Reporting on Homelessness in Northwest Arkansas

Advanced Reporting & Data Analysis

Jour 405V Sec. 7 / Spring 2020

School of Journalism and Strategic Media

University of Arkansas

Class Time and Location:

Monday-Wednesday, 9:40 a.m.-10:55 a.m. / Kimpel 145 / 1/13/2020 - 4/30/2020

Class Website

Instructor: Rob Wells, Ph.D.

Office: Kimpel 128 / O: 479-575-6305 / Cell: 443-591-1189 / rswells@uark.edu

Office hours: Monday-Wednesday 12:30 p.m-1:30 p.m. or by appointment

Course Goal: Students will learn basic data analysis and use these insights to help report on aspects of the homeless population in Northwest Arkansas. Students will produce multimedia stories with data visualizations on assigned topics and may generate their own story ideas.

Course Description: This course provides students with a modern, in-depth experience of combining street reporting and data analysis to tell a story of significant societal importance. Quality reporting in modern newsrooms requires a solid foundation of data analysis. Conversely, data journalism is sterile and abstract without in-depth interviews and engagement with the community to provide character-driven narrative for audiences. In this course, students will interview individuals ranging from homeless men and women, social service providers, police officers and academics working directly on the homeless problem in out community.

Learning Outcomes:

- Gain proficiency in using data to frame and illustrate stories

- Identify the limitations, strengths and weaknesses of datasets.
- Gain proficiency in the R program to manipulate datasets, to sort, filter and conduct basic calculations.
- Create basic data visualizations for publication on a journalism department WordPress site.
- Develop critical thinking: understand the interplay between data analysis and reporting, and how the two methods help advance journalism.
- Demonstrate a grasp of data storytelling techniques that can help broad audiences understand data.

Required Texts:
Machlis, Sharon. Practical R for Mass Communications and Journalism. Chapman & Hall/CRC The R Series. 2018. ISBN 9781138726918
https://www.amazon.com/gp/search?keywords=9781138726918

Supplementary Texts:

Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News. Sarah Cohen. Any edition. Columbia, Mo.: Investigative Reporters & Editors Inc., 2014.
http://store.ire.org/collections/books/products/numbers-in-the-newsroom-using-math-and-statistics-in-news-second-edition

Meyer, Philip. The New Precision Journalism. Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. Free version: https://carolinadatadesk.github.io/pmeyer/book/Chapter1.htm

Data Journalism Handbook
http://datajournalismhandbook.or g/1.0/en/

Verification Handbook
http://verificationhandbook.com/downloads/verification.handbook.pdf

Follow these websites:

Pew Center on Media: https://www.journalism.org/
The Upshot: https://twitter.com/UpshotNYT
FiveThirtyEight: https://fivethirtyeight.com/
Vox : https://www.vox.com/

Class Work on National Reporting Project

Students' work will be offered for consideration to a national reporting project on homelessness being led by the University of Maryland's Howard Center for Investigative Journalism. Partner universities include Stanford University, Boston College, Universities of Maryland, Florida, Oregon, Hawaii and Arizona State University. The media partner is National Public Radio.

Read more about the project

Class Communications:

Email: I will email individual students on occasion about important issues. I expect a timely reply, which means a reply the same day. It is your responsibility to check your email account. We are working on stories for publication so you need to respond promptly to inquiries. If you don't have an answer or are busy with something important, then respond by acknowledging the email and explaining when you expect to get the answer.

I respond to email quickly, usually within an hour. I stop responding to student email at 9 p.m.

I use e-mail and Blackboard to communicate with students.
Blackboard: I will post readings, announcements and grades on the class Blackboard site

All assignments, homework and grades will be posted on the Blackboard site.

It is your responsibility to check your email and Blackboard announcements.

Grading:

Discussion Posts: 40 percent
Assignments: 45 percent
Class Participation: 15 percent

Plagiarism or fabrication will result in your dismissal from class with an F for the course and a recommendation you be dismissed from the college.

