

Fall 2020, Data-motivated storytelling: Psych 678

Dr. Sarah Allred

srallred@camden.rutgers.edu

Course Description

How can we best use data to tell (true) stories? How do our data tools shape the narratives we are able to tell? In this applied course, we will explore different analysis and visualization tools. We will discuss common public forums for psychological data (e.g. peer-reviewed academic articles, public-facing research briefs, op-eds, social media) and which tools are most appropriate for each forum. Finally, we will practice writing each kind of narrative and engage in critical reflection about strengths and limitations of each narrative. The course will be hands-on, with students using multiple tools (and constructing multiple stories) from data sets. Students are expected to have graduate-level skills in research methods and statistics. All other analysis and visualization tools will be taught in class. The instructor will provide actual (as opposed to simulated) data sets that characterize the social, economic, physical and mental health of New Jersey residents. Class narratives and analyses will explore disparities in these health indicators. Grades will be based on frequent low-stakes assessments and critical thinking as assessed by multiple drafts of narratives. Students will not be expected to demonstrate proficiency in all of the data visualization tools; rather, we will pool data skills and students will be assessed on their ability to conceptualize analyses and communicate their results clearly.



Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Explain context for health disparities in New Jersey
- Identify the elements of a data-driven narrative
- Implement data analyses to extract key features of data sets (story elements)
- Clearly visualize story elements (in graphs, charts, images, text)
- Construct data-driven stories from story elements
- Effectively communicate a single story in multiple forums where psychological research may be communicated (such as social media, community-facing publications, and peer-reviewed journals)

Required Textbook(s)

There are no required textbooks. Links will be provided to all required course materials, which will span journal articles, LinkedIn Learning modules, etc.

Course Philosophy

This central goal of this course is to get you to think creatively and thoughtfully about how we present psychological data to others. One way of communicating about data is to think of our results as stories that engage our readers/listeners. What can we learn from this approach? How does it change the way we analyze data? How does it change the way we think about research questions and visualization? And how do our stories change with our audience? In today's world, data are communicated not just in peer-reviewed articles, but also on social media and in community-facing publications.

I view you as my partners in the adventure of exploring these questions, rather than as passive students absorbing knowledge I'm giving you. We will pool our different skills in data analysis and visualization and work together to create data-driven stories. My hope is that you will view the course content as a jumping off place to think, practice, and learn.

Because I view you as my partners, you will have some choice in the format of the two major course projects. The form of the projects will be decided (with your input) in the first few weeks of class.

Format

This course offers weekly synchronous learning (6-7 pm Thursdays, Zoom), multi-media content (in the form of short lecture videos, readings, curated video), discussion boards, homework assignments and group work. There is only one scheduled meeting time (6-7pm on Thursdays), but deadlines are strictly enforced as students work together to achieve learning objectives.

As much as possible, we will try to stick with a consistent schedule during the week:

You can think of the week as beginning on Monday with a short introductory video and links to content for the week. Most weeks you will ingest new content via either reading or short videos by me or others. You will also engage in a discussion of that content via VoiceThread or a discussion board (depending on the week). You will also have weekly homework assignments that will be due on Wednesday nights.

These homework assignments are meant to be difficult and to engage your critical thinking skills. For the most part, you will receive credit for a good faith effort to complete the assignment. On Thursdays, we will meet synchronously to talk about homework, break into groups to improve our homework, and move

forward on the main course projects. Sometimes, a revision of the homework will be assigned in class. These revisions will be due on either Friday or Sunday nights (TBD in class).

The major assessments in the course will be team-based writing/visualization projects. Many homework assignments can be thought of as “scaffolds” for these projects.

As much as possible, we will try to stick with a consistent schedule during the week. The outline of the schedule is here, following that, each activity is explained in more detail. Note that this seems like a lot of work, but it will shift over the semester. Early on, there will be more content and shorter homework assignments. Later on, there will be shorter readings and longer homework assignments:

Monday: Start of new module. Watch the welcome video, begin going through readings and lecture material on Canvas.

Tuesday: Content Reflection is due (by 11:59 pm)

Wednesday: (1) Individual homework is due (by 11:59 pm). (2) Reflection: response to peer is due (by 11:59 pm).

