

# Syllabus | Data-driven reporting, Fall 2015

This syllabus is for the Fall 2015 class Data-Driven Reporting at the University of Texas at Austin.

J 333F DATA-DRIVEN REPORTING	Day	Time	Location
07895	MW	6:00 - 7:30	CMA 4.152
J 395 DATA-DRIVEN REPORTING	Day	Time	Location
08140	MW	6:00 - 7:30	CMA 4.152

## Description

This course will cover the basics of computer-assisted reporting, using electronic records for the basis of news reporting. Students will learn how to request data from public and governmental sources, to clean up and analyze that data using tools such as Excel and SQL, and use simple statistical models to accurately report based on the data.

## Objectives

Students will:

- Learn how to request and negotiate for electronic data from government agencies and other sources.
- Learn about and use common governmental data clearinghouses, such as the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics..
- Learn to clean up existing data and organize primary data to prepare for analysis.
- Learn how to use spreadsheet and database software to analyze data, including the use of relational databases.
- Learn to use patterns and “answers” from data to create data review reports, source lists and fully-reported stories.
- Learn how to use statistical models to define and contextualize data in news reporting.

## Instructor

Christian McDonald

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g) 512-537-2748

Office hours directly following class or upon request

## Resources

**IRE Membership**

I recommend but do not require that students join Investigative Reporters & Editors. Price is \$25/year for students, but with that membership, you get, [among other things](#):

- 1-year Premium subscription to [CometDocs](#), a \$70 value.
- 1-year [Tableau Desktop](#) license. This software [typically costs \\$1000](#).

There are freemium versions of both software applications, but having the real deal helps.

### Required texts

- [Finding Stories with Spreadsheets](#) by Paul Bradshaw (~\$20). If you think you might be interested in scraping data from websites, consider the bundle that includes [Scraping for Journalists](#). (\$25)
- Other free online readings, as assigned.

### Software

- Microsoft Office. We'll be using Excel in class, which will be on the computers in the lab. But if you don't have Office on your personal computer already, you really ought to buy it from the [UT Campus Computer Store](#). \$15 for download version. You can do \*most\* everything with free [Libreoffice](#) or Google Spreadsheets, but we'll be using Excel in class.
- We'll be using other software tools for assignments. These are typically free for the level we are using them or I have acquired educational licences, but may require paid subscriptions for work beyond what we do in class.

### Grading

- (10%) **Participation**: Students are expected to come to class and participate in discussions and in-class assignments. This is a lab-centric course where skills are covered at a computer with instructor supervision. Attendance will be a part of your grade. By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence. There will in-class assignments that can only be completed through the work done in the lab.
- (30%) **Quizzes**: In-class quizzes will include material from assigned readings, lectures and work done in class.
- (30%) **Assignments**: These more-involved assignments will include class lab time to complete the data analysis parts of the project, but also require some out-of-class time to complete.
- (30%) **Final project**: This project will include a fully-reported story with at least three sources based on pre-approved data sets obtained by the students. The process will include a pitch, analysis, data report and in-class presentation.

### **Graduate credit**

This class is cross-listed for graduate students. Those students will be required to analyze the use of data in three published stories and critique how they could have been improved, and to lead a discussion about them on our class Facebook page. Assignment details will be covered in class.

### **Quantitative reasoning flag**

This course carries the Quantitative Reasoning flag. Quantitative Reasoning courses are designed to equip you with skills that are necessary for understanding the types of quantitative arguments you will regularly encounter in your adult and professional life. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your use of quantitative skills to analyze real-world problems.

### **Grading scale**

The grading scale for the course will be as follows:

- A: 94-100
- A-minus: 90-93.99
- B-plus: 87-89.99
- B: 84-86.99
- B-minus: 80-83.99
- C-plus: 77-79.99
- C: 74-76.99
- C-minus: 70-73.99
- Anything below a 70 is failing.

### **More important stuff**

- Obey the [honor code](#).
- Stay safe. [Campus security](#) and [emergencies](#).
- Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>