



**JOUR 490/590: Directed Research
Los Angeles: Politics, Issues and the
Election
2 Units**

Fall 2022 – Fridays – 12-1:15 p.m.

Section: 21409D/21575D

Location: Media Center

Instructor: Alan Mittelstaedt

Office: Media Center

Contact Info: Slack, Cell: 626 372-2453

amittels@usc.edu

Student:

Student ID:

Major:

Contact Info:

Course Description

Students will cover the candidates, issues and campaigns leading up to the Nov. 8 election in Los Angeles County, which promises to bring about historic changes at City Hall and in county government. Students will focus their coverage on key races of their choice. Goal of our coverage will be to identify through community-based reporting the top issues of voters. We will explore ways for voters, rather than candidates, to set the agenda for coverage. Students will produce multimedia stories and submit their work to be published at uscannenbergmedia.com. This directed research course is open to all students.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will engage in investigative techniques, shoe-leather reporting as they report on issues from L.A.'s neighborhoods and develop solution-based coverage of key problems and issues facing residents. Along the way, students will:

- Develop strategies for making elected officials and institutions accountable on matters of grave public concern
- Analyze voter turnout among young demographic
- Refine research techniques for collecting key information
- Illuminate possible solutions for deep problems
- Synthesize complex information into readable and viewable stories for mainstream audiences

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Students will work together to produce a project examining the top races and issues facing L.A. County residents. Assignments will include one or more of these angles: profiles of candidates, evaluation of the city or county programs, neighborhood-based reporting on top issues; and examination of how local governments could be more accountable to the public and residents

Each student will produce three, 800-word text stories or the equivalent. Students may produce a video or documentary in place of text stories.

Stories will be evaluated on the quality of the reporting and writing.

Weekly beat memo: A short memo noting who the student interviewed, what documents and data were obtained, what new information the student found out, and the student's reporting plan for the coming week, will be due at the start of class each week.

Required Readings, hardware/software, laptops and supplementary materials

Students will be expected to stay informed about key races and local government coverage in the Los Angeles Times, KPCC, KCRW and digital outlets LA Taco, LAist, KnockLA, among others. They'll also cover key sources and officials on Twitter.

All USC students have access to the AP stylebook via the USC library.
(https://libproxy.usc.edu/login?url=http://www.apstylebook.com/usc_edu/.)

Students will be graded on adherence to AP style in assignments, including when writing about race and ethnicity. The updated AP style guidelines include capitalizing Black and deleting the hyphen in terms such as Asian American.

The following style guides will be available on BB:

NLGJA Stylebook on LGBTQ Terminology: <https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/>

National Center on Disability and Journalism: <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

Native American Journalists Association: <https://najanewsroom.com/reporting-guides/>

National Association of Black Journalists: <https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide>

Asian American Journalists Association: <https://aaja.org/2020/11/30/covering-asia-and-asian-americans/>

The Diversity Style Guide: <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com>

The NAHJ Cultural Competence Handbook: <https://nahj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NAHJ-Cultural-Competence-Handbook.pdf>

Transjournalist Style Guide: <https://transjournalists.org/style-guide/>

SPJ Diversity Toolbox: <https://www.spj.org/diversity.asp>

Annenberg also has its own style guide that students can access through the app Amy the Stylebot on the Annenberg Media Center's Slack workspace. Annenberg's style guide is being developed with input from students, and whether or not students use our guide, they can provide valuable input here: <http://bit.ly/annenbergediting>

In addition, Annenberg Media's Guide for Equitable Reporting Strategies and Newsroom Style (<https://bit.ly/AnnMediaEquitableReportingGuide>) created by students, has detailed guidelines on thoughtful language and best practices for creating journalism respectful and reflective of a diverse world. Along with other useful resources, it can be found on Blackboard and is incorporated into Amy the Stylebot (mentioned above).

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the Annenberg Digital Lounge for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's Information Technology Services website.

Annenberg is committed to every student’s success. There are multiple resources available to assist students with issues that limit their ability to participate fully in class. Please reach out to a professor and/or advisor for help connecting with these resources. They include the Annenberg Student Success Fund, 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, and other scholarships and awards.

