

Spring 2018
J339T/J395 Intro to Coding for Journalists
M 6 to 9 p.m.
BMC 3.208

Instructor

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Course Description

Learning how to code opens all kinds of doors for journalists. It offers the ability to tell stories in new ways – from simple things like interactive news graphics to more sophisticated tools like machine learning and necessary business functions like the newsroom content management system and ad delivery.

But coding can also be frustrating and, at times, maddeningly complex. This course will guide you through many of the most basic elements of writing code – specifically code for the Web – and introduce you to many of the fundamental technologies that are essential elements of online news presentation. More importantly, in doing so you’ll be learning how to troubleshoot, debug and solve problems like a coder, which can turn all those frustrating moments into challenges followed by satisfying accomplishment.

This class won’t make you computer scientists and you won’t be able to go out and code your own news website from scratch after taking it. However, you will have a much better understanding of the technologies at the core of the Web and you’ll know enough to bend most websites to your will and create a very basic news interactive.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, J339T/J395 students will:

- Have a solid understanding of HTML, CSS and JavaScript and what each does in the context of a modern Web page
- Understand at a high level the interaction of key technologies – networks, servers, databases, etc. – and how they make contemporary news distribution possible
- Know what goes into making a basic news graphic
- Understand the Web publishing process and how to post simple static pages to the Internet
- Be able to create a Web page that responds to user input

- Understand how to independently debug and fix problems in code
- Know how to find online resources for technical help

Required Materials

A subscription to codeschool.com - \$29/mo. or \$19/mo. with a student discount – is required. See “Do you offer any student, military, or non-profit discounts?” at <https://www.codeschool.com/pricing> for details on obtaining the discount.

There will be no textbook for this course.

Required Reading

You are expected to read items prefixed with “Required:” on Canvas and complete assigned lessons on Code School.

Course Requirements

You’ve been asked to subscribe to codeschool.com. You’ll be expected to complete several courses on codeschool.com during this class. Details will be posted on Canvas.

Other than that, the most important thing required of you is persistence. Excuses of failed technology won’t be accepted for this class. That’s because part of this class is about learning to overcome those obstacles. It’s assumed that problems will happen and that to receive an A in this class you will overcome them.

If you own a laptop or a tablet, you are required to bring it to every lecture and lab period. If you do not have access to one, see the instructor immediately.

Graduate Student Course Requirements

Graduate students will be required to complete an additional assignment. The assignment requires picking a single news application and providing a written analysis of its source code and implementation. Further details will be distributed during the semester.

Attendance Policy

Success in this class begins with being in class. This is a once-a-week class, so even a single absence will mean missing out on a significant amount of material. Because you knew the time of this course when you signed up, it’s your responsibility to schedule work, family and other obligations around it. With that in mind, 2.5 points will be deducted from your final course grade for each unexcused absence in this class (reasonable absences for illness, a death in the family, etc. will be excused). It is your responsibility to coordinate with the instructor ahead of time if you know you’ll need to miss class or if you’re ill and unable to attend.

How Grades are Calculated

Quizzes/Homework: 40%

Midterm exam: 30%

Final exam/project: 30%

Final grades will be determined using the above weightings, with the above-noted absence policy taken into account. This class does use the plus-minus system for grading. Specifically:

A: 94%

A-: 90%

B+: 87%

B: 84%

B-: 80%

C+: 77%

C: 74%

C-: 70%

D: 65%

F: <65%

Course Outline (subject to change)

Week 1– Class setup; How the Web works; What happens when you visit a website

Week 2-3 – Developer tools; Basics of markup; Using HTML to add structure to a page; Finding good online resources

Weeks 4 – Getting started with Github; Introducing CSS

Week 5 – CSS selectors

Week 6-7 –Basics of Bootstrap; Publishing to the Web

Week 8 – MIDTERM EXAM: The midterm will require you to use everything you've learned up to this point in the semester – how to code and style a basic Web page and publish it to the Web.

Week 9 – JavaScript basics with jQuery; Midterm review

Week 10-11 – Understanding and acting on user interaction with jQuery

Weeks 12-13– Workdays for final project

Week 14 – Last day of class; Final project demos

Use of Canvas for this Class

In this course, Canvas – a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <http://canvas.utexas.edu/> (Links to an external site.) – is used to distribute materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to submit assignments, and for online quizzes and exams. You can find support in using Canvas at the ITS Help Desk at 512-475-9400, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. or with online tutorials at <http://edutech.ctl.utexas.edu/students/> (Links to an external site.)

Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your email for university and course-related information and announcements. You are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your e-mail address. You should check your e-mail regularly and frequently—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. You can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating your e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php> (Links to an external site.).

Academic Integrity Policy

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code: “As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.” **Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT.**

Therefore, if you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT’s Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code which can be found at the following web address:

http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

Q Drop Policy

If you want to drop a class after the 12th class day, you’ll need to execute a Q drop before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Under Texas law, you are only allowed six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. For more information, see:

<http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>

University Resources for Students

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we’ll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. There are also a range of resources on campus:

Services for Students with Disabilities

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students, but I can only do so if you discuss your needs with me as early as possible. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions. If appropriate, also contact Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329- 3986 (video phone). <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

Counseling and Mental Health Center

Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress.

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is often helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support.

<http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/individualcounseling.html>

The Sanger Learning Center

Did you know that more than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Libraries: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

ITS: <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

Important Safety Information:

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency