**Enterprise Reporting with Data**

JOUR 425-3-20

Medill School of Journalism

Summer Quarter 2016 – starting June 20

Mondays 1:30 p.m. – 4:20 p.m.

McCormick Foundation Center

Room 2111

Darnell Little

McCormick Foundation Center 2-115 (Office)

312-375-6977 (mobile telephone)

Darnell-little@northwestern.edu

Office hours: By appointment

Human sources, firsthand observations and exhaustive interviewing are the very basics of good reporting, but documents and public records are what good reporters rely on to break stories, launch investigative pieces and produce high impact enterprise journalism.

However, more and more documents and records are being released in electronic form, and handling electronic data is a skill reporters need to work on long form investigative and enterprise stories as well as breaking news.

The goal of this class is for students to learn to effectively and accurately use electronic data in their work. Reporters need to understand what the data represent and that the data are being used correctly in a story. Data supply answers but they also lead to questions. Good reporters interrogate numbers, looking for their strengths and weaknesses. Reporters also need to know where to find the right numbers and how to search online for data and electronic public records.

Take a look at some recent stories in the news and you’ll find that they couldn’t be written without numbers. Clearly, numbers aren’t reserved only for sports and business stories. By grounding stories on hard numerical data, reporters can reduce their reliance on hunches, theories and anecdotal evidence.

Students will learn how to correctly use numbers in stories, which numbers are of particular importance in various areas of reporting and where those numbers can be found. Students will develop a rigorous approach to quantitative thinking. Students will learn to develop a strategy for examining large sets of data, learn how to mine the data to find the most revealing figures and learn the math and software skills to work on data sets used in published stories.

**Course work**

Homework will include four writing assignments. Each student will report and write four enterprise stories, each having a strong data element. The first three stories will be assigned by the professor. The fourth story will be assigned or selected by the student and approved by the professor. It must demonstrate the lessons learned in class, and there will be a high premium on originality and the quality of the reporting and writing. Students will orally present their final projects during the last class. The course outline is subject to change, depending on the availability of guest speakers and other factors. All assignments must be handed in on time. Failure to hand in an assignment, or an assignment that doesn’t meet the above standards, will result in a lowered grade. Work rife with typos and grammatical errors will result in the assignment being rejected.

All students must have spreadsheet software installed on their laptops and be familiar with the spreadsheet software they own. Specifically, students will be expected to know how to sort and filter data, and students should know how to enter simple formulas in a worksheet and perform basic mathematical calculations. This is not a software class, so students are expected to learn how to use their software on their own. Students who are not proficient in Microsoft Excel will be required to sign up at Lynda.com, a library of online tutorials designed to teach software skills.

Follow these easy steps to gain access to [Lynda.com](http://www.lynda.com/):

1. Log into [www.northwestern.edu/lynda](http://www.northwestern.edu/lynda) using your NetID and password.

2. You'll have one quick question to answer before gaining access to over 2,400 tutorials and courses.

3. If you have a Mac laptop, sign up for Microsoft Excel for Mac 2011 Essential Training. If you have a PC, sign up for Excel 2013 Essential Training.

**Grading**

The first assignment will be worth 20 percent of your grade. The second and the third assignments will each be worth 25 percent of your grade. The final assignment, including the oral presentation, will be worth 30 percent of your grade. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on Monday. Assignments may be emailed to the instructor.

**Grading scale**

100—93.34 A; 93.33—90 A-; 89.99—86.67 B+; 86.66—83.34 B; 83.33—80.00 B-; 79.99—76.67 C+; 76.66—73.34 C; 73.33—70.00 C-; anything lower is an F.

**Medill Integrity Code**

As members of the Medill community, all of our academic, professional, media, journalism and marketing communications work must meet the standards in this code.

For further information, please see the Northwestern University integrity policy:

<http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/student-life/academic-integrity-policy/>

**Special needs**

Northwestern University and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) are committed to providing a supportive and challenging environment for students with disabilities who choose to attend the university. Additionally, the university works to provide all students with disabilities a learning environment that affords them equal access and reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. Any student who has a documented disability and needs accommodations for classes and/or course work is requested to speak directly to the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD, 847-467-5530 ; ssd@northwestern.edu) and the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first two weeks of class). All discussions will remain confidential.

**Required text**

*Math Tools for Journalists* by Kathleen Woodruff Wickham. The book can be purchased at Amazon.com.

**Suggested text**

*Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News* by Sarah Cohen. The book can be purchased at Amazon.com and at the Investigative Reporters and Editors Web site. Click on the “Resource Center” tab and look under the “IRE Books & Audio” link.

**Class schedule**

Before our first class on June 20, please read:

*Math Tools for Journalists:* Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 – sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

And on Lynda.com, complete these chapters:

Essential Training for Excel 2013 (PC users): Chapter 1(Getting Started with Excel), Chapter 2 (Entering Data) and Chapter 3 (Creating Formulas and Functions).

Excel for Mac 2011 Essential Training: Chapter 1(Getting Started with Excel), Chapter 3(Managing Worksheets, Cells and Cell Data) and Chapter 4(Summarizing Data Using Formulas and Functions).

Week One

-- Introduction

-- Statistics 101/ Numbers in the newsroom

-- Census primer

-- Table design

-- Homework assignment: Due next week – *750 - 1000* words. Write an article on the U.S. census population statistics assigned to you. Describe the most interesting population change in your area and then focus on why that change is happening.

- *Math Tools for Journalists:* Chapter 3

And on Lynda.com, complete these chapters:

Essential Training for Excel 2013 (PC users): Chapter 7(Introduction to Charting)

Excel for Mac 2011 Essential Training: Chapter 6(Working with Charts)

Week Two

-- Descriptive statistics using spreadsheets

Examples - calculate means, medians, standard deviations using Illinois State Board of Education report card data

--Lecture on data analysis using education statistics

--Intro to chart/graph design

--Homework

*-- Due next week – School test score assignment. 750-1000 words.*

And on Lynda.com, complete these chapters:

Essential Training for Excel 2013 (PC users): Chapter 13(PivotTables)

Excel for Mac 2011 Essential Training: Chapter 9(Exploring PivotTable Reports)

Week Three

-- Using pivot tables/cleaning data and using text functions in spreadsheets

-- Advanced chart/graph design

-- Discuss final story ideas

--Homework

*-- Due next week – Crime statistics assignment. 750-1000 words*

Week Four

--Vetting the final story ideas

-- Internet research strategies

--Homework

#  -- Due next week. *Original assignment submitted by the student. Must include graphics. 750-1000 words.*

Week Five

*--Oral presentations of final project*