

JOUR 322: Introduction to Investigative and Data Journalism 2 units

Spring 2020 – Wednesday – 2-3:50 p.m.

Section: 21176D

Location: Online

Instructor: Gary Cohn

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1-2 p.m., and by appointment
(phone or zoom)

I. Course Description

The goal of this course is to inspire you and teach you the practical reporting, writing and analytical skills and ethical principles that will allow you to portray and evaluate contemporary newsworthy events and become a responsible investigative and data journalist in our rapidly changing journalism landscape; lectures, discussions, hands-on exercises involving public records research.

The focus of the class will be on learning the fundamentals of investigative journalism: how to choose a subject for investigation; how to identify human sources and persuade them to talk with you on the record; how to conduct an interview; how to use documents, and how to organize large amounts of material and data and present it in a fair and compelling way.

In addition, this class will teach you the fundamentals of data journalism. Proficiency with gathering, analyzing and visualizing data is essential in today's journalism landscape, whether you are a math expert or not. It's important for business reporters, beat reporters, sports reporters and investigative journalists. You will learn how to use data as a key news "source," and how to "interview" data in both your daily and investigative work.

The reporting, writing, analytical and data analysis skills and techniques will go well beyond what has been taught in Journalism 207 and other writing and reporting classes. In fact, this class is intended to give you a strong foundation of reporting, writing and data skills that should allow you to do more interesting stories than most other journalists do. While the focus will be on learning practical skills, you should also develop a better understanding of the principles of the First Amendment and the roles of an investigative and data journalist in our society. In addition, we will be discussing the practical, ethical and legal aspects of investigative reporting and data journalism in the context of our rapidly changing media landscape.

There will be an emphasis during our class sessions, and in your assignments, in using multi-media tools and presentations to complement your written stories and tell investigative stories in the most compelling way possible.

In addition, this class will stress the importance of reporting and data analysis that takes full account of the identities, realities and voices of all people, especially those from historically marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

1. Examine a raw government dataset with thousands of records. [Analyze]
 - a. Describe what questions a dataset can and can't answer. [Understand]

- b. Identify and explain the biases in the way crime data is collected, analyzed and reported, and how these biases have contributed to systemic inequities. [Understand]
 - c. File a Freedom of Information Act or California Public Records request for a crime dataset. [Apply]
2. Use math and Excel to “interview” data to answer research questions about possible stories. [Apply]
 - a. Calculate absolute vs. relative change; fractions, rates, percentages and per capita; averages and medians. [Apply]
 - b. Use reader-friendly techniques in stories such as rounding numbers and writing paragraphs that include fewer than eight digits. [Apply]
 - c. Excel/Google Docs as data organizing tool; shared resource; standardized terms for coding.
 3. Conduct in-depth interviews that go beyond daily news events to issues involving government and corporate malfeasance and society and money and power. [Apply]
 4. Using a template, develop a comprehensive story pitch. [Create]
 - a. Select the relevant facts from an analysis of a dataset and identify the biases, missing data and other caveats that affect the use of the dataset in a story. [Understand]
 - b. Locate and summarize information from secondary sources such as reports and social media. [Understand]
 - c. Prepare a source list that includes a diverse group of both government officials and people who are affected by the story. The source list must include the gender, race and ethnicity as preferred by the source. The gender and racial composition of the source list must reflect the community of the story affects. [Apply]
 5. Write an in-depth story that includes the relevant facts from an analysis of a dataset and identifies what other research and interviews are needed. [Create]

III. Course Notes

1. This course will be conducted online with Zoom and Blackboard.
 - a. Zoom: Lectures, optional labs, office hours
 - i. The link to the live class and optional lab each week will be posted at the top of the Announcements section in Blackboard. Please click on the link after you’ve signed into the USC system to avoid being put in the waiting room to be admitted.
 - ii. Recordings of the live class will be available in the Zoom link on Blackboard a few hours after class ends.
 - iii. Video: I’d prefer that you be on video but it’s not required. If your bandwidth allows, however, please turn on your video at the beginning of class to say hi, and also when you’re in a breakout room working with one or two other students.
 - iv. Zoom netiquette guidelines will be on Blackboard and will be discussed on the first day of class.

- v. Let me know at any point of the semester if you are having problems with any aspect of your online learning environment. Annenberg has many resources available to you that may help.
- b. Blackboard, Email and Assignment Submission Policy
 - i. Slides, assignment descriptions, readings and other resources will be posted on each week before the beginning of the scheduled class time.
 - ii. All assignments must be completed and/or submitted via email as a word doc and via Blackboard. Please make sure your name is on all assignments, not just the email but on all attachments. I will be using Blackboard tests, assignments, discussion boards and rubrics.
 - iii. Links to the optional lab videos will be in the Assignments section.

