

EMORY UNIVERSITY

Journalism Program

Computer-Assisted Reporting • JRNL 488 • Spring 2003 Course Outline

Instructor:	David A. Milliron	Time:	Mondays, 6 – 8:30 p.m.
Phone:	(404) 526-5348	Location:	Cox Hall Computer Lab
Email:	David @ Milliron.com	Office hours:	By appointment

OBJECTIVE

This lecture/lab is designed to teach students to use computer skills in daily reporting. Students will research topics incorporating the Internet and public documents and databases. They will learn to use spreadsheet and database management software to organize information, develop story ideas and produce a written project by the end of the semester. Students will also learn how to use state and federal public access laws to acquire information in electronic form.

PREREQUISITES

Although the emphasis will be on journalism, much time will be spent learning the technology and software necessary to complete all assignments in this course. Students must, however, have a working knowledge of computers and the use of E-Mail. Students will be taught skills using Microsoft Word (word processor software), Microsoft Excel (spreadsheet software) and Microsoft Access (database software). Students must have successfully completed Journalism 201: (News Reporting and Writing) prior to enrollment in this course. Permission of Journalism Program required. Acceptance into the Journalism Program required.

TEXTBOOKS

Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide

by Brant Houston – University of Missouri/Investigative Reporters & Editors/National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting
Paperback - 224 pages 2nd edition (1999)

Bedford/St. Martin's Press; ISBN: 0-312-18852-8

Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News

by Sarah Cohen – Washington Post, for Investigative Reporters and Editors

Paperback - 108 pages (2001)

GRADING

This is a lecture/lab course, and class participation and mastery of the skills will determine your final grade. All assignments will be graded as if students were professional journalists. Therefore, all factual errors -- including misspellings or typographical errors -- shall result in an automatic 50-point penalty on any given assignment.

- 20 percent – Competency quizzes using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access, in addition to math and Internet skills
- 50 percent -- Research, acquisition and analysis of a public database resulting in a detailed story budget and written project suitable for publication or broadcast
- 30 percent – Attendance, class participation, pop quizzes, article reviews and assigned reading

COMPUTER LAB

The computer lab is only for the use of students enrolled in the Journalism Program. Cards will be confiscated and disciplinary action taken against any student found sharing their card or using it to allow unauthorized students into the lab.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 – January 27

CLASS: Introduction to computer-assisted reporting and research, including story examples from newspapers and television stations throughout the United States.

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 1: "High-Tech Journalism: What Computer-Assisted Reporting Is and Why Journalists Need to Use It"

WEEK 2 – February 3

CLASS: Introduction to the Internet, including E-mail, newsgroups, Listservs, file transfer protocol (FTP), search engines, and file compression and decompression. Students will also learn how to discover who's behind a particular Internet site, and how to verify the accuracy of a site's content.

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 7: "Getting Stories by Going Online: Searching, Finding, and Downloading;" Appendix B: "Places to Start Online"

WEEK 3 – February 10

CLASS: How to talk like a nerd; Local, state and national databases; Record layouts, data dictionaries, data schemas.

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 2: "Computer Basics: Translating the Technical into the Practical;" Glossary, pages 212-215

WEEK 4 – February 17

CLASS: Introduction to state and federal laws governing access to electronic records, including the Georgia Open Records Act and federal Electronic Freedom of Information Act (E-FOIA).

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 8: "Obtaining Databases: Locating, Negotiating and Importing;" Appendix D: "Requests for Electronic Information"

WEEK 5 – February 24

CLASS: Introduction to spreadsheet software, using Microsoft Excel. Students will use public data to master formulas, character formats, functions, importing data, cross tabs, parsing data, creating graphs and charts to visualize data, etc.

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 3: "Spreadsheets: Conquering Numbers;" Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News: Chapter 1: "What's a Number?"

WEEK 6 – March 3

CLASS: Continued, Introduction to spreadsheet software, using Microsoft Excel. Students will use public data to master formulas, character formats, functions, importing data, cross tabs, parsing data, creating graphs and charts to visualize data, etc.

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 9: "Dirty Data: Pitfalls and Solutions;" Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News: Chapter 2: "A Newsroom Math Guide"

WEEK 7 – March 17

CLASS: Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of using data in your newsgathering efforts. What pitfalls exist? How do you negotiate for data? How do I get the data from a government's computer system and onto a computer for use in a spreadsheet or database program? The class will examine a news project that used computer-assisted reporting skills, and speak to the author behind the project.

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 10: "Getting Going: Strategies for Stories;" Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News: Chapter 6: "The 10 Most Wanted List: Mistakes in the news from simple math to lapses in judgment"

WEEK 8 – March 24

CLASS: Introduction to database software, using Microsoft Access. Students will use several state databases to master record layouts, data dictionaries, database formats, importing data, querying data, sorting data, filtering data, relational databases, Boolean logic, data cleansing, etc.

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 4: "Database Managers: Going from the Rolodex to Matchmaking;" Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News: Chapter 4: "The Standard Stories"

WEEKS 9 – March 31

CLASS: Continued, Introduction to database software, using Microsoft Access. Students will use several state databases to master record layouts, data dictionaries, database formats, importing data, querying data, sorting data, filtering data, relational databases, Boolean logic, data cleansing, etc.

READING: Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide: Chapter 6: "A few words about Statistics: A Brief Foray into Social Research Tools;" Appendix C: "Ethics and Accuracy in Computer-Assisted Reporting"; Appendix E: "Getting Story Ideas for Computer-Assisted Reporting"

WEEKS 10, 11, 12, 13 – April 7, 14, 21, 28

CLASS: For the final exam, students will research, acquire and analyze a public database resulting in a detailed project proposal for a print or broadcast news story. Students will write the lead paragraphs to the story, and detail the results of their analysis. Students will work in teams as assigned by the instructor, each team being assigned a specific geography for the project.

SPRING 2003 UNIVERSITY CALENDAR

- Wednesday, January 15: First day of classes
- Monday, January 20, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday – University Closed
- Thursday, January 23: Last day of drop/add
- Monday, March 10 - Friday, March 14: Spring Break – No Classes
- Monday, April 28: Last day of classes
- Monday, May 12: Commencement