News Consumption and Knowledge of Current Events

As journalists, you should keep up with what is happening on campus, in the Los Angeles area, in the United States and around the world. USC provides subscriptions for students, staff and faculty to The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times, as well as the Wall Street Journal.

Through the USC library, you have access to many regional news outlets and a variety of publications that cover specific communities. You should be familiar with publications covering the many communities of Los Angeles such as The Los Angeles Sentinel, The Los Angeles Blade, The Los Angeles Wave, La Opinión, L.A. Taco, The Eastsider, The Armenian Weekly, High Country News, the Asian Journal and others. You should keep up with the Daily Trojan and uscannenbergmedia.com, including USC student-led verticals Dímelo, elevASIAN and Black., listen to NPR and news radio, watch local and national television news, read news email newsletters and push alerts and follow news organizations social networks, including Twitter, Instagram and TikTok. You’re encouraged to sign up for Nieman Lab’s newsletter, which publishes brief, readable articles on important issues in the media. Following the news will sharpen your judgment and provide good (and bad) examples of the state of mainstream journalism.

Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Class participation/weekly beat memo	10	10%
Story 1	30	30%
Story 2	30	30%
Story 3	30	30%
TOTAL	100	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

Students must earn a grade of C- or better in JOUR 490 to receive major credit. Students must earn a grade of B or better in JOUR 590 to receive "Credit" (CR) towards the major.

c. Grading Standards

Journalism

All assignments will be edited on a professional basis and you will be judged first on the accuracy of your stories. You will be then evaluated for style, editing, originality and the ability to meet deadlines.

"A" stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well written and require only minor copyediting. Video work must also be shot and edited creatively, be well paced and include good sound bites and natural sound that add flavor, color or emotion to the story.

"B" stories require more than minor editing and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission. For video, there may be minor flaws in the composition of some shots or in the editing. Good use of available sound bites is required.

"C" stories need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors. Camera work and editing techniques in video stories are mediocre or unimaginative, but passable. Sound bites add little or no color - only information that could be better told in the reporter's narration.

"D" stories require excessive rewriting, have numerous errors and should not have been submitted. Camera work is unsatisfactory or fails to show important elements.

"F" stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, are late, have numerous errors or both. Your copy should not contain any errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. Any misspelled or mispronounced proper noun will result in an automatic "F" on that assignment. Any factual error will also result in an automatic "F" on the assignment. Accuracy is the first law of journalism. The following are some other circumstances that would warrant a grade of "F" and potential USC/Annenberg disciplinary action:

- Fabricating a story or making up quotes or information.
- Plagiarizing a script/article, part of a script/article or information from any source.
- Staging video or telling interview subjects what to say.
- Using video shot by someone else and presenting it as original work.
- Shooting video in one location and presenting it as another location.
- Using the camcorder to intentionally intimidate, provoke or incite a person or a group of people to elicit more "dramatic" video.
- Promising, paying or giving someone something in exchange for doing an interview either on or off camera.

Assignment Submission Policy

A folder for each student will be created on Quip, a file management system. Stories will be created on Google docs, with the links placed in a Quip folder.

Required Readings and Bibliography of Sources

Students will read, watch and listen to national, regional and local news stories to keep current on developments facing local governments.

Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [Annenberg Virtual Commons](#) for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, please visit USC’s [Information Technology Services](#) website.

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

	Class Plan	Deliverables/Due dates	Research or Activity
Week 1 Aug. 26	Introductions Discuss LA elections and philosophy of voter-driven campaign coverage https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-07-01/2022-los-angeles-election-results-karen-bass-frontrunner https://www.nie.manlab.org/2022/	Beat note due Sept. 2 First pitch due next week	Discuss LA elections Mayor’s race: Bass vs. Caruso City Controller’s race: City Attorney’s race: City Council run-offs https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-07-01/2022-los-angeles-election-