2. Team teaching

Investigative and data journalists often work in teams, so we will, too. Professors Dana Chinn and Sarah Girardot, who are teaching the other sections of JOUR 322, will be “TAs” and available to you. You may see them helping out in the live classes or responding to your email that I’ve forwarded to them because they’ll have the better answer.

The four sections will differ in some ways, but we will be coordinating on some assignments. For example, we might establish pool reporting across the four sections so there won’t be multiple students contacting the same source for the same story.

IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments

1. Posts to the Blackboard discussion group – weekly

Most of the classes during the scheduled course time will include short assignments completed individually or in groups of two or three. The assignments will include discussions followed by posts or remarks to posts in a Blackboard discussion group. These posts will mostly be graded pass/fail. These posts will usually be due the following Sunday so I can review them before the next class.

2. Quantitative assignments in Excel - weekly

This course will be conducted with a modified “flipped” course format. With “traditional” instruction, students attend a lecture and then complete an assignment. Journalism students have widely varying levels of familiarity with quantitative concepts and Excel. We will review the concepts briefly during the scheduled course time, but you’ll complete the Excel assignments on your own, at your own pace. Videos that walk you through each step together with the concepts will be available if you need them.

If you prefer to learn Excel the traditional way, Professor Dana Chinn will conduct a weekly optional lab on [Saturday or Sunday time TBD] for all JOUR 322 students where you can complete the assignment with her and ask questions. And, of course, you can also schedule individual time during office hours.

These assignments will be due before the beginning of the next class.

3. Readings for the following week

Each week there will be required readings that will prepare you for the discussions and assignments during the scheduled course time.

4. Homework assignments

- a. Interview with an investigative reporter and write-up
- b. Assignments started in class and finished on your own
 - i. Courts: Annotated timeline and briefing about a case that you have followed from arrest to arraignment.
 - ii. Public records: Locate and describe records from a government open data portal and a non-profit organization.
 - iii. FOIA/PRA: Write a Freedom of Information Act or California Public Records Act request asking for missing data from a given dataset discussed in class.

5. Final story package – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Your final story package will be a small group assignment on some aspect of your courts assignment. I will assign you to work with one or two other classmates so you will get experience working on an investigative or data journalism team where each member’s skills and interests complement each other. Each member of the team will get the same grade on the story pitch and on the final story package.

Your final story package will consist of:

- a. Detailed story pitch
 - i. A preliminary story pitch will be due in week 12 and graded.
 - ii. The completed pitch will part of your final story package.
- b. Final story dataset quantitative analysis in Excel
 - i. Excel workbook with calculations
 - ii. Summary of key points using reader-friendly techniques
- c. The final package must also include a FOIA, PRA and/or a memo of at least 250 words detailing additional data essential to completing the story in a substantive way.
- d. Final story: A 1,000-word (or equivalent in multimedia) story that has investigative and data journalism elements.

In addition to text, the story can include audio, graphics, charts, photos and/or video, but these elements must be specified and approved in advance via the story pitch assignments. Multimedia elements will be graded based on the requirements specified by the instructor, and will be based on the standards in the student’s previous required journalism courses (JOUR 207/Reporting and Writing 1, JOUR 307/ Reporting and Writing 2, JOUR 320/Introduction to Coding for Storytelling, and JOUR 321/Visual Journalism).

V. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
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Weekly Blackboard discussion group posts	5%
Weekly quantitative/Excel assignments	10%
Homework	
Interview with an investigative reporter	5%
Public records	5%
FOIA/PRA	5%
Courts timeline and briefing	25%
Final story pitch draft	10%
Final package (group)	35%
Total	100%

b. Grading Scale

95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

c. Grading Standards

Each assignment will have its own rubric. Each rubric will include a component for grammar, punctuation, spelling, AP Style, number formatting and rounding.

Below are some common components for all assignments. Due to the quantitative aspects of this course, you will be held to a higher standard for accuracy than what you may be used to. A typo in a word is minor editing; a typo with a number is a material factual error.

“A” stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well written and require only minor copyediting (i.e., they would be aired or published). The data, calculations and any data visualizations are correct and complete, and use Excel as directed. Data sources are correctly presented.

“B” stories require more than minor editing and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission.

“C” stories need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or material or omission errors.

“D” stories require excessive rewriting, have numerous errors and should not have been submitted.

“F” stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, are late, have numerous errors or both.

For example:

- It doesn't use the correct data or calculations.
- It misspells a proper noun and/or doesn't use the full and proper name for a dataset.
- It states a hypothesis as a fact.

The following are some other circumstances that would warrant a grade of “F” and potential USC/Annenberg disciplinary action:

- Emailing, texting or otherwise communicating in-class quiz or assignment questions and/or answers to others.
- Fabricating data or making up quotes or other information.
- Plagiarizing a script/article, part of a script/article or information from any source.

d. Grading Timeline

I will usually return grades and feedback within one week.

