

COMM 3313: News Gathering and Investigation

CRN: 22414

Spring 2023

Room 104, Cotton Memorial Building

Tues-Thurs 3-420 p.m.

Professor Kate Gannon

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<http://www.linkedin.com/in/kategannon>

Virtual office hours: Tue & Thurs. 4:30 – 5:30 p.m. and Weds. 10 a.m. – noon, or by appointment. I can also be reached

through our course Slack channel or via text messaging.

Gannon's Personal Meeting Zoom:

**<https://utep-edu.zoom.us/j/9896710784?pwd=bWowWldGdW13YWVUM0c4ZDIoUFVWUT09>
Meeting ID: 989 671 0784
Passcode: 103774**

Course Description

The rigor of in-depth investigative reporting raises “the bar for the entire profession,” says Brant Houston, who served for years as the executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors. But, investigative newsgathering techniques aren’t just the exclusive territory of elite reporters working for months or years on blockbuster stories. **All journalists use the investigative process every day to improve understanding of the issues being reported on any beat.**

Sometimes called “watchdog” reporting,” investigative journalism holds institutions and organizations accountable to the public they are supposed to serve. This course covers the techniques and ethical principles of news gathering for accountability reporting. Are our schools improving or declining? Is a charity using donations wisely? Is our athletic program safe? Which cars are most likely to be stolen? What are the most dangerous jobs in town?

Students will practice the fundamentals of investigative journalism: tracking down relevant primary and secondary sources, filing open records requests and conducting research and interviews. Students will also gain practical experience in data journalism techniques for inquiry and analysis that they will use for finding story ideas and reporting on public affairs. The techniques are the basis for lifelong skills that can be used for everything from investigative journalism projects to daily beat reporting and even non-journalism work of tracking data for businesses and organizations for quality control and efficiency planning.

How this Course Works

Students will work on exercises and story assignments to deepen their news gathering and investigation skills. Students will also be required to propose and develop their own data-driven stories.

This course covers the practical skills and ethical principles of in-depth newsgathering. We will learn the fundamentals of investigation: choosing topics, identifying sources, conducting research and interviews as well as organizing an investigative project. And finally, writing a balanced and compelling narrative.

Students will pitch, report, conceptualize, design and produce informative news articles that include analysis of data sets that reveal stories in the data. The goal is to produce well-sourced and researched stories as well as data visualizations that would be deemed publishable by professional media outlets.

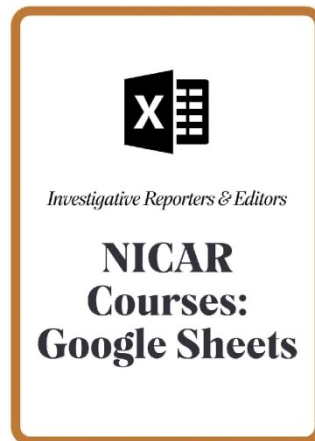
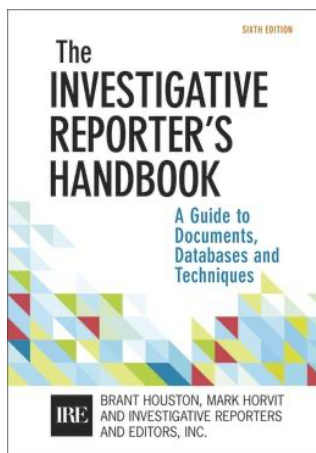
Course Objective and Expected Learning Outcomes

Course Objective: To master basic investigative tools and techniques, as well as know how to apply them to everyday reporting and major enterprise stories. We will explore how to take advantage of two main sources of information – documents and people – and discuss when and how to use data journalism to develop a routine story or provide the foundation for a major project. In addition, we will gain an understanding of technologies available to create online, interactive data visualizations to inform and empower communities.