	01/kpcc-and-laist-are-shifting-the-focus-of-their-politics-coverage-from-politicians-to-voters-heres-why/		results-karen-bass-frontrunner https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-county-sheriffs-race-2022-precinct-results-map/
Week 2 Sept. 2	Updates Review pitches https://medium.com/backchannel/why-campaign-coverage-makes-just-plain-citizens-unhappy-86d4677daef	Beat note due Sept. 9 Drafts due Sept. 9	Continue making assignments Finetune scope of project
Week 3 Sept. 9	Updates Review drafts https://pressthink.org/2019/06/key-steps-in-the-citizens-agenda-style-of-campaign-coverage/	Beat note due Sept. 16 Revised drafts due Sept. 16	Discuss campaign coverage Review pitches for Story 1
Week 4 Sept. 16	Updates Discuss infographics Review revised drafts https://niemanreports.org/articles/what-went-wrong-and-right-with-campaign-coverage/	Beat note due Sept. 23 Final drafts due Sept. 23	Discuss our findings Discuss infographics Refine project outline Review revised pitches Story 1
Week 5 Sept. 23	Updates Review final drafts Begin mapping out interactive element	Beat note due Sept. 30 Story pitch due Sept. 30	Discuss our findings Begin mapping out interactive element Review final pitch of Story 1

	https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-county-sheriffs-race-2022-precinct-results-map/		
Week 6 Sept. 30	Updates Review pitches https://journalistsresource.org/politics-and-government/horse-race-reporting-election/	Beat note due Oct. 7 First drafts due Oct. 7	Discuss our findings Review drafts of story 1
Week 7 Oct. 7	Updates Review drafts Identify elements for interactives https://theclick.news/choosing-process-over-policy-the-unavoidability-of-horserace-journalism/	Beat note due Oct 21 Revised drafts due Oct. 21	Discuss our findings Review drafts of Story 1 Identify elements for interactives
Week 8 Oct. 14	NO CLASS Fall Break, Oct. 13-14		Discuss our findings Review drafts of Story 1
Week 9 Oct. 21	Updates Review drafts	Beat note due Oct. 28 Final drafts due Oct. 28	Discuss our findings Review Story 1
Week 10 Oct. 28	Updates Review final drafts	Beat note due Nov. 4 Revised drafts due Nov. 4	NO CLASS
Week 11 Nov. 4	Updates Review drafts Identify multimedia elements for final project	Beat note due Nov. 11 Revised drafts due Nov. 11	Discuss our findings Review pitches Story 2 Begin mapping out project and design

Week 12 Nov. 11	NO CLASS Veterans Day	Beat note due Nov. 18 Revised drafts due Nov. 18	Discuss our findings Review draft of Story 2
Week 13 Nov. 18	Updates Review drafts https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2021/how-the-2020-election-sparked-a-new-kind-of-journalism/	Final drafts due Dec. 2Int	Discuss our findings Review Story 2 Identify multimedia elements for final project
Week 14 Nov. 25	NO CLASS Thanksgiving recess, Nov. 23- 27		Discuss our findings Review Story 2
Week 15 Dec. 2	Discuss our findings Submit final story for publication		Discuss our findings Design and review final project

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, <https://policy.usc.edu/research-and-scholarship-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
<https://eotix.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 Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776

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

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://annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-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://annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-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

Alan Mittelstaedt started as an adjunct instructor in 2003 and joined the full-time faculty in Fall 2009 to help manage Annenberg Digital News, which produced Neon Tommy, the forerunner of uscannenbergmedia.com, where he now is a faculty advisor. During the previous decade, he was news editor at Los Angeles' alt-weeklies, including seven years at the L.A. Weekly, where he wrote a political column and oversaw six hard-nosed reporters. His mainstream newspaper jobs include city editor at the Portland (Maine) Press Herald and at the Pasadena Star-News, and investigative reporter and editor at the San Bernardino County Sun, where he was named Employee of the Year despite questioning many decisions of his Gannett bosses. At 15, he published his first article called "Deschooling Society: The Evils of Compulsory Education," and handed out 1,000 copies at his rural Virginia high school over the protests of his principal, who threatened to suspend him.