Journalism 333F
Data-driven Reporting (the *Texas Tribune* Course)
Syllabus – Fall 2012

Lecture: MW 3 – 4:30 p.m.
BMC 3.208 (Multimedia Newsroom)

Instructor: Pete Slover
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Office Hours: Monday-Wednesday 4:40-5:30 p.m. and by appointment BMC 3.326 (Cubicle down the hall from Multimedia Newsroom)

Course Description and Overview

In this course you'll learn about and skills needed for Computer Assisted Reporting (also known as CAR) with a focus on data-driven reporting, a valuable skillset in journalism, easily exportable to other professions. You will learn to: develop a journalistic theory or line of questioning that could be addressed through data analysis; identify the data needed to test or address your questions; obtain or build the needed datasets, clean, analyze and compare data; perform follow-up reporting and develop stories based on your findings.

Additionally, this class will expose students to journalistic techniques and methodology that are in widespread use, but where acquiring technical aptitude is beyond the scope of this class, including mapping, statistics and polling

The course is being offered in collaboration and with visiting speakers from the *Texas Tribune*, an Austin-based online news operation that has led the news industry in data-based reporting and – a new trend in CAR – obtaining, cleaning and sharing data online for the use of individuals and other journalistic enterprises. Other experts from national publications may lecture via Skype or in-person (schedule to be determined).

The class will work on a common project or individual projects of its design and choosing. The *Tribune* will consider and review the work of the class for publication.

This class does not require a pre-existing familiarity or comfort with technical tools or methods. After an initial assessment of the journalism and computer experience and aptitude of the class, we will develop or refine skills in Microsoft Access and Excel, as needed to accomplish the course goals listed below. The best computer-assisted reporting is as much or more about journalism and reporting as it is about technology and data. This class will reinforce your journalistic training, and show you how to employ technology to dig into pressing questions, develop test theories, make connections and tell stories.

Your Instructor

Pete Slover is former journalist, currently working an in-house attorney for the nation's largest non-profit, member-owned retail electric utility, the Pedernales Electric Cooperative, Inc. After graduation from University of Texas Law School and passing the bar in 1986 he worked for 20 years in journalism, 17 at *The Dallas Morning News*. He specialized in, has won numerous national awards for, and has frequently taught and spoken on investigative documents-based reporting, including projects based on electronic documents and data. He is an advisory director and former member of the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas, where he co-founded the Light of Day Project, a Foundation-sponsored, annual journalism collaboration between journalism students and faculty at universities across Texas. Solver's experience inside and outside professional journalism have demonstrated to him that journalistic training and skills are readily translatable and highly relevant to other professional pursuits.

Required materials

No textbook is required.

An 8 GB Flash Drive is required for storage and transfer of data.

Students must have or arrange the use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and Access database. Access is a Windows-only database program, and the instructor will help any students without this capability to make arrangements for use of the program via virtual desktop or otherwise.

Class Schedule and Learning Objectives

Aug 29	Review syllabus, introduction to CAR, history overview, student skills assessment
Sept. 5	(No class Sept. 3, Labor Day). The Texas Tribune Approach
Sept. 10,12	Review and analysis of professional CAR examples, identification of story thesis, datasets, methodology. Development of project ideas.
Sept. 17,18	Development of project ideas. Identification of data sets needed. Public Information Act, FOIA and data acquisition. File requests for data.
Sept 24,26	Basic math for reporters, Intro to Excel, with hands on exercises
Oct. 1,3	Advanced Excel, including filters, pivot tables, advanced sort.
Oct. 8,10	Intro to Access, with hands-on exercises
Oct. 15,17	Advanced Access queries and reports
Oct. 22,24	Other CAR technology and methods (statistics and mapping)
Oct. 29,31	Data cleanup, story development, data analysis, using actual project data if available.
Nov. 5,7	Story development, data analysis, using actual project data if available.
Nov. 12,14	Story development, data analysis, using actual project data if available.
Nov. 19,21	Story development, data analysis, using actual project data if available. (Lite Thanksgiving week, with class option alternative out-of-class assignment on 11/21)
Nov. 26,28	Story development, data analysis, using actual project data if available. Story presentation(s)
Dec. 3,5	Story presentation(s)
Final Exams:	At this time, no final examination is planned for this course.

Academic Honesty:

Don't cheat, plagiarize or otherwise take shortcuts. If you're caught violating UT's Academic Integrity standards, you'll be dropped from the class with a failing grade. Standards for Academic Integrity are posted at http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

Assessment Standards and Grading

Separate from the Academic Integrity standards, students are expected to meet professional journalistic standards for, research and reporting, quotes, focus, grammar, spelling and punctuation and timeliness (deadlines). Failure to meet these standards may result in lower substantive grades in the areas described below.

Late work will be scored downward by 10 percent for each 24 hours late.

In-class exercises:	25 percent, three lowest grades dropped
Out-of-class assignments:	35 percent
Final Project	20 percent
In-class participation:	20 percent (Students concerned about this component may request

and evaluation and will be given guidance, if needed, for improving)

Extra credit may offered, or allowed for work proposed by students.
Please see the attendance section for effect of absences on grades.

Laptops and cellphones

No cellphone use, including texting, is allowed during class.

Attendance and tardiness:

Consistent and prompt attendance and participation are critical in your preparation to become a professional. Therefore, class attendance is **required.**

An absence will be excused for medical or religious reasons. Verification of illness from a doctor may be required. Each unexcused absence will result in a one-point lowering of the student's final grade. Arrival more than 45 minutes after a class commences will be counted as a half-absence, resulting in a one-half point lowering of the student's grade.

The subject matter in this course is cumulative, with the each class building upon previous class content. Students **will not** be given the opportunity to make up in-class assignments, in-class exercises or in-class quizzes for any unexcused absence, and zeros grade will be recorded (such grades may be dropped per the criteria for in-class grading as described herein).

Additionally, apart from any deductions for excessive absence, it is likely that such absences will result in degraded quality of work, and correspondingly lower grades on substantive work.

<u>Students with disabilities</u>

Any student with a documented disability (physical or cognitive) who requires academic accommodations should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259 (voice) or 471-4641 (TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations. If you have a disability that you believe qualifies for consideration, please see me before Oct. 1.

<u>Emergencies</u>

Please refer to the UT Safety website for emergency protocols:
http://www.utexas.edu/safety/terms/