>12. Spreadsheets 2: Filters</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s)</td>
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<td>April 15</td>
<td>13. Spreadsheets 3: Data viz</td>
<td>Watch instructional video(s); read Cohen ch. 3</td>
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<td>April 22</td>
<td>Exam 2</td>
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Quizzes (25%)
Most weeks, a quiz will be given in class. Permissible calculators (see section above) are allowed. Quizzes could be at the beginning (so be on time) or the end – or both. The two low scores will be dropped to allow for absences for whatever reason, whether “approved” or not.

Homework (20%)
Period homework assignments will be given to further practice and apply the concepts discussed in class. The two low scores will be dropped to allow for off weeks or for when life gets in the way; no extensions can be granted.
Exam 1 (25%)
Exam 1 will cover everything in class up until that point. Permissible calculators (see section above) are allowed. It will mostly be multiple-choice questions; some questions will require that you write out a sentence as you would for an audience. See the Attendance section below for what to do if an illness or emergency arises.

Exam 2 (30%)
Exam 2 will cover everything in the semester. About two-thirds will be from the second half of class. Permissible calculators (see section above) are allowed. It will mostly be multiple-choice questions; some questions will require that you write out a sentence as you would for an audience. See the Attendance section below for what to do if an illness or emergency arises.

Grading Scale

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-90%</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-83%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-93%</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87%</td>
<td>C+</td>
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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.

THE FINE PRINT

Attendance
Attendance is expected. Course requirements for attendance, make-up exams, assignments and other work are consistent with UF policy. Makeup exams can be accommodated if and only if (a) the absence is covered by UF policy, (b) you call me at least 30 minutes before class begins, and (c) you promptly provide written documentation for the absence.

Academic Integrity
University of Florida 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.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to me when requesting accommodation. Such requests should be made as early in the semester as possible.
Help With Coping
The UF Counseling and Wellness Center is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call 352-392-1575.

The UF Police can be reached at 392-1111 or, in an emergency, by dialing 911.

Course Evaluations
Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations. You will be notified by email when the evaluations are open, typically in the last two or three weeks of the semester. Summary results are available to you and the public.