# Designing a Data Journalism Course

## Intro

I am a lecturer at CUNY's Graduate School of Journalism where I teach classes on data visualization and newsgames and sometimes plain old reporting.

It is worth giving you my career path in a nutshell: I started my professional life in journalism and then got drawn in by the politics of freesoftware and a project at what is now the National Center for Law and Economic Justice to lead technology training workshops with community organizers. Which means, among other things, that I spent a lot of time working with organizations with really well developed organizing strategy but no database, say. And then I came back to journalism, via a couple of years as Director of Technology at Gotham Gazette, a small public policy magazine in NYC.

So I was bringing a lot of skills to the table as a system administrator and database developer and I learned those things by administering servers and building databases. So I had some proficiency with data, but I hadn't been working in Journalism for a long old time.

I had, however, been working with a lot of folks whose core agenda felt very similar to me -- community organizers spend a lot of time trying to convince busy people that a particular policy or piece of legislation is important. And to some degree that is what we were doing at Gotham Gazette.

I left Gotham Gazette and spent a couple of years getting DocumentCloud off the ground. I obviously think DocumentCloud is awesome, but the thing I really liked and like about it was that at the core, DocumentCloud is about showing your work. It is about switching up the frame that says "I am the journalist and you should believe what I say" to "I am the journalist and instead of trusting me you should look at what I see."

2007-2009 Gotham Gazette 2009-2011 DocumentCloud Spring 2012, Fall 2012 (Fundamentals), Spring 2013 (Craft II), Fall 2013**, Spring 2014

So I'm in my fifth semester teaching.

## Teaching

So ... I started teaching with a class called "Data Driven Storytelling" in the Spring of 2012.

Some things about CUNY -- we have some tag line about an integrated curriculum -- I always forget what it is -- but I have to say it is one of the most collegial places I've ever worked and does a really good job of creative problem solving.

The first semester curriculum doesn't include a lot of electives. There might not be any, but don't quote me on that. I know that everyone takes a broadcast class where they learn some fundamental skills around recording and editing for broadcast. Everyone takes Craft 1, which is the core reporting class. And everyone takes Fundamentals of Interactive, where they skim a whole lot of skills like adding an annotation layer to a video with popcorn or adding an annotation layer to a document on DocumentCloud. And my colleague Russell Chun and I developed and taught a two week data segment that walked through some basic Excel skills and had students develop a very rough story with a chart and a map attached to it and get it online within two weeks.

And by then I'd been on campus long enough that I was hearing from some of the folks who teach investigative classes about bringing in their colleagues to teach excel workshops. That's great -- I don't need to be the only person who teaches this stuff, but that was when thing started to click for me. So this semester I'm also teaching a faculty workshop on Pivot

Tables.

**Spring 2012**

Storytelling with Data

**Fall 2012**

Storytelling with Data Fundamentals of Multimedia

**Spring 2013**

Business reporting classes all have to embed an interactive chart in every story. Urban reporting classes all have to incorporate a data viz piece in a budget story.

**Fall 2013**

Storytelling with Data Fundamentals of Multimedia Craft 1 (Writing about Numbers) Newsgames

**Spring 2014**

Craft II (Quizzes) Faculty Excel workshops

## How that is working

Getting into classes means I meet a lot of faculty, and that they're more comfortable with me.

## The future

So what's on the horizon? A 5 week scraping with Python module, lots and lots of integration.

I've also been worming my way earlier in the curriculum, so my colleageu Ben Lesser and I now do an extended "Got Numbers" workshop with every first semester Craft class, and everyone does a little bit of spreadsheet work and mapping in Fundamentals of Multimedia.

Newsgames is a five week module that starts with downloading a git repository (we don't actually clone it), editing a .csv, and deploying to a web server. The game, Steve Melendez's Bingo Card generator, isn't really the point. The point is that by the end of week one "Just grab the repo" is an instruction that has meaning, though we also talk about how to write for something like this, how to be clean and consistent and use a single voice across each entry.

Then we all build a quiz using Mother Jones' script and from there we dive into [Twine](), a tool that lets you incorporate scoring and logic into a choose your own adventure game. Last fall, we came up with a "spend a week homeless" game and another that trailed a disabled veteran.

What we're doing is just storytelling.