

Jour 5003: Advanced Reporting Spring 2021 Syllabus

Advanced Reporting Jour 5003: ArkansasCovid.com, Spring 2021

JOUR 5003 Advanced Reporting section 001

Remote Delivery. Class Time: Monday-Wednesday, 9:40 a.m.-10:55 a.m.

Jan. 11 - May 7, 2021

Syllabus updated Jan. 10, 2020

Instructor: Rob Wells, Ph.D.

Office: Remote in Spring 2021

Office phone: 479-575-6305

Office hours: Monday-Wednesday online 11:00 a.m-12:00 p.m.

and by appointment: <https://calendly.com/rswells/30min>

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Course Goal: Students will collaborate with the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism on a national reporting project about COVID-19 in the workplace. Preliminary reporting will be published on Arkansascovid.com throughout the semester.

Course Description: This course will have two tracks. Those without data journalism experience will learn the basics of data visualization and contribute to the daily updates of Arkansascovid.com.

The advanced track is for students with data journalism training and reporting experience. They will report on an evolving news story, the COVID-19 outbreak in Arkansas and its implications in the workplace.

Both beginning and advanced students will produce content for Arkansascovid.com – <https://arkansascovid.com/> – a popular data portal. We will examine Covid-19 data in Arkansas and produce stories based on this data, primarily on occupational outbreaks.

Students will use Flourish and Datawrapper for data visualization and will code in R. These are powerful tools used in modern news reporting. Quality reporting in newsrooms requires a solid foundation of data analysis.

The data skills taught in this class are in high demand in newsrooms and corporations.

Learning Outcomes

- Contribute to operation of a real-time multimedia news site
- Report and produce multimedia stories with data
- Attain Data Literacy: Identify the limitations, strengths and weaknesses of datasets
- Learn best practices in data project management
- Learn best practices for news reporting with Twitter
- Create basic data visualizations for web publication
- Understand how data analysis and reporting can advance journalism

Advanced Track Additional Learning Outcomes:

- Participate in a national investigative reporting project
- Gain proficiency in R and R Studio
- Apply best practices with investigative reporting

Required Texts:

Wong, Dona M. The Wall Street Journal Guide to Information Graphics. W. W. Norton & Company. 2013. ISBN 0393347281.

<https://www.amazon.com/Street-Journal-Guide-Information-Graphics/dp/0393347281>

Aucoin, James L. The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism,. University of Missouri Press, 2005. ProQuest Ebook Central. (Free through Mullins library).

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3440699>

Advanced Track Only:

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:

Verification Handbook

<http://verificationhandbook.com/downloads/verification.handbook.pdf>

Cohen, Sarah Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News. Any edition. Columbia, Mo.: Investigative Reporters & Editors Inc., 2014.

<https://www.ire.org/product/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/>

Kabacoff, R. (2015). *R in action: Data analysis and graphics with R* (2nd ed.). Shelter Island, NY: Manning. <https://www.amazon.com/Action-Data-Analysis-Graphics/dp/1617291382>

Select readings posted course website

Follow these websites:

Arkansascovid.com

Howard Center for Investigative Journalism at University of Maryland:

<https://merrill.umd.edu/howard-center-for-investigative-journalism>

Arkansas Dept. of Health:

<https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/novel-coronavirus>

ProPublica

The Upshot (The New York Times)

FiveThirtyEight

Vox

Reddit Rlanguage

Machlis' R website: <http://www.machlis.com/R4Journalists/>

Grading:

Assignments: 70 percent

Teamwork / Class Participation: 30 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.

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.

Remote Class:

The course will be taught remotely and synchronously, which means we all meet online at the same time twice a week. Course presentations will be on Zoom. The reporting and assignments and homework will be discussed in Microsoft Teams. Students will write in Google Docs and use Google Sheets and GitHub to manage and organize data. These are all tools used in professional newsrooms.

The course will be presented in a flipped format, where homework and watching of pre-recorded video lectures is offline and the class time will be used for collaborative problem solving and discussion.

I will record all class sessions.

Class Communications:

1) Teams:

This collaboration platform, widely used for project management, will be the heart of our communications. It will serve as a convenient repository for messages and documents through the semester. Breaking news and important documents related to our reporting will be distributed in Teams. I will expect a timely reply to a direct query to a student on a particular issue. Many reporting and data problems will be discussed on Teams.

