

JOUR 322: Introduction to Investigative and Data Journalism

2 units

Fall 2023 – Tuesdays – 12-1:40 p.m.

Section: 21177R

Location: ANN 408

Instructor: Dana Chinn

Office: ASC 227A and on Zoom

Office Hours: By appointment at danachinn.appointlet.com

Contact Info: chinn@usc.edu

Mobile: 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. Write 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 10.

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 formats. 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 <https://annenbergtechops.com/>. 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.

Grading

a. Grading Breakdown

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

b. Grading Scale

Letter grade and corresponding numerical point range		
95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+ (D plus)
90% to 94%: A- (A minus)	77% to 79%: C+ (C plus)	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+ (B plus)	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D- (D minus)
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C- (C minus)	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: 8/21/2023 – 12/01/2023; Final Exam Period: 12/6-13/2023)

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-0231/calendar/>

Last day to add: Friday, September 8, 2023

Last day to drop without a mark of "W" and receive a refund: Friday, September 8, 2023

Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit: Friday, September 8, 2023 [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Last day to add/drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund or change to Audit: Tuesday, September 12, 2023

Last day to withdraw without a “W” on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade: Friday, October 6, 2023 [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.]

Last day to drop with a mark of "W": Friday, November 10, 2023

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week	Topics	Quantitative / Excel
Week 1 – Aug. 22	Introduction to the class	Set up Excel Quick Access Toolbars
Week 2 – Aug. 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• U.S. Census data• Biases in data based on the way it’s gathered• AP Style guidelines on race and ethnicity Interview with an investigative or data journalist assignment assigned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scraping and cleaning up data from data.census.gov• Absolute (amount) vs. relative (percent) change
Week 3 – Sept. 5	Calculating and comparing racial composition <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Los Angeles County• City of Los Angeles vs. LAPD	Percent share; percentage points

Week 4 – Sept. 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government jurisdictions and law enforcement agencies in Los Angeles County FBI Uniform Crime Reporting data Violent and property crime rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rates: Crimes per x people; 1 out of every x people
Week 5 – Sept. 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to the Washington Post Fatal Force dataset Who's in the dataset? When is a fatal shooting by police "necessary," "reasonable," "legitimate," or "legal?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dataset prep Starting a data dictionary City, state Add a column: Law enforcement agency
Week 6 – Sept. 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LAPD Use of Force Policy 1 Translating police jargon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Filling in blanks Interpreting data definitions, e.g., "undetermined" vs. "unknown" Dataset as reporting tool: "need to find out" Grouping detailed data: armed Pivot tables
Week 7 – Oct. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LAPD Use of Force Policy 2 Writing with eight or fewer digits in a paragraph to make quantitative data easier to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threat level Threat level and armed
Week 8 – Oct. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting the timeline for the final project: What happens after a person is fatally shot by an LAPD officer? 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental illness Body camera
Week 9 – Oct. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manner of death Flee
Week 10 – Oct. 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal vs. state courts The Los Angeles County District Attorney investigation report: Why wasn't the officer charged with a crime? Describing a list: Ranges, averages, medians <p>Interview with an investigative or data journalist assignment due</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age Gender Race
Week 11 – Oct. 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> California Public Records Act information requests from the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner-Coroner Introduction to civil suits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a dataset and pivot tables to identify people to research further

Week 12 – Nov. 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deciphering plaintiffs, defendants and allegations from a civil suit docket and complaint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF 8 - TBD
Week 13 – Nov. 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarizing jury instructions, jury minutes, verdicts, dismissals and settlements from court documents Fact checking and annotations for primary and secondary source documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prep FF dataset file and pivot tables for the final project Source and document lists
Week 14 – Nov. 21	Final project topic TBD	TBD
Week 15 – Nov 28	Final project topic TBD	TBD
FINAL	Final project workshops: Monday, Dec. 11, 8-10 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 12, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. The final project is due Wed., Dec. 13, end of day.	

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% 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

Academic Conduct

The USC Student Handbook (https://policy.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/USC_StudentCode_August2022.pdf)

Academic Integrity

USC's Unifying Value of integrity is a foundational principle that inspires the community to match its values to its actions. Academic integrity is ultimately the sole guarantor of the legitimacy of one's education, and therefore, is vitally important not just for oneself, but for the entire USC community. The value of all USC degrees is negatively impacted by violations of academic integrity. In the classroom, general principles of academic integrity include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles.

Academic Integrity violations (academic dishonesty) include, but are not limited to: Plagiarism and Cheating

- The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student's own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.
- Re-using any portion of one's own work (essay, term paper, project, or other assignment) previously submitted without citation of such and without permission of the instructor(s) involved.
- Improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers, including drafts. Also, all students involved in collaborative work (as permitted by the instructor) are expected to proofread the work and are responsible for all

particulars of the final draft.

- Acquisition of academic work, such as term papers, solutions, or other assignments, from any source and the subsequent presentation of those materials as the student's own work, or providing academic work, such as term papers, solutions, or assignments that another student submits as their own work.

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

https://catalogue.usc.edu/preview_entity.php?catoid=16&ent_oid=3459

"Since its founding, the 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."

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.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

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

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

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273- 8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

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.

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

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

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and

auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

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

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323) 442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

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.