

JOUR 322: Introduction to Investigative and Data Journalism 2 units

Spring 2021 – Wednesdays – 12-1:40 p.m.

Section: 21169D

Location: Online

Instructor: Dana Chinn

she/her/hers

Office: Click on the Zoom link on Blackboard.

Office Hours: Sign up for an appointment via the Appointlet link on Blackboard.

Email: chinn@usc.edu

Course Description

This course builds on the beat reporting skills you developed in JOUR 207/307 Reporting and Writing I and II. It's an introduction to the fundamentals of investigative and data journalism – identifying and getting primary and secondary sources, quantitatively analyzing datasets, summarizing facts and opinions, and fact checking.

You will learn a research methodology and organizational structure that you can use as a foundation for beat reporting, a comprehensive story pitch, or an in-depth story that would take months or years. The final is a research plan that will require levels of detail, accuracy and transparency that you may find intimidating, but we'll work on it together as a class step-by-step throughout the semester.

This semester we'll complete the first step of a research plan to track the impact, if any, of California Assembly Bill 392, The California Act to Save Lives. Enacted in 2019, AB 392 will purportedly decrease the number of people killed by law enforcement officers. Under the previous law, an officer could use deadly force if there was an "objectively reasonable" belief that they were confronting a person who was endangering them or other people. Under AB 392, officers can only use deadly force if it is "necessary."

Identifying the issues and the players for this research question will require you to have a thorough understanding of people, government jurisdictions, the criminal justice system and criminal and civil courts. In addition to developing diverse source lists, you will also learn how data is not "objective," and how the ways that crime data is collected (or not collected), analyzed, reported and used for decision-making have led to and sustain systematic racism.

I am committed to including and valuing the identities and voices of all students, especially those from historically marginalized and vulnerable groups. I hope we will all hold each other accountable for fostering an inclusive and anti-racist learning environment as we tackle this complex question.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Analyze a raw dataset.
 - a. Describe what questions a dataset can and can't answer.
 - 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.
 - c. Categorize and add additional information to a raw dataset from primary and secondary sources.
 - d. Prepare a data dictionary that documents what's in each column and identifies missing and problematic data issues.
2. Use math, Excel, Google Sheets and Tableau to "interview" data to answer research questions about possible stories.
 - a. Calculate absolute vs. relative change; fractions, rates, percentages and per capita; averages and medians; and statistical outliers.
 - b. Use reader-friendly techniques in stories such as rounding numbers and writing paragraphs that include fewer than eight digits.
 - c. Construct infographics that use best practices in data visualization.
 - d. Use Excel and Google Sheets as a data organizing tool and shared resource.
3. Using a template, develop a comprehensive research plan for an in-depth story.
 - 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.
 - b. Locate and summarize information from primary and secondary sources such as criminal and civil court documents, legislative analyses, news stories, reports from academic and interest group experts and social media.
 - c. File Freedom of Information Act or California Public Records requests for primary source documents. Construct a log to track the details of what was requested and when you should follow up based on the public records laws of a jurisdiction.
 - d. Prepare a source list and interview guide 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.
 - e. Write research briefs and check them using industry-standard fact checker annotations.

Course Notes

This course will be conducted online with Zoom and Blackboard.

1. Zoom: Lectures, office hours
 - a. The link to the live class and office hours 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.
 - b. Recordings of the live class will be available in the Zoom link on Blackboard a few hours after class ends.

- c. 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, when we have a guest speaker, and when you're in a breakout room.
 - d. Zoom netiquette guidelines will be on Blackboard.
 - e. 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.
2. Blackboard
- a. The class plan for the day, slides, assignment descriptions, readings, videos and other resources will be posted slightly before the beginning of the scheduled class time in the Assignments section.
 - b. All assignments must be completed and/or submitted via Blackboard. I will be using Blackboard tests, assignments, discussion boards and rubrics.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

1. **Weekly in-class assignments**

Each class will include short exercises completed individually or in groups of two or three. These assignments will usually be due the following Sunday.

2. **Quantitative assignments in Excel - weekly**

Most weeks there will be an Excel assignment that has two components – an Excel worksheet with calculations from raw data, and a write-up and/or short answers based on the data.

In each live class I will spend at least 30 minutes going through the quantitative concepts and demonstrating the Excel steps. Some of you will be able to follow along and complete the Excel portion in class. If you're just learning Excel, have a small screen and/or having connection problems, you might want to just observe and focus on how to interpret and write up quantitative data.

There will be optional step-by-step videos that will duplicate the in-class demonstration. I'm also available for one-on-one walk-throughs during office hours.

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 class discussions and assignments.

4. **Other assignments**

- a. Interview with an investigative reporter and write-up
- b. Investigative Reporters and Editors NICAR conference write-up

5. **Final project**

The final is a research plan for an in-depth story based on the Washington Post Fatal Force

dataset. You will be working on your final throughout the semester with the weekly assignments.

