

## **JOUR 322: Introduction to Investigative and Data Journalism** **2 units**

**Fall 2022 – Tuesdays – 12-1:40 p.m.**

**Section:** 21177D

**Location:** ANN 408

**Instructor:** Dana Chinn

**Office:** ASC 227 and on Zoom (see Blackboard for link)

**Office Hours:** By appointment at [danachinn.appointlet.com](http://danachinn.appointlet.com)

**Contact Info:** [chinn@usc.edu](mailto:chinn@usc.edu)

Cell: See the Contacts section on Blackboard

**Pronouns:** she/her/hers

### **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.

JOUR 322 is a research skills class to equip you to go beyond anecdotal reporting and into a systematic examination of the factors driving a major societal issue. This semester we will tackle police misconduct by both analyzing the Washington Post Fatal Force dataset of the thousands of people who have been fatally shot by officers and by delving into the case of one person killed by a Los Angeles Police Department officer. The final is a collection of research briefs with a related dataset that will require you to have an understanding of government jurisdictions, the criminal justice system and criminal and civil courts that will give you a foundation for covering many different topics.

### **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 data is collected, analyzed and reported, and how these biases have contributed to systemic inequities.
  - c. Use AP Style guidelines to write precisely and accurately about race and ethnicity.
  - d. Categorize and add additional information to a raw dataset.
  - e. Prepare a data dictionary that documents what's in each column and identifies missing and problematic data issues.
2. Use math and Excel 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.
  - b. Use reader-friendly techniques in stories such as rounding numbers and writing paragraphs that include fewer than eight digits.
  - c. Use Excel as a qualitative data organizing tool.

3. Using a template, compile and summarize relevant information from primary source documents for an investigative 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, log and summarize documents and processes from law enforcement agencies, district attorneys, federal civil courts and select secondary sources.
  - c. File Freedom of Information Act or California Public Records requests for primary source documents.
  - d. Write research briefs suitable for a general news audience and annotate them using industry-standard fact checker notations.

## **Description and Assessment of Assignments**

### **1. Weekly assignments**

There will be weekly assignments on Blackboard due **at the end of each class**. Assignments will usually have two components – an Excel worksheet with calculations from raw data, and a write-up and/or short answers based on the data. Sometimes the Excel component will be due at the end of class, and the write-up will be due the following week.

Grading for the weekly assignments will be largely based on your analysis, interpretation and write-up of data vs. your Excel skills. Each question or component will have a point value and a grading rubric.

Each week's assignments build on the previous week's, so **I will not accept late assignments**. I will, however, drop your two lowest grades from the assignments portion of your course grade. This means you can miss two classes or assignments without affecting your course grade.

### **2. Interview with an investigative or data journalist and write-up**

This assignment will help you explore what it takes to report and produce an investigative or data journalism story. It will be assigned in Week 2, and will be due in Week 9.

### **3. Final project**

The final is a collection of documents summarizing your research into the case of a person listed in the Washington Post Fatal Force dataset who was fatally shot by a Los Angeles Police Department officer. You will be working on your final project throughout the semester.

## **Course Notes and Policies**

Please be courteous to me and your classmates by arriving on time and being fully engaged. Regular attendance will be crucial for successfully completing the weekly assignments and the final project. The scope of the work and the interpretations and context that should be in the write-ups will be determined by class discussion, similar to how a newsroom team operates.

We will be researching the details behind the data that shows that Black and Hispanic people are fatally shot by law enforcement officers at disproportionate rates. Trying to understand the quagmire that is the U.S. criminal justice system can be overwhelming and triggering, especially during these fraught times. Please let me know if you or any of your classmates are struggling with the materials, discussions and/or assignments.

### Suggested readings, hardware/software, laptops 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 includes explanations about the quantitative concepts in the course 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. A summary of the AP Style guidelines for numbers is on Blackboard.

You will be completing a video lesson module to help you learn 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 formal. Omissions and a lack of inclusion can render people invisible and cause anguish.”

3. **Knigh 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](http://itservices.usc.edu/officestudents).