Your work will be marked on the following scale:

A+: 100 – 98
A: 97 – 93
A-: 92 – 90
B+: 89 – 88
B: 87 – 83
B-: 82 – 80
C+: 79 – 78
C: 77 – 73
C-: 72 – 70
D+: 69 – 68
D: 67 – 63
D-: 62 – 60
F: Below 60

A - The work is of professional quality (for journalism "professional" track students) or high academic quality (for others). It reflects a depth of research, clarity of writing, and a complete grasp of the main concepts presented in the class.

B - The work is good but needs editing or is flawed in one of the categories mentioned above.
C – The work is weak, needs major editing or reflects an average understanding of key concepts presented in class.
D - Work fails to meet requirements and needs a complete rewrite.
F – Unacceptable.

Class Blog:
Students are encouraged to post interesting and relevant news items about homelessness on the class blog on Blackboard.

Libel:
Any story that includes libelous material will result in an F (55 percent) Examples would be if you describe someone as a murderer in your story before he or she is convicted, or if you mistype the name of a convicted murder and thereby implicate someone not guilty of the crime.

Attendance:
You are required to attend class and it will figure into your class participation grade. An excused absence requires notification by e-mail before the start of class. Be prepared to submit documentation to validate your absence, especially if it is for an extended period of time.
Students who miss more than six classes may have their final grade reduced by a full letter grade.

Classroom Etiquette:
We will be working in a computer lab. Show respect for your colleagues and instructor by refraining from personal computer use during class. You are being rude to your instructor and distracting to your classmates when you engage in computer activities unrelated to class. Anyone misusing classroom computers for personal matters will receive a zero for class participation that day and may be asked to leave the class if the behavior persists.

Academic Honesty:
Please refer to http://provost.uark.edu/245.php for the academic integrity policy.

Class Weather Policy:
If the university is closed, there will be no class. If I need to cancel class, for whatever reason, I will do my best to notify you by e-mail and notify the journalism office: 479-575-3601.

CEA, Center for Education Access:
If you are a student with special needs, contact me personally. The CEA is at 479-575-3104. I will accommodate students who require assistance.

Emergency Preparedness Plan:
The university has a new emergency plan; review it at http://emergency.uark.edu/

About the Instructor:
Rob Wells is an assistant professor of journalism and has been teaching at the University of Arkansas since the Fall 2016 semester. He earned his doctorate in philosophy in Journalism Studies at the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism. As an adjunct instructor, he taught reporting classes at the Merrill College between 2010-2016. He was a 2012 Reynolds Visiting Professor at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, a program sponsored by the Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism.

Wells is the former deputy bureau chief for Dow Jones Newswires/Wall Street Journal in Washington, D.C., where he oversaw 22 reporters who covered real-time business, economics and financial news in the nation's capital. Prior to this, he was a business reporter for Dow Jones, Bloomberg News and The Associated Press. He holds a master's degree in liberal studies from St. John's College in Annapolis, where he studied philosophy, literature, history and political science. His academic research is in business journalism and history, along with data journalism and technology. He is the author of *The Enforcers: How Little-Known Trade Reporters Exposed the Keating Five and Advanced Business Journalism*, University of Illinois Press, November 2019.

Assignments:

The class will explore the following basic story ideas and may develop others during the course of the semester:

- Homeless children in Arkansas
- "The End of Veteran Homelessness in Northwest Arkansas." Really?
- The Role of the University of Arkansas in Exacerbating a Housing Shortage and the Local Homeless Problem
- The Legacy of the 2017 Homeless Crackdown in South Fayetteville
- Local Law Enforcement's Interactions with the Homeless Population
- Excellent story proposals generated by a student

An assignment uploaded late (1 minute after the posted deadline) will be reduced by one grade, and will be reduced a full grade for every subsequent day.
Students with excused absences should contact me immediately about making up missed assignments. The final assignment represents the final examination; there is no separate final examination.

Assignments:

#1: Feb 19: First story

#2: March 18: Second story

#3: April 20: Third story

Depending on the student's progress, the story #2 and #3 might represent in-depth elaborations and revisions.

Weekly Posts:

Regular journal / discussion posts on readings. Details on Blackboard.

