Course Description

Technology has made more information readily available to journalists and the general public. This same technology has also made it easier to spread misinformation. That means the journalist has an increased role as a responsible investigator and interpreter of information. The goal of this class is to teach the skills necessary to fulfill this role.

Some of the issues that guide the development of this course:
Journalists rely too much on Google when doing research, at the expense of more sophisticated search techniques.
Journalists rely too much on online research, and sometimes miss the deeper layers of information that are often not available online.
Some of the traditional journalistic skills such as reading a city budget or interpreting census data are at risk of being ignored.
Journalists need to be able to do database-driven reporting, importing data into databases and finding correlations that could serve as story ideas.

Learning Goals and Outcomes

Students will learn the following:

How to use and navigate databases.
Basic statistics for journalists
Spreadsheets/Computer Assisted Reporting
Obtaining and interpreting government documents (e.g. police reports, city budgets)
Obtaining, reading and interpreting legal documents
Interpreting scientific studies and research
Obtaining, reading and interpreting business documents
Analyzing Census Statistics
Interpreting polls
Filing FOIA requests
Open meeting laws

Required Materials
Students will periodically be required to bring the current day’s Chicago Tribune to class.

Instructor Office Hours
Friday: 12 noon-1:30 pm
Other days by appointment

Note: I am a full-time editor at the Chicago Sun-Times. This makes it more difficult to maintain extensive, regular office hours. Please do not think this means I’m not available to discuss questions about the class. If the office time listed above is not convenient, please contact me. I will make time to talk.

Grading
As students learn journalistic research skills, they will be asked to demonstrate their acquired knowledge by reporting and writing articles using statistics, research and information found in spreadsheets, budgets, reports and other documents.

Census Story: 75 points
Data Portal Story: 75 points
Crime Stat Story: 75 points
Medical Story: 75 points
Budget Story: 75 points
Legal Story: 75 points
Business Story: 75 points
Property tax Story 75 points
Final Project 300 points
In-Class Exercises and Quizzes: 50 points
Professionalism: 50 points

Grading Criteria for Writing Assignments
A: Publishable work with no spelling, grammatical, punctuation or AP Style errors and the proper information and sources written in a lively, well-organized manner.
B: Minimal spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Minimal missing information and sources; minimal problems with the lead and organization.
C: Notable number of spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Noticeable missing information and sources; problems with the lead and organization.
D: Significant number of spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Significant missing information and sources; Significant problems with the lead and organization.
F: Misspelling of proper names. Other major spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Almost total lack of information and sources; Severe problems with the lead and organization.

Rewrites
If you receive a grade of C- or below on the Outside Assignments, you have one week to rewrite the story for an improved grade.

Deadlines
Deadlines are important in journalism, and you will be required to file assignments on time. Late assignments will drop one letter grade each day they are filed past deadline. The instructor does not accept assignments by e-mail without prior approval.

**Individual Assignment Grade Scale**

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-94</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-90</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>89-88</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>87-83</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82-80</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>62-60</td>
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<td>F</td>
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**Style and Spelling**

It is important that you learn proper newspaper style, so refer often to your Associated Press Stylebook. Spelling and grammar are equally important. Your grade will suffer if your copy contains style and spelling errors.

**Professionalism**

This class is run like a newsroom, and you should treat it as if it were your job. Therefore, you will be expected to display a respectable level of professionalism by attending class regularly, arriving on time, being prepared for class, paying attention during lectures and participating in discussions. Texting and fiddling with the computer will not be tolerated. Frequent absences will result in a lower grade. Showing up on time also is crucial, since much material will be covered in lectures and writing labs. Tardiness will be taken into consideration when computing your final grade. If you’re expecting to be absent or late, please call or email me before class, the same as if you had a job.

**Academic Dishonesty Policy**

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student’s work, and submitting false documents. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher;
- Providing information to another student during an examination;
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination;
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor;
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted;
• Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student’s work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom;
• Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines; or
• Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

• Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc.;
• Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material;
• Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit; or
• Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of this issue can be found at http://luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source.

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes. This applies even if the student is enrolled in the classes during different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor’s assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of “F” in the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication.
A complete description of the School of Communication Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: [http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml)

**Schedule**

**Week One**
August 26, 28, 30
Introduction
AP Style update and quiz

**Week Two**
Sept. 2 (Labor Day, no class)
Sept. 4, 6
Lecture: Finding Story Ideas; Census Statistics

**Week Three**
Sept. 9, 11, 13
Lecture: FOIA, Open Meetings Act
**Deadline: Census Story due Wednesday, Sept. 11**

**Week Four**
Sept. 16, 18, 20
Lecture: City of Chicago Data Portal
Practical: Mining the data portal

**Week Five**
Sept. 23, 25, 27
Lecture: Police reports, Crime Statistics
**Deadline: Data portal Story due Monday, Sept. 23**

**Week Six**
Sept. 30, Oct. 2, 4
Lecture: Final project discussion
**Deadline: Crime stat story due Sept. 30**

**Week Seven**
Oct. 7, 9, 11 BREAK

**Week Eight**
Oct. 14, 16, 18
Lecture: Medical reports and studies
**Deadline: Final project ideas due Wednesday, October 16**

**Week Nine**
Oct. 21, 23, 25
Legal Docs, lawsuits
**Deadline: Medical story due Monday, Oct. 21**

**Week Ten**
Oct. 28, 30, Nov. 1
Lecture: Business reports
Deadline: Legal story due Friday, Nov. 1

Week Eleven
Nov. 4, 6, 8
Lecture: Income and Property Taxes
Deadline: Business story due Monday, Nov. 4

Week Twelve
Nov. 11, 13, 15
Lecture: Municipal documents, budgets, etc.
Deadline: Property Tax Story Due Wednesday, Nov. 11

Week Thirteen
Nov. 18, 20, 22
Lecture: Final Project discussion, work
Deadline: Municipal budget story due Monday, Nov. 18

Week Fourteen
Nov. 25
Nov. 27, 29 THANKSGIVING BREAK
Lecture: Interpreting Scientific and Research Papers

Week Fifteen
Dec. 2, 4, 6
TBD

Final Project due:
TBD