

TELLING STORIES WITH DATA

JN 430 COURSE SYLLABUS

The University of Alabama, Spring 2016
Classroom: Reese Phifer 338
Class time: Tuesday/Thursday, 12:30-1:45 p.m.
Office hours: Wednesday/Thursday 2-4

Instructor: Chip Brantley
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Phone: (205) 202-0055

Course description

What exactly is data and how does it fit into journalism? How can journalists work with data to find, report and visualize stories? That's what we'll explore in this course. (It doesn't sound fun, but it will be.) We will learn to scrape, compile, clean and critique data and then communicate that data as stories. To do this, we'll look into and play around with different tools and techniques for analyzing, interpreting and visualizing data. We'll make maps, diagrams and charts, evaluate them rigorously and think creatively about how to best to tell the underlying story we want them to tell. We'll also collaborate with Alabama Media Group on class projects, the best of which will be published on AL.com.

Student learning outcomes

By the end of this course, you will have developed the skills necessary to find, compile, clean, evaluate and visualize relevant data and then use that data to help tell interesting stories for publication. You will have learned to work in a professional setting on deadline and collaborate with each other and AMG editors through cloud-based editing platforms.

Topics covered in this class

Finding and evaluating data sets; data scraping; creating, editing and managing spreadsheets; using Google Fusion Tables and other data visualization tools; geocoding and mapping data; graphic design; collaborating; design thinking; visual storytelling; thinking critically about design and storytelling.

Required texts

All reading material will be distributed by instructor in class.

Class schedule

Any absence not cleared with me ahead of time or accompanied with a verifiably dire excuse after the fact will bring down your class citizenship grade and drop your final grade down half a letter grade.

Breakdown of your final grade in this class

Your final letter grade in this class will be determined as follows:

- 20% of your grade will be based on your four quiz grades (5% each)
- 40% of your grade will be based on your project grade
- 30% of your grade will be based on your citizenship grade, which includes attendance, in-class participation, in-class discussion, homework, blog posts, in-class and online critiques
- 10% of your grade will be based on your in-class presentation

Assignments

Quizzes

You will have four quizzes that test your knowledge and understanding of what we read about and discuss in class.

Project

You will complete a major data-driven project. The goal is for these projects to be published on AL.com. You will receive more details on this project during the first full week of class.

Citizenship

You will receive regular homework and in-class assignments, including reading, assessments, critiques, small data-production assignments and visualizations. Each will have a clear deadline. You will receive a letter grade on these, and together with attendance and in-class participation, they will account for your citizenship grade. (See below about how absences and tardiness affect your citizenship grade.)

Presentation

You will do a short presentation on an assigned topic during the semester.

Grading scale

A+ = 97-100, A = 93-96, A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82

C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72

D+ = 67-69, D = 63-66, D- = 60-62

F = 59 or lower. (If you're given only a letter grade "F," this will be calculated as a 55.)

Note: Graduate students receive only straight-up letter grades (no +/-).

Class policies: Absences, tardiness, make-up assignments

Attendance is required unless you have a verifiably dire excuse. For an absence to be excused, you must have a note from a doctor (in the event of a medical absence) or a note from a family member in the event of a family emergency. Doctor or dentist visits that are routine or scheduled in advance will not be excused. Plan these around your classes. Flat tires, deadlines in other classes (or with student media), etc. will not be excused. You get two unexcused absences. After that, the 30% citizenship grade is lowered half a letter grade each time you have an unexcused absence. Being late is also unacceptable. Two tardy arrivals at class (past a 5-minute grace period) will count as an unexcused absence.

If you have a verifiably dire excuse, you may make up missed quizzes. I will work with you to do this, but you must contact me ahead of a missed quiz or have a verifiably dire excuse after the fact.

Late work will be dropped half a letter grade for every day it is late, up to five days. Once five days have passed after the deadline, undelivered work will receive a "0" grade.