At the end of this course, students should:

- Understand how and where to access important investigative documents, including using FOIA and open records requests
- Be able to use interviewing skills to obtain relevant information and context
- Be able to organize large amounts of information into a coherent news narrative
- Demonstrate knowledge of common math concepts in reporting
- Be able to use spreadsheets and basic data analysis for storytelling

Required Materials



Purchase the \$20 Google Sheets course pack from Investigative Reporters and Editors, National Institute of Computer Assisted Reporting (IRE-NICAR). This includes the sample data and instructions we'll be using throughout this course.

<https://www.ire.org/product/nicar-courses-google-sheets-version>

The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases and Techniques 6th Edition by Brant Houston and Investigative Reporters and Editors

<https://www.macmillanlearning.com/college/us/product/Investigative-Reporters-Handbook/p/1319102840>

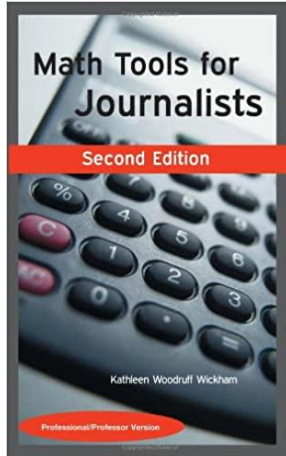
A Google Account – Free

Poynter News University account – Free

Other course readings will be available on Blackboard.

Regular access to a computer that can access Google Drive using web browser (not mobile app), Blackboard, Slack and your UTEP email account. I will use Blackboard to post some lessons, reference readings, evaluations, assignments, grades, announcements and other relevant information.

Recommended



Math Tools for Journalists, Second Edition by Kathleen Woodruff Wickham 9780972993746
(professional/professor version with answers is fine)

Grading

Your final class grade will be the average of your scores in the following categories. Each assignment will be graded on a scale of A to F. Class participation will also be scored from A to F. Points will be deducted from your class participation score for absences.

- Participation (Attendance, in-class exercises) - 25 percent
- Quizzes - 15 percent
- Assignments - 20 percent
- Data Story 1 - 15 percent
- Data Story 2 (Final project) - 25 percent

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100 An "A" grade is designated for exceptional work of publishable quality without the need for further editing or reporting, deeply reported, fact-checked, original and creative, well presented and adhering to AP style.

B = 80 – 89 A "B" grade is designated for better than average work, publishable with minor changes, well reported and organized, with a few errors in editing and follows AP style.

C = 70 – 79 A "C" grade is designated for an assignment that meets requirements of the assignment, but is average work; average research, story lacks clarity, sources are insufficient, requires substantial changes, including additional reporting, significant rewriting and correction of numerous AP style errors.

D = 60 – 69 A "D" grade is designated for assignments that do not meet all requirements of the assignment; generally less than average work, less than average research, no clear angle for the story, sources are faulty, or serious flaws in reporting and writing.

F = 0 – 59 An “F” grade fails to meet most of the requirements of the assignment; far below average work, insufficient reporting and massive errors.

Participation: 25 percent

This includes attendance, class contributions, class exercises and story pitches. For example, with participation you will receive a check plus if you make positive class contributions and complete assignments satisfactorily. This is worth 10 pts. If you make an effort, but don’t complete the exercise as intended you will receive a check, which is worth 7 pts. If you are absent / don’t complete the exercise you will receive 0 pts

You will be able to make up missed or unsatisfactory assignments (but not absences) to make up points. However, you can’t earn more than the 250 points total for this category. That is, your grade for attendance and participation won’t improve your grade on your assignments or quizzes.

Assignments

There will be a number of in-class exercises that will be graded under Participation. Additional mandatory exercises expected to be completed outside of class, such as the Open Records Story, Investigative Story Report, Data Map, etc., will be averaged for a grade for Assignments.

Data Story 1

This will be a short data-driven news story. The story will demonstrate data analysis and clear explanation of an issue.

