LMC 6650 | SPRING 2015
VISUALIZATION JOURNALISM

Monday and Wednesday, 11:35AM-12:55PM (tentative)
Location: 209 TSRB
School of Literature, Media and Communication
Georgia Institute of Technology

Professor: Yanni Alexander Loukissas
Email: yanni.loukissas@lmc.gatech.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 4-5pm (or by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This project studio will prepare students to engage with emergent practices in journalism that harness visualization to tell stories with and about data. Major domestic and international news outlets like the New York Times and the Guardian already make skilled use of navigable maps, panoramic graphs, participatory timelines, interactive models and playful simulations. In doing so, these outlets seek to reengage audiences as explorers, spectators, contributors, analysts and even gamers.

Such examples of data journalism are critical sites for rethinking the ethics, aesthetics and epistemology of "big data," with profound implications for the entangled futures of public knowledge and civic life. The project studio will focus on journalism about the environment in order to highlight recent changes in the evidence, actors, concerns, tropes and audiences engaged by a relatively narrow spectrum of stories.

Students will analyze contemporary journalism and subsequently imagine new platforms for visually driven news. Project work will be supported by readings in information visualization, data journalism, environmental studies and social studies of science and technology.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

• Students will learn to examine public data as cultural artifacts, inextricably tied to host institutions and the details of their social, historical and material context.
• Students will learn to speak effectively about the ethics, aesthetics and epistemology of public data.
• Students will develop skills for creating and critiquing visualizations of large data sets for public audiences.
• Students will learn about the opportunities and pitfalls in using visualization as a means of illuminating large public data sets for journalism.
• Students will learn to frame journalistic questions about data and develop their own answers.

ASSIGNMENTS

There are two types of assignments in this course:

Readings will structure the theoretical portion of the course. Each student should complete readings before class and participate in discussions. All reading selections listed on the syllabus are tentative. Additional readings may be assigned as supporting material along with projects and written assignments.

Projects are substantial efforts meant to develop your capacity to conceptualize and execute creative works in visualization journalism. This requires the merger of technical expertise and creative vision. Projects also demand that you identify and describe a creative goal, such that I can evaluate your work against your stated objective. Attention to detail in execution is appreciated, but rougher-edged well-conceived work is encouraged over very polished, unimaginative work.

GRADING

Grades will be given based on completeness and excellence, distributed as follows:

20% Participation
30% Introductory Projects
50% Final Project

Grades for projects will be distributed A-F with +/- modifiers used sparingly. Roughly speaking, an assignment will be excellent (A), good (B), satisfactory (C), unsatisfactory (D), or failing (F). Submissions that meet only the basic requirements of the assignment will receive a "C". C means "satisfactory." Submissions that meet all the requirements of the assignment and are executed with additional care, creativity, and coherence will receive a "B." To receive an "A" on assignments (and therefore, in the course), submissions

must go above and beyond the basic requirements, showing exceptional care, creativity, and coherence. Submissions that fail to meet the requirements of the assignment or whose execution is incomplete or inadequate will receive a "D" or below.

Deadlines All assignments will include submission instructions and a due date. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day. Assignments turned in on the due date, but after the specified deadline will be penalized half a letter grade. Extensions will only be granted in extreme circumstances (i.e. serious illness, family emergency). Failure to complete any of the projects may be grounds for a failing grade.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

Students are encouraged to bring their laptops to class. It is important to keep in mind that this class focuses on the principles and processes of visualization, not on technical skills; it is therefore up to you to develop and/or hone your facility with any tools required to complete assignments.

Attendance Students are required to attend and actively participate in all classes. Failing to attend class regularly will result, ultimately, in a poor grade for participation.

Readings and Materials will be distributed electronically via T-Square, email, or another readily available means. Some readings will be linked directly from the syllabus. Any materials not linked here can be found in the T-Square resources. Additional materials for projects will be distributed electronically. You will need your own laptop computer (Windows or Mac).