Policy on academic misconduct

Academic Honor Code: All students in attendance at The University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University of Alabama expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academic or related matter and any knowing or intentional help, attempt to help, or conspiracy to help, another student commit an act of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following acts, when performed in any type of academic or academically related matter, exercise, or activity:

- **Cheating:** using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, study aids, or computer-

related information.

- **Plagiarism:** representing the words, data, works, ideas, computer programs or output, or anything not generated in an authorized fashion, as one's own. In this class, if you borrow any material from another publication (even a press release) or a website, you must attribute it clearly and fully. It is not acceptable to borrow large passages (more than a sentence or two) from other printed works, even with full attribution. You are producing ORIGINAL writing in this class.
- **Fabrication:** presenting as genuine any invented or falsified citation or material
- **Misrepresentation:** falsifying, altering, or misstating the contents of documents or other materials related to academic matters, including schedules, prerequisites, and transcripts

In the event of academic misconduct, the judicial procedures spelled out in Article V of the Code of Student Conduct will be followed.

Disability statement

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit 1000 Houser Hall to register for services. Students who may need course adaptations because of a disability are welcome to make an appointment to see me during office hours. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services, 1000 Houser Hall, before receiving academic adjustments.

Statement on diversity

The University of Alabama and the College of Communication and Information Sciences are intentionally inclusive communities that strive to have faculty, staff, students and course instruction that reflect the diversity of our society. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, class, linguistic background, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or physical ability.

Severe weather protocol

In the case of a tornado warning (tornado has been sighted or detected by radar; sirens activated), all university activities are automatically suspended, including all classes and laboratories. If you are in a building, please move immediately to the lowest level and toward the center of the building away from windows (interior classrooms, offices, or corridors) and remain there until the tornado warning has expired. Classes in session when the tornado warning is issued can resume immediately after the warning has expired at the discretion of the instructor. Classes that have not yet begun will resume 30 minutes after the tornado warning has expired provided at least half of the class period remains.

UA is a residential campus with many students living on or near campus. In general classes will remain in session until the National Weather Service issues safety warnings for the city of Tuscaloosa. Clearly, some students and faculty commute from adjacent counties. These counties may experience weather related problems not encountered in Tuscaloosa. Individuals should follow the advice of the National Weather Service for that area taking the necessary precautions to ensure personal safety. Whenever the National Weather Service and the Emergency Management Agency issue a warning, people in the path of the storm (tornado or severe thunderstorm) should take immediate life saving actions.

When West Alabama is under a severe weather advisory, conditions can change rapidly. It is imperative to get to where you can receive information from the National Weather Service at <http://www.weather.gov/> and to follow the instructions provided. Personal safety should dictate the actions that faculty, staff and students take. The Office of Public Relations will disseminate the latest information regarding conditions on campus in the following ways:

- Weather advisory posted on the UA homepage
- Weather advisory sent out through Connect-ED-faculty, staff and students (sign up at myBama)

- Weather advisory broadcast over WVUA at 90.7 FM
- Weather advisory broadcast over Alabama Public Radio (WUAL) at 91.5 FM
- Weather advisory broadcast over WVUA 7. WVUA 7 Storm Watch provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone. Check <http://www.wvua7.com/stormwatch.html> for details.

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JN 430 COURSE SCHEDULE

Thursday, January 14

Tuesday, January 19

Thursday, January 21

Tuesday, January 26

Thursday, January 28

Tuesday, February 2

Thursday, February 4

Tuesday, February 9

Thursday, February 11

Tuesday, February 16

Thursday, February 18

Tuesday, February 23

Thursday, February 25

Thursday, March 1

Thursday, March 3

Thursday, March 8

Thursday, March 10

Thursday, March 15 – NO CLASS / SPRING BREAK

Thursday, March 17 – NO CLASS / SPRING BREAK

Thursday, March 22

Thursday, March 24

Thursday, March 29 – Visit to Anniston

Thursday, March 31

Thursday, April 5

Thursday, April 7

Thursday, April 12

Thursday, April 14

Thursday, April 19

Thursday, April 21

Thursday, April 26

Thursday, April 28

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