Teams is free through your university Office365 account. Download the Teams App through the Office365 suite

<https://its.uark.edu/communication-collaboration/office365/office365-desktop-apps.php>

2) Zoom:

Our course sessions will be on Zoom. I need everyone to participate fully during these sessions; activate your video camera unless there is some special circumstance when that is not possible.

3) Course website:

Bookmark <https://wordpressua.uark.edu/datareporting/>

This site will contain content for 10 modules to learn the skills necessary to produce material for Arkansascovid.com.

4) Blackboard, UofA email:

You hand in weekly memos and items for a grade on Blackboard. Grades will be posted on Blackboard as will be class recordings. On occasion, I will send messages to students via the UofA email accounts about important issues but expect much of our communication will be in Teams.

5) Trello:

Project management software for our daily work.

It is your responsibility to monitor Teams for direct messages and check your UofA email. I respond to email quickly, usually within an hour. I stop responding to student email at 9 p.m.

Attendance:

We will be publishing Arkansascovid.com, so your attendance will be very important. Your colleagues will be relying on you to show up and show up prepared.

If for some reason you cannot make a class or a publishing assignment, please let me know as soon as possible so I can arrange for a substitute.

The class is being offered during a pandemic, so I will be flexible in the event health issues prevent your attendance. Please follow this basic rule: communicate with me about any absence as soon as you can.

Online Etiquette:

Let us all resist the temptation to multitask during class and instead **be present in the brief time we have together.**

Unless you are talking, please mute your microphone to eliminate outside noise; headsets or earbuds are a good idea.

Show your face. Unless there is some extraordinary circumstance, students must activate their video camera during class time. Lurking off-camera impedes the teamwork necessary in this class. Failure to do so will mean you will be marked as absent and removed from the class session.

Course Tools

- 1) Google Docs / Google Sheets: We will write and edit articles in Google Docs, which permits collaborative writing and editing. Google Sheets will be used to keep track of important data and for project management.
- 2) Tableau: Tableau is a popular data visualization program, to supplement our work.
- 3) Flourish: You will learn to build graphics in Flourish.
- 4) Datawrapper: You will learn to build maps in Datawrapper.
- 5) WordPress: You will learn to post and format your work in WordPress. You will learn about Data Management.
- 6) R and RStudio: Track 2 students will manage and produce content in R.
- 7) Teams: For discussions and daily work.
- 8) Trello: Project management software for our daily work.

Course Organization For Beginning Students:

You will learn the basics and produce content quickly.

Schedule of Instruction

Daily Site Maintenance:

We update Arkansascovid.com each day. The site has two paid interns to handle the main data tasks and students will work with them on this task throughout the semester. These tasks will be outside of the scheduled class time. The data update begins between 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. daily, depending on release from the Arkansas Department of Health. The data is then made available to students to produce daily charts and tweets based on the news.

A calendar for students' daily work is posted on Teams and will be scheduled two weeks in advance or more. Contact Prof. Wells if you have a conflict and work to find a replacement.

Skills Modules

The basic skills will be taught through online modules
Module #1: Basic Data - Math

Module #2: Data Management
Module #3: Tableau
Module #4: Data Visualization
Module #5: Flourish
Module #6: Writing About Data
Module #7: WordPress
Module #8: Data Cleaning
Module #9: Datawrapper

Please see the [course outline](#).

Homework / Assignments

The course goal is to learn basic data journalism skills and get your material published on Arkansascovid.com.

How much homework will you have? It depends on how quickly you master the skill modules and the amount of editing required.

In this class, the editing process is the homework.

I will provide feedback and guidance and the student will make the revisions necessary make the item publication worthy. I will ask you to review one or more of the skills modules to complete that task. This can involve some amount of back and forth between the student and instructor.

Students will complete 10 items over the course of the semester.
Items include the following:

- Creating static or interactive graphic on a Covid topic
- Producing daily tweets on the data or a Covid-related report
- Producing tweets from the governor's daily press conference
- Producing an interactive workbook with a fully-reported story
- Writing a story for Arkansascovid.com
- Producing a podcast or video for Arkansascovid.com
- And, things we can't anticipate because we are dealing with breaking news

I will use the skills modules to teach you how to produce the following:

1: Static Graphic - Story This item should be completed by Feb 1

Students will use Excel and Tableau or Flourish to gather, analyze and visualize Arkansascovid data by demographic, or on another assigned topic, and report and write a 300 word story.

