

COMM 362 Journalism Research Methods

Fall 2018

Tuesdays and Thursdays 1 p.m.-2:15 p.m.

Corboy, Room 710

Office Hours: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., by appointment

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Course Description

The evolution of information technology has made more information readily available to journalists and the general public. As a result, the journalist has an increased role as a responsible investigator and interpreter of information. The goal of this class is to teach students 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, ignoring the fact that some data are 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 statistics and information into tables and finding correlations that could serve as story ideas.

Learning Goals and Outcomes

- How to use and navigate databases
- Basic statistics and mathematical terms
- 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
- Conducting and interpreting polls
- Filing FOIA requests
- Knowing open meeting laws

Required Materials

- All readings for this class are online. Click on the links below. If the links don't work, copy and paste them into your browser.
- Associated Press Stylebook

How we will get there

Students will be expected to know material covered in class discussions and from the readings. This knowledge will be measured through written stories and class participation. All will serve as an assessment of students' skills and as a measure of attendance.

This class functions much like a newsroom or an operation that aggregates information, and students should treat it as if it were their place of employment. They will be expected to display a respectable level of professionalism by attending regularly, arriving on time, being prepared, paying attention during the brief lectures and participating in discussions. Texting and fiddling with laptops or electronic devices will not be permitted, so turn off devices unless taking notes.

Because attendance will be taken at the beginning of class, showing up on time is crucial. Tardiness and absences will impact final grades. If you're expecting to be absent or late, call, text or email the instructor before class. Get course notes from a classmate. For illnesses, please make every effort to provide documentation (doctor's note, proof that you made an appointment at the Wellness Center, which does not provide medical excuse forms). The preceding efforts will go toward constituting an excused absence, which is at the discretion of the instructor. Success in this class is dependent on student participation and on the completion of assignments by due dates and times. **If you have an unexcused absence on the day an assignment is due, the grade for that missing assignment will be an F.** There will be no make-up opportunities for unexcused absences.

Do follow guidelines and instructions. Do not ask for extra credit, because there isn't any.

Deadlines

Deadlines are important in journalism and in life, so you will be required to file assignments on time. Late assignments will drop at least one letter grade. **The instructor does not accept assignments by email without prior approval.**

Rewrites and Editing

If the instructor determines you need to rewrite a story, or edit a video or audio package, you have one week to do so.

Assignments/Grading

As students learn journalistic research skills, they will demonstrate their acquired knowledge by producing stories using statistics, research and information found in spreadsheets, budgets, reports and other documents.

Total possible points for the semester: 1,000

- Census story: 100 points
- Legal/courts story: 100 points
- City budget story: 100 points
- Election story: 100 points
- Business story: 100 points
- FOIA assignment: 100 points
- Final Project: 200 points
- In-Class Exercises and Quizzes: 100 points
- Participation/Professionalism: 100 points

Grading criteria for written work

A: Publishable copy with few spelling, grammatical, punctuation or AP Style errors, well researched and sourced, and written in a lively, well-organized manner. The work should add meaningfully to a dialogue on the subject at hand and if possible provide for the reader information that is unavailable elsewhere. The opening paragraphs must generate interest and convey important information. The story must flow, logically, from one subject to the next with an engaging and active voice. Quotes must contribute meaningfully to the work.

B-C = Up to three spelling, grammatical or AP style errors; minimal to noticeable missing information and sources; problems with the opening paragraphs and organization.

D = Four or more spelling, grammatical or AP style errors; significant missing information and sources; significant problems with the opening paragraphs and organization.

F = Misspelling of proper names or inclusion of any personal opinion; total lack of crucial information; severe problems with the opening paragraphs and organization.

Grading Criteria for video, audio work:

Video:

A: Clearly focused images, proper framing, lively content, tells a compelling story, understandable audio, at least three minutes in length.

B-F: Varies, depending upon how many of the above items are missing.

Audio:

A: Clear and uncluttered sound, lively content, tells a compelling story, variety of voices.

B-F: Varies, depending upon how many of the above items are missing.

