

COMM 362 - 201 Journalism Research Methods

Fall 2015; Tu-Th: 1:00 – 2:15

School of Communication room 015

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Course objective

Students in this class will learn how to locate and analyze various sources of information that can serve as the basis for a journalistic story. The focus will be on non-human sources, i.e. documents. At the end of this course students will be able:

- to engage in effective search strategies online and offline
- to be more efficient in using online search tools
- to generate story ideas from a variety of sources
- to understand the basics of FOIA law
- to execute a successful FOIA request
- to perform basic data analysis in Excel
- to visualize data
- to use social media as data sources
- to critically analyze and evaluate data, polls, and studies
- to locate and analyze legal documents and court opinions
- to locate and analyze scientific studies
- to find experts
- to use data and information provided by groups and associations
- to search information related to social justice issues
- to assess quality and reliability of information
- to understand legal and ethical issues that come up during the research process

Format

Research skills cannot be taught merely *ex-cathedra*, but require a hands-on approach and practice. The class therefore will rely heavily on practicing and honing our research skills, both during and outside of class time. This philosophy is reflected in the way this course is graded, with only 25% of the grade stemming from tests.

It is important that you do the assigned readings before coming to class, so they can be discussed and you have the required knowledge to engage in in-class assignments and activities.

About 20% of the classes will be taken up by guest lectures. Guest speakers were selected because of their professional skills and insights. When we have a guest lecturer coming to class, you still need to do your readings for that day

Graded activities

- Exams – 25%: There will be a final and midterm, counting for a combined 25% of the grade. For your final exam, you will have the option of having your class-related activities and participation score count for the score of your final exam.
- Final project – 17.5%: Throughout the semester you will be researching a topic for a story, using all the tools you learned about throughout the semester.
- Tip sheet contributions 10%: Every week, every member of the class has to contribute one specific information gathering tip on a wiki document. These tips have to be specific (for example, point out an interesting public database, search mechanism, data analysis or visualization tool, resource for help with FOIA requests.....) and have to be of use to your fellow students. The goal is to prepare a document that we then can distribute through the whole journalism program. You have to post one tip per week from week four through thirteen. If your tip does not meet the requirements of the assignment, I will let you know and you will have the opportunity to submit another tip by the end of the following week. Every one has five of these re-write opportunities, but they can only be invoked if you meet the deadline for posting your tip, which will always be Tuesday at 7 pm.
- Class related activities and participation 22.5%: Throughout the semester, you will be asked to prepare or research an issue before coming to class, do an in-class quiz, assignment or exercise, take an online quiz, fill out a take-home work sheet etc. Sometimes you will have to turn something in, sometimes you will just need to prepare something. As mentioned elsewhere, this is not a class that can be successful as a passive learning experience, where the knowledge streams from instructor to students, but this class is a collective learning effort. This grade reflects your contribution to the class by being an active learner actively engaged with class material. Your in-class participation will also be reflected in this grade. I will give you updates on your grade throughout the semester. Non-excused absences will affect this part of your grade. From your fourth unexcused absence on, you will lose 10% per absence for this part of the grade.
- Assignments 25%:

- Research a person
- FOIA log
- Build an index/visualization
- Newspaper analysis
- Database story idea

Texts

MacLead, Don. *How to Find Anything?* New York: Prentice Hall Press (2012)

Cuillier, David and Charles Davis. *The Art of Access*. Washington DC (2011)

Houston, Brand and the Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. *The Investigative Reporter's Handbook (fifth edition)*. Boston, Bedford Martins (2009).

You also need to get access to the following materials: <http://store.ire.org/products/nicar-courses-bastiaan-vanackers-com-362-research-methods-in-journalism> They cost \$20. And yes, they come as unsecured PDF files, but do the right thing and buy your own rather than sharing among each other.

Class etiquette

- Use computers only for class-related activities. Sometimes class time will be devoted to exercises on the computer. Don't see that as time to update your Facebook profile or check your email.
- Don't leave early.
- Don't start packing your belongings before the end of class.
- Treat others like you want to be treated.
- You can miss three classes without consequences. More than that will affect your grade (see above). If you will miss class, or multiple classes, it is better to keep me in the loop.
- Be honest.

Academic dishonesty

Please familiarize yourself with the School of communication's policy on academic integrity. Any violation may result in an F for the course.

<http://www.luc.edu/soc/undergrad/academicintegrity//>

Students with Disabilities

Any student with a learning disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course contents and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

Grading Scale

A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, F, WF are assigned the following credit points for purposes of grade point average (GPA) calculations: A = 4.0; A- = 3.67; B+ = 3.33; B = 3.00; B- = 2.67; C+ = 2.33; C = 2.00; C- = 1.67; D+ = 1.33; D = 1.00; F = 0; WF = 0.

100 - 93%	A
93 - 90%	A-
90 - 88%	B+
88 - 83%	B
83 - 80%	B-
80 - 78%	C+
78 - 73%	C
73 - 70%	C-
70 - 68%	D+
68 - 63%	D
63 - 60%	D-
below 60%	F

Late Assignments

They are strict and non-negotiable. Assignments must be turned in no later than the start of class on the day they are due **in hard copy**. Exceptions to this policy are extremely rare. Don't wait to print these papers out until right before class. **I also do not accept papers over email.** Papers turned in in hard copy **before** the beginning of next class to my mailbox will receive an automatic 25% deduction but will still be accepted. After that, you will no longer be able to receive credit for the assignment.

Date	Topic	Readings	Guest speakers	Assignment due
8/24/15	Meet and Greet			
8/26/15	Search strategies	Houston ch. 1; MacLeod ch. 1 + intro module on Sakai		
9/1/2015	Search strategies - finding info on a person	MacLeod ch. 7; Houston ch. 5; Cuillier ch. 1		
9/3/15	Googling with a purpose + CRAAP test	MacLeod ch. 2-3		
9/8/15	Chicago city data portal	Online module	Scott Robbin, Joe Germuska and Daniel O'Neill	
9/10/15	Using the library	MacLeod: Ch 4-5; Houston ch. 2	Gabrielle Annala	
9/15/15	Primary sources	Cuillier ch. 1-2; Houston ch. 3; MacLeod ch. 9		Turn in research a person exercise
9/17/15	Groups and associations	MacLeod ch. 6 + Houston 14		
9/22/15	FOIA- open meeting laws	Cuillier 3-7; online module		
9/24/15	FOIA - the basics		Maryam Judar	
9/29/15	Intro to excel + data journalism	Basics and sorting in excel		
10/1/15	Reviewing the basics The basics and sorting	Basics and sorting		
10/6/15	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
10/8/15	Rates and ratios	Rates and Ratios		

10/13/15	Filtering, Pivoting, Importing	Filtering + Importing		
10/15/15	creating an index/visualization tools	Online module	Jessica Brown	Turn in story analysis
10/20/15	Midterm			
10/22/15	Using social media	Online module		
10/27/15	Research and polls	Online module		
10/29/15	Analyzing medical studies	Online module	Gary Schwitzer	Turn in database assignment
11/3/15	Company and business reports	Mac Leod ch. 8; Houston 13	John Slania	
11/5/15	Final project progress report + TBD			Turn in Index
11/10/15	Court records	Houston ch. 10	TBD	
11/12/15	Court records			
11/17/15	Investigating law enforcement	Houston ch. 11		
11/19/15	Social Justice reporting	Houston ch. 21		
11/24/15	work on final project			
11/26/15	Thanksgiving			
12/1/15	Ethics and law + presentation	Online module		Turn in FOIA log
12/3/15	Wrapping things up + presentations			Turn in final project