2: Graphic with Multiple Data Sources. This item should be completed by Feb 24

Students will use Excel and Tableau or Flourish to gather, analyze and visualize Arkansascovid data by demographic or on another assigned topic. Data dictionary required. Report and write a 300 word story.

3: Interactive Map. This item should be completed by March 15

Students will use Excel, Tableau or Flourish to build interactive maps of Arkansas

occupational data in Arkansas or on another assigned topic. Data dictionary required. Report and write a 300 word story.

4: Interactive Data Visualization. This item should be completed by March 31 Students will use Datawrapper to build interactive graphics / maps of Arkansas covid data. Data dictionary required. Report and write a 300 word story.

5: Data Gathering and Management. This item should be completed by April 19 Students will gather data from the Arkansas Department of Health website on a topic not updated regularly, build a time series of data and visualize it in Flourish and/or Datawrapper. Results will be posted on GitHub. Data dictionary required. Report and write a 300 word story.

All students will participate in the peer-fact checking process, which is key to the learning experience. The fact check is part of your grade.

I want all students to produce at least one item from these five categories. Whether that happens will depend on the flow of daily news. These items and topics may shift and evolve as we continue our reporting during the semester. I will provide advance notice of any changes. Deadlines will be set with the individual students depending on the level of complexity of the item.

Course Organization For Advanced Students:

Advanced students will participate in weekly conference calls with the Howard Center staff and coordinate as needed. Students may be assigned to work directly with Howard Center instructors or other students on an as-needed basis. Flexibility is paramount!

Students will produce weekly memos on their reporting progress. These memos will be a place where students write short reflections on assigned readings.

Students will seek to produce data visualizations, brief stories or social media posts to provide some current update on occupational outbreaks of COVID-19 in Arkansas. I am flexible on what form this may take. It may involve updating a series of data visualizations every week. It may involve some short stories about incremental findings. The intent is to provide regular content on this topic while working on the longer-form project.

Skills Modules

Students can consult the basic skills modules as needed

Module #1: Basic Data – Math

Module #2: Data Management

Module #3: Tableau

Module #4: Data Visualization

Module #5: Flourish

Module #6: Writing About Data

Module #7: WordPress
Module #8: Data Cleaning
Module #9: Datawrapper

Advanced Skill Modules

Module #10: Basic R
Module #11: Graphics in R
Module #12: Updating ArkansasCovid with R
Module #13: Github
Module #14: Blending and analyzing data in R

Homework

The course goal is to produce publication worthy articles and data for the Howard Center national reporting project while offering regular content for ArkansasCovid.com.

In this class, the editing process is the homework.

I will provide feedback and guidance and the student will make the revisions so the item is worthy of publication. I will ask you to review one or more of the skills modules to complete that task. This can involve some amount of back and forth between the student and instructor.

Assignments: Weekly memos:

All students will produce weekly reporting memos. They will describe their reporting progress and any roadblocks they encounter with the material. Students also will write about assigned readings. These reporting memos should follow AP style and contain sufficient detail so the instructor can understand any issues without a follow-up conversation. A memo would describe what a student did on the daily maintenance, problems identified or fixed, community engagement or presentations. A rubric is attached: [Grading Rubric For Weekly Memos](#)

An assignment uploaded late (after 11:59 p.m. on the designated day, according to Blackboard) 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.

These assignments topics may shift and evolve as we continue our reporting during the semester. I will provide advance notice of any changes.

All students will participate in the peer-fact checking process, which is key to the learning experience. The fact check is part of your grade.

Collaboration with Other Courses

Students may be asked to collaborate with some of our partners this semester and that work may count towards one of the Items required this semester.

The Arkansascovid.com project will partner with:

--Prof. Niketa Reed's Content Strategy course this semester and these students will assist with optimizing our website and improving our social media reach.

--A small group of advanced Biomedical Engineering students who are using our data for Honors thesis and independent student research in their department.

--La Prensa Libre, the Spanish language weekly, and will be seeking other media partnerships.

--And the class may partner with McMillon Innovation Studio within the Walton College for long-term strategy.

Academic Honesty:

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

CEA, Center for Education Access:

If you are a student with special needs, contact me personally **and as soon as possible**. 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/> 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.

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 is the editor and publisher of Arkansascovid.com. He earned his doctorate in philosophy in Journalism Studies at the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism. His academic research is in business journalism and history, along with data journalism and technology. He is the author of a forthcoming book about the problems and future of business journalism, to be published by the University of Illinois Press in 2019. 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.