VI. Assignment Submission Policy

Unless otherwise instructed, you must post all in-class, homework, midterm and final assessments on Blackboard. **No late assignments will be accepted.**

VII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. **Investigative Reporters and Editors NICAR Course Pack**
Available for \$20 via the link posted on Blackboard.
2. ***Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News, Second Edition***, by Sarah Cohen for Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc., 2014, 134 pages. Available for \$10 via the IRE website link posted on Blackboard.
3. ***The Associated Press Stylebook***
All assignments will be graded for AP Style. Expressing numbers in a consistent style is essential to communicating data accurately, clearly and credibly.

VIII. Computer Policy

Hardware and software support is available from USC Annenberg Technical Services and Operations at <http://annenbergtechops.com/techops>. Blackboard support is available 24/7 by calling 213-740-5555.

Software

Microsoft Office 365 or Office 2016 (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) is required. It is available for free to USC students at itservices.usc.edu/officestudents.

IX. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (13 weeks: 8/17/20 – 11/13/20)

Friday, September 4: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, September 4: Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, September 4: Last day to drop a class and receive a refund to avoid a mark of “W” on student record and STARS report

Friday, September 4: Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall

Friday, October 2: Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript only. Mark of “W” will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply. [Please drop any course by the end of week three for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, October 2: Last day to change a Pass/No Pass course to letter grade

Friday, November 6: Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

X. Course Schedule – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

	Topics	Quantitative / Excel	Due before scheduled class time the following week
Week 1 Aug. 19	Introduction	Excel Quick Access Toolbar Absolute vs. relative change; percent change	
Week 2 Aug. 26	Anatomy of an investigative story Diverse source lists	U.S. Census race and ethnicity Percent share; percentage points	Identify an investigative story and journalist to interview.
Week 3 Sept. 2	Crime stories 1 Government jurisdictions Interviewing 1	Percent change, percent difference, percent share	
Week 4 Sept. 9	Crime stories 2 Interviewing 2	Averages, medians, ranges.	Investigative journalist interview write- up
Week 5 Sept. 16	Crime stories 3 Interviewing 3	Rates 1. Rounding.	
Week 6 Sept. 23	Investigative Reporters and Editors virtual conference Courts 1 Court jurisdictions	Rates 2. Grouping data with pivot tables	

Week 7 Sept. 30	Courts 2 Court records	Exploratory data analysis 1: percent change, percent difference, percent share, percentage points, averages, medians, ranges, rates, subgroups.	
Week 8 Oct. 7	Courts 3	Exploratory data analysis 2. Writing paragraphs with fewer than eight digits.	Courts timeline and briefing.
Week 9 Oct. 14	Nonprofit records	Data biographies. Cleaning and categorizing datasets.	
Week 10 Oct. 21	FOIA, California PRA	Terminology used to request datasets in a FOIA or PRA	FOIA/PRA assignment.
Week 11 Oct. 28	Final story writing, organizing, sourcing, dataset analysis. Story pitches.	Final story dataset 1	Final story draft pitch.
Week 12 Nov. 4	Election Week Polls. Fact checking.	Sampling. Margin of error. Final story dataset 2	
Week 13 Nov. 11	Final story package workshop	Final story dataset 3	Final Project Draft is due
Final Exam Period: Fri., Nov. 20, 2-4 p.m.	Final story package discussion Friday, November 20, 2-4 p.m. – Final Project is due at beginning of class		

XI. Policies and Procedures

Communication

Feel free to email, text or call me (see info in the Contacts section on Blackboard). If I am at my desk I will usually respond pretty quickly. Otherwise I will usually get back to you within a few hours. The link for my Zoom office hours will be posted on Blackboard.

Internships

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No

credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class.
Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism or public relations class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

b. Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition,

mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplcity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscsa.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.

XII. About Your Instructor

Pulitzer Prize winner Gary Cohn is a longtime investigative reporter. Many of his stories have exposed systemic problems and wrongdoing and resulted in significant reforms. A reporter for more than three decades, Cohn has been teaching undergraduate and graduate courses at USC Annenberg for more than ten years. In summer 2019, Cohn was one of the editors who helped lead Annenberg's groundbreaking Beacon Project, which was aimed at teaching, training and inspiring the next general of investigative journalists.

Cohn has worked for the Los Angeles Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Baltimore Sun, the Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader, The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg News and for columnist Jack Anderson in Washington. He also served for two years as Atwood Professor of Journalism at the University of Alaska at Anchorage.

Cohn won the Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting in 1998 and was a Pulitzer finalist in 1996 and 2001. His work has received numerous other prestigious journalism awards, including two Selden Ring Awards for investigative journalism, an Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) Medal, a George Polk Award for environmental reporting and two Overseas Press Club awards.