DEBATE, DIVERSITY, AND RESPECT

In this class, we will present and discuss a diversity of perspectives. Although you may not always agree with others' perspectives, you are required to be respectful of others' values and beliefs. Repeated inappropriate or abusive comments and/or behavior will be cause for disciplinary action. If you feel that your perspectives are being ignored or slighted, or you in anyway feel uncomfortable in the classroom, please contact me immediately.

THE COMMUNICATION CENTER

The Communication Center is located in Clough Commons, Suite 447. It is an excellent resource for any student (undergraduate or graduate) who wants help with a communication-related project. You can visit the center for help at any stage of the process for any project in any discipline. The knowledgeable and friendly tutors are available to help you develop and revise your projects. They are not available to "fix" your projects. Please do not ask the tutors to proofread or edit your work. For information on making an appointment please visit

http://communicationcenter.gatech.edu/content/makeappointment. If you need assistance with the appointment system, you can call 404-385-3612 or stop by the center. All services are free and confidential.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students should self-report to the Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students at: 220 Student Services Building Atlanta, GA 30332-0285 404.894.2564 (voice) or 404.894.1664 (voice/TDD)
www.adapts.gatech.edu/guidebook.html

PLAGIARISM WARNING

Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated, and will result in a failing grade for the course. Plagiarism is not only the uncredited copying of text from another's work but also copying ideas or code from other digital artifacts. Adaptation of code samples (provided or found online) is not necessarily plagiarism. To facilitate your success on projects, I will try to provide sample code or links to other samples. However, explicitly copying entire algorithms or sample applications and representing them as your own is not permitted. Use sample code and online resources as tutorials to help you write your own original code. Copying more than 10% of a code sample will be considered plagiarism.

Having said that, students are encouraged to share and critique each others' work. You are allowed (and encouraged!) to work together with other students, but collaboration is only permitted on group projects. On all other assignments, you are expected to complete and turn in your own work. Students may not submit work on another's behalf. Unauthorized use of any previous semester course materials is prohibited. Violating these terms will be considered a direct violation of academic policy and will be dealt with according to the GT Academic Honor Code.

SCHEDULE

Details about forthcoming assignments will be added to this syllabus weekly, so you will need to check it regularly. This schedule is subject to change at any time. Updates and changes will be announced in class or by email to students.

WK 1

[Mon] January 5: Project 1 Introduction

[Wed] January 7: Data + Narrative

Reading: Segel, Edward, and Jeffrey Heer. 2010.
                                    "Narrative Visualization: Telling Stories with
                                    Data."

WK 2

[Mon] January 12: Mapping Stories

Due: Project 1: Pin Up

WK 3

[Mon] January 19: School holiday (No Class)

[Fri] January 24: NewsScape

Guest Visit (Skype):   Francis Steen,
                                Assoc. Professor of Comm Studies, UCLA
                                Director, NewsScape Project

Reading: Jungseock Joo, et. al.,
                                "Visual Persuasion: Inferring Communicative
                                Intents of Images"

                                Michael LaCour,
                                "The Echo Chambers Are Empty: Direct
                                Evidence of Balanced, Not Biased, Exposure To
                                Mass Media"

WK 4

[Mon] January 26: Humanistic Approaches to Visualization

Guest Visit (Skype):   Johanna Drucker
                                Professor of Information Studies, UCLA

Reading: Laura Mandell,
                                "How to Read a Literary Visualization"

                                Johanna Drucker,
                                "Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display"

WK 5

[Mon] February 2: Visualizing Journalism

                                Project 2 Introduction

Guest Visit: Arielle Coambes
                                Digital Media GRA, GATech

WK 6

[Mon] February 9: Interactivity (No Class)

WK 7

[Mon] February 16: Project 2 Pin Up

WK 8

[Mon] February 23: Computation + Journalism

Guest Visit: Irfan Essa,
                                   Professor Interactive Computing, Georgia Tech

WK 9

[Mon] March 2: Project 2 Review

WK 10

[Mon] March 9: Final Project Introduction

Remainder of the term devoted to final project work. Schedule TBD

WK 11 Spring Break

WK 12 Critique

WK 13 Critique

WK 14 Prelim Review

WK 15 Critique

WK 16 Final Review