### Grading

#### a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Weekly assignments (lowest two grades will be dropped)	55%
Interview with an investigative reporter and write-up	10%
Final project	35%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

**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.

**Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/22/22 – 12/2/22)**

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20223/calendar/>

**Friday, September 9:** Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

**Friday, September 9:** Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

**Friday, September 9:** Last day to change enrollment option to audit for Session 001

**Friday, September 9:** Last day to change a Pass/No Pass to a letter grade for Session 001

**Friday, September 9:** Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall

**Tuesday, September 13:** Last day to add or drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund or change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

**Friday, October 7:** 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, November 11:** Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

### Course Schedule – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Week	Topics	Quantitative / Excel
Week 1 – Aug. 23	Introduction to the class	Set up Excel Quick Access Toolbars
Week 2 – Aug. 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. Census data</li> <li>Biases in data based on the way it’s gathered</li> <li>AP Style guidelines on race and ethnicity</li> </ul> <p>Interview with an investigative or data journalist assignment assigned</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scraping and cleaning up data from <a href="http://data.census.gov">data.census.gov</a></li> <li>Absolute (amount) vs. relative (percent) change</li> </ul>
Week 3 – Sept. 6	Calculating and comparing racial composition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Los Angeles County</li> <li>City of Los Angeles vs. LAPD</li> </ul>	Percent share; percentage points
Week 4 – Sept. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government jurisdictions and law enforcement agencies in Los Angeles County</li> <li>FBI Uniform Crime Reporting data</li> <li>Violent and property crime rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rates: Crimes per x people; 1 out of every x people</li> </ul>
Week 5 – Sept. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction to the Washington Post Fatal Force dataset</li> <li>Who’s in the dataset?</li> <li>When is a fatal shooting by police “necessary,” “reasonable,” “legitimate,” or “legal?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FF 1               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dataset prep</li> <li>Starting a data dictionary</li> <li>City, state</li> <li>Add a column: Law enforcement agency</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Week 6 – Sept. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAPD Use of Force Policy 1</li> <li>Translating police jargon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FF 2               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Filling in blanks</li> <li>Interpreting data definitions, e.g., “undetermined” vs. “unknown”</li> <li>Dataset as reporting tool: “need to find out”</li> <li>Grouping detailed data: armed</li> </ul> </li> <li>Pivot tables</li> </ul>

Week 7 – Oct. 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAPD Use of Force Policy 2</li> <li>• Writing with eight or fewer digits in a paragraph to make quantitative data easier to understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FF 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Threat level</li> <li>○ Threat level and armed</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Week 8 – Oct. 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starting the timeline for the final project: What happens after a person is fatally shot by an LAPD officer?</li> <li>• Starting a documents log with the LAPD primary source documents: Force Investigation Division; Use of Force Review Board; Chief of Police; Board of Police Commissioners Office of the Inspector General; Board of Police Commissioners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FF 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mental illness</li> <li>○ Body camera</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Week 9 – Oct. 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LAPD reports: Did the officers follow LAPD Use of Force policies? Use Excel to identify, organize and analyze key facts from the LAPD primary source documents</li> </ul> <p>Interview with an investigative or data journalist assignment due</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FF 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Manner of death</li> <li>○ Flee</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Week 10 – Oct. 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal vs. state courts</li> <li>• The Los Angeles County District Attorney investigation report: Why wasn't the officer charged with a crime?</li> <li>• Describing a list: Ranges, averages, medians</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FF 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Age</li> <li>○ Gender</li> <li>○ Race</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Week 11 – Nov. 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• California Public Records Act information requests from the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner-Coroner</li> <li>• Introduction to civil suits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FF 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Using a dataset and pivot tables to identify people to research further</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Week 12 – Nov. 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deciphering plaintiffs, defendants and allegations from a civil suit docket and complaint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FF 8 - TBD</li> </ul>
Week 13 – Nov. 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarizing jury instructions, jury minutes, verdicts, dismissals and settlements from court documents</li> <li>• Fact checking and annotations for primary and secondary source documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prep FF dataset file and pivot tables for the final project</li> <li>• Source and document lists</li> </ul>
Week 14 – Nov. 22	Final project topic TBD	TBD
Week 15 – Nov. 29	Final project topic TBD	TBD
<b>FINAL 12/13, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.</b>	Final project workshops: Mon., Dec. 12, 8-10 a.m. Tues., Dec. 13, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.	

	Final project is due Wed., Dec. 14, end of day	
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## 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](https://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*

<https://eeotix.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.symlicity.com/care\\_report](https://usc-advocate.symlicity.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 Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776*

[osas.usc.edu](https://osas.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/note takers/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](https://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](https://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](https://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](https://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](https://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

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.

*Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund*



<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

### **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.