Class participation and classroom respect

The class participation component of your grade is not an extra credit-kind-of-thing. We will be listening and sharing ideas on a range of topics. Students are expected to exhibit a supportive attitude and an appreciation for diversity in opinions, beliefs and values.

Grading criteria for participation:

A = Frequent and meaningful contributions to class discussions (with consistent attendance) that show insight and understanding of material

B = Frequent and on-topic contributions to class discussions (with three or fewer absences)

C = Occasional participation in class discussions, spotty attendance

D = Participates only when called upon (with poor attendance)

F = No participation, poor attendance

Individual assignment grade scale

A: 100-94

A-: 93-90

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: 59-0

Final grade scale (no rounding up)

A: 1,000-940

A-: 939-900

B+: 899-880

B: 879-830

B-: 829-800

C+: 799-780

C: 779-730

C-: 729-700

D+: 699-580

D: 679-630

D-: 629-600

F: 599-0

IMPORTANT NOTES: **1)** Readings must be completed and assignments are due in class on the day they are listed. **2)** Some in-class assignments may be done on handouts. For others, students should upload stories to Sakai. **3)** No in-class work may be completed outside of class because of an absence unless the absence is excused. **4)** Unless otherwise instructed, NO work will be accepted via email.

Students with disabilities

If you require accommodation during classes or exams, present documentation to the instructor from Services for Students With Disabilities. Every effort will be made to meet your needs.

Please do this early in the semester. The instructor cannot retroactively adjust grades in cases where documentation was presented late.

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

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.

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 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 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>

Class schedule (subject to change)

Week One

August 28 and 30

Review syllabus

Practice news quiz

Readings

Week Two

September 4 and 6

Finding story ideas

Census statistics

Assign census story (due Sept. 13)

Week Three

September 11 and 13

Police reports and crime statistics (delayed)

Census story due Thursday, Sept. 13

Guest speaker (delayed)

Week Four

September 18 and 20

Fun with FOIA and open meetings

Guest speaker 9/20

Assign FOIA story (due Oct. 18)

Week Five

September 25 and 27

Legal documents

Guest speaker 9/25

Assign legal story (due Oct. 4)

Week Six

October 2 and 4

Municipal documents and budgets

Guest speaker 10/4

Legal story due 10/4

Assign city budget story (due Oct. 11)

Week Seven

October 9 (no class, Fall Break) and 11

Business reporting: Stocks, annual reports, quarterly reports, press releases

City budget story due Thursday, Oct. 11

Assign business story (due 10/23)

Week Eight**October 16 and 18**

Lecture: Elections: Campaign finance reports
FOIA story due Thursday, Oct. 18)

Week Nine**October 23 and 25**

Elections: Polls, voting results
Readings
Business story due Thursday, Oct. 23)

Week 10**October 30 and November 1**

Elections: exit polls
Assign election story (due Nov. 13)

Week 11**November 6 and 8**

Work on election story

Week 12**November 13 and 15**

Lecture: Computer assisted reporting
Election story due Tuesday, Nov. 13

Week 13**November 20 and 22 (no class, Thanksgiving)**

Prep Finals Project

Week 15**December 4 and 6**

Prep Finals Project

Finals Project due by 3 p.m., Friday, Dec. 14

Michael Limón is an educator and veteran journalist/editor who has led and been part of award-winning teams at a wide range of top newspapers. Most recently, as business editor at *The Salt Lake Tribune*, the Money section under his supervision was honored with multiple General Excellence awards by the Society of American Business Editors and Writers (SABEW). Previous to that, during more than a decade with the Gannett Co., in roles ranging from assistant managing editor to executive editor, he was twice named a Gannett Newsroom Supervisor of the Year and was honored by The Associated Press, among others.

Limón began his career as a reporter at *The Wichita Eagle* before serving in a variety of editing positions at *The Dallas Morning News* and *The Sacramento Bee*. He is a lifetime member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and serves on the Board of Visitors for the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma, his alma mater (BA journalism). Limón and wife Robbin, who have two grown children, live in the Old Town neighborhood of Chicago. He is an avid skier who enjoys live music of almost any genre and collects first-edition books.