JOUR 322: Introduction to Investigative and Data Journalism
2 Units

Spring 2025 – Wednesdays – 9-10:40 a.m.
Section: 21168R
Location: ANN 408

Instructor: Dana Chinn
Office: ASC 227A
Office Hours: By appointment – see Appointlet link on Brightspace.
Contact Info: chinn@usc.edu
             See cell number on Brightspace
Pronouns: she/her

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 and using artificial intelligence tools for research and reporting.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Analyze a raw dataset.
    a. Describe the questions a dataset can and can't answer.
    b. Identify and explain the biases in the ways data is collected, analyzed and reported, and how these biases have contributed to systemic inequities.
    c. Explain the role of the U.S. Census in establishing the categories for gender, race and other demographics.
    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.
d. Identify the question prompts that can be used to interview datasets with artificial intelligence tools such as Chat GPT Data Analyst.

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 Brightspace 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.

You can have more time to complete an in-class assignment without a late penalty if you let me know as you leave class. Videos that walk you through the Excel portions will be posted on Brightspace, and/or you can make a Zoom office hours appointment.

If you can't attend class in-person for any reason, please email me at least an hour before class starts. I will record the class on Zoom and you can attend remotely or watch the class session later.

Each class builds on the previous week's lesson, so it's important to keep up. I will apply a 50% late penalty to any in-class assignments that are turned in later than the following Monday and/or are turned in late without my prior approval.

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 11.

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.

Readings, hardware/software, laptops and supplementary materials

Suggested readings
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 Brightspace.

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.

Required 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.

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.

Grading

a. Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
Weekly assignments	55%
Interview with an investigative reporter and write-up	10%
Final project	35%
TOTAL	**100%**

b. Course 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.

d. Grading Timeline
Weekly assignments will usually be graded before the following class.

Assignment Submission Policy
All assignments must be submitted via Brightspace.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001
(15 weeks: 1/13/2025 – 5/2/2025; Final Exam Period: 5/7-14/2025)
Link: https://classes.usc.edu/term-20251/registration-calendar/
Last day to add: Friday, January 31, 2025
Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund: Friday, January 31, 2025
Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit: Friday, January 31, 2025 [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, February 4, 2025
Last day to withdraw without a "W" on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade: Friday, February 28, 2025 [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, April 11, 2025

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown (subject to change)

Week	Topics	Quantitative / Excel
Week 1 – Jan. 15	● Introduction to the class ● Review of class Brightspace site	● Set up Excel ● Set up Excel Quick Access Toolbars
Week 2 – Jan. 22	● Government jurisdictions ● U.S. Census data Anatomy of an investigative story assigned	● Census Reporter ● Absolute (amount) vs. relative (percent) change
Week 3 – Jan. 29	● Biases in data based on how it's collected ○ Observed vs. self-reported ○ Structured vs. unstructured data ● U.S. Census categories for gender and race ● Calculating and comparing racial composition	Percent share; percentage points
Week 4 – Feb. 5	● Using Census Reporter for researching a communities, cities, counties, metro areas	● Census Reporter ● Absolute vs. relative change ● Percent share; percentage points
Week 5 – Feb. 12	● Law enforcement agencies in Los Angeles County ● FBI Uniform Crime Reporting data ● Violent and property crime rates	● Rates: Crimes per x people; 1 out of every x people
Week 6 – Feb. 19	● Introduction to the Washington Post Fatal Force dataset ○ How data journalists determine what goes into a dataset ○ When is a fatal shooting by police "necessary," "reasonable," "legitimate," or "legal?" ● People fatally shot by the LAPD	● FF 1 ○ Dataset prep ○ Starting a data dictionary ○ Columns: city, state, agency codes
Week 7 – Feb. 26	● Starting our final project: What happened when one person was fatally shot by the LAPD? ○ What documents from which government agencies do we need to get? ○ Using a documents log ● Translating police jargon ● LAPD Use of Force Policy	● FF 2 ○ 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 8 – March 5	● Did the officers follow LAPD Use of Force policies? Using Excel to organize and analyze key facts from the LAPD primary source documents.	● FF 3 ○ Threat level ○ Threat level and armed

