Finding Stories in Visual Datasets
Fall 2017
Course Syllabus

**Course Description:** Space probe imagery, government pill databases and social media photos all contain a treasure trove of data - some in the imagery itself, others in the metadata. In this class we'll learn tools and techniques for gathering, analyzing and presenting the data hidden within large visual data sets. We will also explore how to present these data as news projects that readers will remember.

**Course Objective:** The goal of this class is **learn ways to tell compelling stories with visual data.**

- We will achieve this goal not by just by learning a specific tool or technique, but by starting to **think creatively about what data and stories could be hiding in the imagery around us**
  - We will **survey the best of such work being done in the field**
  - We will **meet some of the visual journalists making this work**
  - We will **survey basic data visualization techniques that can be used to tell such stories**
  - We will **learn how visual journalists work in modern newsrooms**
  - We will **study tools and techniques that can be used to gather, analyze and extract information from pictures and imagery**
  - We will also **learn storytelling and data visualization techniques for presenting visual data.**

**Final Grade Calculation**

**Participation / Attendance**  **30%**

Please read the full attendance policy below. Active participation in the discussion of the topics being taught is essential to a successful class. You will get more out of the class by asking questions, and participating in a respectful, professional manner.
**Reading / Research** 20%

We will be looking at lots of work being done in the field, and reading about how working journalists practice their craft. Our weekly 2 hour class will be tightly packed with information, that will reference material that you will need to have read, understood and thought about. I will share links, articles and videos for you to consume between our weekly classes, and it will be essential to our discussions in class, and it will be clear if you have not done your required reading and research.

**Final Project** 30%

Over the course of the semester, each student will produce and publish an article online that tells a story using a visual data set. Visual elements must be used in conjunction with writing. The analysis and presentation of the visual data set may be through video, animation, data visualization, interactive graphics, or static graphics (created in Photoshop, Illustrator, etc). The work must result in a finding, conclusion or insight derived from analysis of the chosen visual data set. There must be a question that is asked of the data, and a resulting answer. This analysis may be conducted manually, or via code. Creativity in choosing the visual data set, as well as deciding upon a method of analysis will make up an important part of this grading. During each class, we will discuss how the tools and techniques we learn could be used for the stories we are working on.

**Presentations** 20%

Students will be required to make a pitch presentation to the group for their final project – as a journalist would have pitch an editor. These will be slide based presentations that sell the idea, possible headlines, news hooks, techniques and tools they will be employing to create the work. Students will also have to make a final presentation of their completed project, documenting their process, challenges and conclusions to the group.

**TOTAL 100%**

**Weekly Breakdown**

This is a tentative schedule, and I want to keep some flexibility based on where the class is at, and where interests lie. But here’s a rough plan for what we’ll be doing.

Week 1- Intro / overview / expectations / goals

Week 2- Survey of "visual data" work in the industry / Discovering great work

Week 3- Storytelling concepts
Week 4- Present Project Pitches / Creative crit  
Week 5- Tools overview - Imagemagick / ffmpeg / GIFs  
Week 6- Scraping / downloading / processing visual data  
Week 7- Overview of Data Viz principles and tools for presentation  
Week 8- Guest speaker 1 - TBD  
Week 9- Project workshop - discuss and check-in on projects  
Week 10-Newsrooms  
Week 11- Guest speaker 2 - TBD  
Week 12- Review final project presentations  

Course Policies  
Phones will be off or in airplane mode and put away during class. Laptops may be used, but only for course work.