Grading

1. Breakdown of Grade

Weekly in-class assignments	25%
Quantitative/Excel assignments	25%
Interview with an investigative reporter	5%
IRE NICAR conference write-up	5%
Final project draft	5%
Final project	35%
Total	100%

2. 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

3. 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.

Grading Timeline

I will usually return grades and feedback within one week.

Assignment Submission Policy

Unless otherwise instructed, you must post all assignments on Blackboard. **No late assignments will be accepted.**

VII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. ***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](#).
This handbook complements the IRE course pack. It includes explanations about the quantitative concepts in the course pack assignments and guidelines about writing about numbers that I'll be referring to – and grading you on – throughout the semester.
2. ***The Associated Press Stylebook***
Available for free from [the USC Library \(must be signed in\)](#).
All assignments will be graded for AP Style. Expressing numbers in a consistent style is essential to communicating data accurately, clearly and credibly. You will also be using the [AP Style guidelines when describing gender, race and ethnicity](#) when appropriate in a story. From the AP Stylebook: "In all coverage – not just race-related coverage – strive to accurately represent the world, or a particular community, and its diversity through the people you quote and depict in all forms. Omissions and a lack of inclusion can render people invisible and cause anguish."
3. **[Knight Science Journalism - MIT Fact-Checking Project](#)**
You will be using the industry-standard fact-checking methodologies outlined in this module throughout the semester.

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.

Tableau is a data visualization program that we'll be using in the second half of the semester. The license key will be posted on Blackboard.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/15/2021 – 4/30/2021; Final Exam Period: 5/5-12/2021)

Friday, February 5: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, February 5: Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, February 9: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, March 5: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. 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 (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, March 5: Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Friday, April 9: Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

Course Schedule – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

	Topics	Quantitative / Excel	Major assignments due before scheduled class time the following week
Week 1 Jan. 20	Introduction	Spreadsheets for organizing information. Excel Quick Access Toolbar. Basic functions.	
Week 2 Jan. 27	Anatomy of an in-depth story. Components of a research plan. How race data is gathered. Introduction to the Washington Post Fatal Force dataset.	U.S. Census race and ethnicity. Absolute vs. relative or percent change. Rounding.	Identify an in-depth or investigative story and journalist to interview.
Week 3 Feb. 3	Timeline of what happens after a law enforcement officer fatally shoots a person.	Percent share; percentage points. When a race is a majority vs. a minority.	

	Government jurisdictions; state vs. federal courts.	Identifying what dataset columns to add to a raw dataset.	
Week 4 Feb. 10	California Penal Codes, AB 392, state district attorney investigation reports. FBI Uniform Crime Reporting data.	Rates and per capita. Grouping dataset columns. Determining standardized values for a column.	Investigative journalist interview write-up
Week 5 Feb. 17	Civil suits 1: Getting and interpreting federal court documents (dockets, complaints, responses, judgments) from PACER and other sources.	Averages and medians	
Week 6 Feb. 24	Civil suits 2: Federal civil rights, use of excessive force and inadequate training claims under 42 U.S.C. 1938. Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments. Data dictionaries.	Using Excel for logging data dictionaries, sources and documents.	
Week 7 Mar. 3	IRE NICAR virtual conference		IRE NICAR write-up
Week 8 Mar. 10	Final project structure and outline. Fact checking methodology.	Exploratory data analysis with Excel Pivot tables 1	
Week 9 Mar. 17	FOIA and California Public Records requests 1: Birth, marriage and other records. Autopsies.	Exploratory data analysis with Excel Pivot tables 2	
Week 10 Mar. 24	FOIA/PRAs 2: Law enforcement agencies, state prosecutors.	Data visualization 1/Intro to Tableau	
Week 11 Mar. 31	FOIA/PRAs 3: Federal prosecutors	Data visualization 2	
Week 12 Apr. 7	Wellness Day – no class		
Week 13 Apr. 14	Final project topic TBD	Data visualization 3 Statistical outliers	Final project draft (graded)
Week 14 Apr. 21	Final project topic TBD	Data visualization 4	
Week 15 Apr. 28	Final project topic TBD		

Final Exam Period: Fri., 5/7, 8-10 a.m. Pacific	Final project discussion (All classes must meet during their university designated final exam date and time.)
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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. You can also make an appointment with me at <https://danachinn.appointlet.com>. 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.symplicity.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 Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.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://annenbergsuccessfund.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.

About Your Instructor

I’ve been a full-time faculty member at USC since 2002 and now focus on data journalism and open data. My work experience includes consulting and management positions in digital analytics, strategic planning, marketing and finance at news organizations including Gannett and the Los Angeles Times. I have an undergraduate degree in journalism and an MBA from USC.