Week	Topics	Quantitative / Excel
	● Writing with eight or fewer digits in a paragraph to make quantitative data easier to understand	
Week 9 – March 12	● Capturing structured and unstructured data from the LAPD investigation reports into a dataset to analyze patterns in LAPD disciplinary recommendations and decisions by officer and LAPD entity	● FF 4 　o Mental illness 　o Body camera
	SPRING BREAK – March 17 - 21	●
Week 10 – March 26	● Federal vs. state courts; criminal vs. civil cases ● California laws on use of force: legal definitions of "reasonable" and "necessary" ● The Los Angeles County District Attorney investigation report: Why wasn't the officer charged with a crime? ● Describing a list: Ranges, averages, medians	● FF 5 　o Age 　o Gender 　o Race
Week 11 – April 2	● California Public Records Act information requests to the LAPD and the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner ● Introduction to civil suits Interview with an investigative or data journalist assignment due	● FF 6 　o Manner of death 　o Flee
Week 12 – April 9	● Deciphering plaintiffs, defendants and allegations from a civil suit docket and complaint ● Summarizing jury instructions, jury minutes, verdicts, dismissals and settlements from court documents	● FF 7 　o Using a dataset and pivot tables to identify people to research further
Week 13 – April 16	● Fact checking and annotations for primary and secondary source documents	● FF 8 – TBD ● Prep FF dataset file and pivot tables for the final project
Week 14 – April 23	Final project topic TBD	TBD
Week 15 – April 30	Final project topic TBD	TBD
Final Exam Period – Friday, May 9, 8-10 a.m.	Summative experience	

Policies and Procedures
Communication
Appointlet (link is on Brightspace) will have suggested days/times for Zoom office hours. Feel free to email me for other days/times not listed in Appointment, or if you'd like to meet in person. I am on campus on Wednesdays and am often available on other days of the week.

You are also welcome to email, call or text me. I will usually respond within 24-48 hours.

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 by unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism or public relations class.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies
USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation, is prohibited. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems
Academic Conduct
The USC Student Handbook (https://policy.usc.edu/studenthandbook/)

Academic Integrity
The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic

misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity
https://catalogue.usc.edu/preview_entity.php?catoid=20&ent_oid=4369
"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.

Academic Integrity violations (academic dishonesty) include, but are not limited to: Plagiarism and Cheating
- The submission of material authored by another person or entity (such as an AI tool – see below) 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, articles 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, articles or assignments that another student submits as their own work.
- The USC Annenberg Journalism program views generative AI as an addition to USC's digital

literacy tools that students are encouraged to experiment with and use inside and outside the classroom. In this course, students may use generative AI tools to brainstorm, search for sources, aid in reporting, etc. but must disclose that use in a note that is included with the assignment when it is turned in. Students MAY NOT use any form of AI to structure or write an assignment in the classroom, for homework, or during their Media Center shift. Doing so, will be considered as presenting someone else's work as your own (since AI are trained on libraries of previous pieces of journalism) or some other entity's work as your own (the AI-generated text) and will be treated as acts of plagiarism. Students should also be aware of the danger of false information created by AI as students are solely responsible for the accuracy of their documents and stories, regardless of whether they were completed with the aid of generative AI. An error created or introduced by an AI is grounds for an "F" on the assignment (as stated in the above grading rubric). A finding of plagiarism may be also result in an "F" in the course and potential academic program dismissal.

Generative AI Policy
You may use AI (e.g., ChatGPT and image generation tools) in this class. Learning to use AI is an emerging skill, and I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to provide guidance with these tools during office hours or after class. Keep in mind the following:
- AI tools are permitted to help you brainstorm topics or revise work you have already written.
- If you provide minimum-effort prompts, you will get low-quality results. You will need to refine your prompts to get good outcomes. This will take work.
- Proceed with caution when using AI tools and do not assume the information provided is accurate or trustworthy. If it gives you a number or fact, assume it is incorrect unless you either know the correct answer or can verify its accuracy with another source. You will be responsible for any errors or omissions provided by the tool. It works best for topics you understand.
- AI is a tool, but one that you need to acknowledge using. Please include a paragraph at the end of any assignment that uses AI explaining how (and why) you used AI and indicate/specify the prompts you used to obtain the results and what prompts you used to get the results. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies.
- Be thoughtful about when AI is useful. Consider its appropriateness for each assignment or circumstance. The use of AI tools requires attribution. You are expected to clearly attribute any material generated by the tool used.]

Please ask me if you are unsure about what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an "F" grade on the assignment, exam, or in the course.

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.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:
To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:
USC Annenberg has an embedded student health counselor, Dr. Kelly Greco. Dr. Greco helps students prioritize their mental health and emotional well-being. In this video, she shares a few tips for how to "Fight On" every day. Students may schedule sessions with her through MySHR or by calling (213) 740-9355 (WELL). USC Student Health services are also available to support student's mental health journey by visiting: https://sites.usc.edu/counselingandmentalhealth/

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 consists 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) 740-2500
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.