Schedule of Instruction:

Week 1: Jan 13-15

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe basic facts about the homeless population in Northwest Arkansas.
- Open R Studio and navigate basic functions
- Examine Census data on Census.gov

Modules

- Introduction to R Studio
- Install R and R Studio on Your Laptop

Week 2: Jan 20-22:

Introduction to R & Census Data

Topics will include research on Northwest Arkansas homeless community, navigating R Studio, Review of Census Data

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Open R Studio, load a script, import data.
- Articulate the basic scope of the homeless community and its challenges in Northwest Arkansas
- Understand the basic layout of the U.S. Census website.

Modules:

- Introduction to R Studio
- Refresher: Basics of Data Analysis
- Introduction to Data.census.gov

Week 3: Jan 27-29

R & Census Data

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Use an R script and produce basic descriptive statistics.
- Gain a basic understanding of dplyr and ggplot
- Tell a basic story from U.S. Census data.

Modules

- dplyr and ggplot - the Swiss Army Knife of Data Analysis
- File Management
- Class Exercise
- Refresher: Numbers in the Newsroom

Guest Speaker, Wed. Jan 29. Steve Burt, the executive director of Continuum of Care https://nwacoc.com/ and Cassidy Dutton, Candidate for Master in Social Work

---

Week 4: Feb 3-5: Story pitch

Data Processing - Analysis and Story pitch

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Gain proficiency in dplyr and ggplot
- Articulate a basic story pitch on homeless issues

Modules

- Dplyr and ggplot - the Swiss Army Knife of Data Analysis
- File Management

Guest Lecturer: Wednesday, Feb 5 Alex Kingsbury, editorial board for New York Times.

Week 5: Feb 10-12

Mapping in R

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Create a basic maps
- Use R to download data

Modules:

- Mapping in R
- Mapping in R class exercise

Guest Speaker: Feb 12, Kevin Fitzpatrick, Univ of Arkansas

Week 6: Feb 17-19: First story

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Embed R maps into WordPress
- Create additional maps in R
- Gain basic understanding of APIs in data journalism

Week 7: Feb 24-26

Introduction to APIs

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand the utility of APIs in data analysis.

- Use the Census API to download data into R
- Examine Census data on Census.gov

Modules

- Introduction to APIs
- Class Exercise APIs
- tidycensus

Week 8: March 2-4: Story pitch.

Homeless Children in Arkansas

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe basic facts about the scale of homeless children population in Northwest Arkansas.
- Produce charts with the largest homeless children population by school district
- Create an R script to process multiple years' worth of data

Modules

- Homeless Children
- Trend Analysis, Homeless Children Data

Week 9: March 9-11

Homeless children

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Produce a time series analysis of homeless children population in Arkansas.
- Produce charts with the largest homeless children population by school district
- Learn basic concepts about joining datasets.

Modules

- Homeless Children
- Data Joining In R

Week 10: March 16-18: Second story

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Produce a map of homeless children population in Arkansas.
- Produce charts with the largest homeless children population by school district
- Compare homeless children data to Census data on Census.gov

Possible guest speaker, Veronica Molina, CNN

Spring Break: March 23-27

Week 11: March 30-April 1

Housing data

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand housing data and context with other communities
- Perform a basic analysis of housing costs, homelessness increase in NW Arkansas

Modules

- Housing Data-Affordability
- Housing Affordability Analysis

Week 12: April 6-8: Story pitch

Housing data

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explore correlations between housing price increases and university enrollment
- Examine the role of the UofA on housing affordability

Modules

- Housing data, continued
- Extract data from PDFs

Week 13: April 13-15

Housing Affordability and the UofA

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explore correlations between housing price increases and university enrollment
- Examine the role of the UofA on housing affordability

Modules

- Housing data, continued
- Extract data from PDFs

Week 14: April 20-22: Third story

News Production-GitHub

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Embed interactive graphics in R Markdown.
- Host a basic web page on GitHub

Modules

- News Production-GitHub
- GitHub and R Markdown

Week 15: April 27-29

News Production

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Embed interactive graphics in R Markdown.
- Host a basic web page on GitHub