Data Story 2

This final project is a journalism-style article that uses data as a way to gain some insight into a local newsworthy issue. The story will convey complex information in a clear and compelling manner and include at least two relevant human sources (interviews you conduct), data analysis and data visualization elements.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is determined by class participation. Students must be prepared, participate in group discussions, and complete the course modules in order to understand and incorporate the strategies and processes used to complete the projects.

COVID-19 PRECAUTION STATEMENT

Please stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you are encouraged to report your results to covidaction@utep.edu, so that the Dean of Students Office can provide

you with support and help with communication with your professors. The Student Health Center is equipped to provide COVID-19 testing.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people in areas of substantial or high COVID-19 transmission wear face masks when indoors in groups of people. The best way that Miners can take care of Miners is to get the vaccine. If you still need the vaccine, it is widely available in the El Paso area, and will be available at no charge on campus during the first week of classes. For more information about the current rates, testing, and vaccinations, please visit epstrong.org.

Technology Requirements

Course content is delivered via the Internet through the Blackboard learning management system (LMS). Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the Web. You may use any of the primary Web browsers—Explorer, Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari, etc. When having technical difficulties, try switching to another browser.

You will need to have or have access to a computer/laptop, a webcam and a microphone. You will need to download or update the following software: Microsoft Office. Check that your computer hardware and software are up-to-date and able to access all parts of the course. **If you encounter technical difficulties of any kind, contact the [Help Desk](#).**

Netiquette

- Always consider audience. Remember that members of the class and the instructor will be reading any postings.
- Respect and courtesy must be provided to classmates and to instructor at all times. No harassment or inappropriate postings will be tolerated.
- When reacting to someone else's message, address the ideas, not the person. Post only what anyone would comfortably state in a face-to-face situation.
- Blackboard, messaging apps and web conferencing sessions are not public internet venues; all postings to them should be considered private and confidential. Whatever is posted on in these online spaces is intended for classmates and professor only. Please do not copy documents and paste them to a publicly accessible website, blog, or other space. If students wish to do so, they have the ethical obligation to first request the permission of the writer(s).

Drop Policy

Students wishing to withdraw from the course with a grade of "W" must do so before the official college deadline, Friday, March 30. To do so, please contact the [Registrar's Office](#). It is the responsibility of students to drop themselves if they desire to receive a "W" in the course. If a student's name remains on the final roster, then a letter grade will be assigned to that student

based on the work received by the instructor by the end of the semester and may receive an “F” for the course.

Accommodations Policy

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. Students requesting an accommodation based on a disability must register with the [UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services](#).

Scholastic Integrity

It is expected that you will research and report all of your own work and that you will know how to properly attribute sources and quote people accurately.

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student or falsifying source material. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another as ones' own. Self-plagiarism involves “recycling” assignments from other classes or publications. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be reported to the [Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution \(OSCCR\)](#) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more [HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline](#).

CASS: If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at www.sa.utep.edu/cass. *CASS Staff are the only individuals who can validate and if need be, authorize accommodations for students with disabilities.*

Student Resources

UTEP provides a variety of student services and support:

- [UTEP Library](#): Access a wide range of resources including online, full-text access to thousands of journals and eBooks plus reference service and librarian assistance for enrolled students.

- [Help Desk](#): Students experiencing technological challenges (email, Blackboard, software, etc.) can submit a ticket to the UTEP Helpdesk for assistance. Contact the Helpdesk via phone, email, chat, website, or in person if on campus.
- [University Writing Center \(UWC\)](#): Submit papers here for assistance with writing style and formatting, ask a tutor for help and explore other writing resources.
- [Online AP Stylebook and AP Writing lab](#): Link and instructions on how to use the UTEP VPN to access the Associated Press Stylebook online free.
- [Military Student Success Center](#): UTEP welcomes military-affiliated students to its degree programs, and the Military Student Success Center and its dedicated staff (many of whom are veterans and students themselves) are here to help personnel in any branch of service to reach their educational goals.
- [A Miners Guide](#): Help with Time Management, Stress
- [UTEP Counseling Services](#): Including hotline helpline