Thursday: Class! (6-7 pm)

Friday or Sunday (TBD) : Team homework / Revision of homework is due (by 11:59 pm).

Communication guidelines

I want you to succeed! Please don't hesitate to reach out to me throughout the semester with any questions or concerns you may have. It's a good thing to ask for help—it means you're paying attention and you know what you need.

Email

Please direct all general course questions to the “General Course Questions” discussion board in Canvas (available in the Course Essentials module). I ask you to do this (rather than email me) because often if you have a question, so will other students! It is much more efficient for me to answer the question on Canvas than over email. Check both the syllabus and the discussion board before asking a question. **Personal questions regarding grades or individual assignments should not be addressed in Canvas;** please email me these questions. Depending on when you send your email, you can expect a response:

- Monday-Friday: within 24 hours (if between the hours of 9am and 5pm, it will likely be sooner).
- Weekend emails: I'll respond within 48 hours. (I try very hard to keep the weekend for my family!)
- Emails received between 5pm and 9am will likely not be addressed until the morning.

If you do not receive a response from me within the above listed time frame, please send the email again. This is not bothering me. I do my best to respond, but I receive a lot of emails and occasionally


one slips through the cracks.

Office hours

Office hours will be by appointment only and usually need at least 48 hours notice. We can meet Zoom or talk over the phone. If you'd like to request an appointment, email me. Please include the reason why you'd like to meet in your email.

What you can expect from me in this course

Before I talk about what you'll be doing in the course, I'd like to review what you can expect from me as your professor. This material and learning environment may be challenging for all of us. To help you through this, you can expect me to:

- Communicate with the whole class using Announcements in Canvas 1-2 times a week to review progress and reminders. Sometimes I will post a video announcement, sometimes they will just be text-based. Please make sure your [Canvas Notifications](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10624)  (<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10624>) are set to alert you to new Announcements immediately.
- Provide personal feedback on your major assignments in a timely fashion (usually within a week of submitting) to help you improve or continue to do well in the course.
- Respond to all of your email communications with me based on the communication guidelines above.
- Encourage you and our class on our achievements. I'm very excited to learn with you in this course!
- Listen to your concerns about and ideas for this course. This is a small graduate course. In my experience, these courses work best if we form good relationships with each other and if I integrate your ideas into the course.
- Patience as you figure out Canvas!

What I'm expecting from you in this course (big-picture)

This is my first time teaching (mostly) online, and my first time teaching this course. Both of those things mean that we will likely have to adjust technology and assignments as we go along. I ask for your patience as we work through these hiccups together.

Assessment

There are a lot of assignments in this course, and you're expected to engage with the content frequently because engagement and application are how we learn best. As long as you are putting forth your best

effort and keep up with the assignments, you should be able to succeed in this course.

Activity type	Percentage of grade
Weekly Reflections (discussion boards or Voice Thread)	20%
Homework	40%
Class attendance and participation	10%
Final Story #1	15%
Final Story #2	15%

Late assignment guidelines

We are all managing different challenges of learning during this pandemic. For most of your low-stakes assessments, I will not accept late work, but you can drop your lowest score(s) (1 for online discussions, 1 for homework, 1 for attendance). For your final projects, late projects will be docked 10% for each day late. **The only exceptions will be if you reach out to me ahead of time to make arrangements.**

Assignment Descriptions and Expectations

Reflections

Purpose

The purpose of the discussions is to get you to **think critically about the readings/content**. I recommend that you read the reflection question **before** you ingest the week's content to get your mind thinking. During the early part of the semester, the reflection will be based on the readings/lecture

content. During the later part of the semester, the reflections will be based around ways to revise our stories and data visualizations.

Format

Depending on the question, the reflections will take place either in the Discussions tool on Canvas or within the VoiceThread tool on Canvas

When crafting your response, remember...

- You should address the question(s) fully and draw connections to **course content** and **your own experiences** in your response.
- Please use mostly standard English grammar for your response. When directly relevant OR extremely funny, occasional emoji/gif use is acceptable. Be sparing.

Assessment: Discussion post grading rubric

The rubric is available [here. \(https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/pages/reflection-rubric\)](https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/pages/reflection-rubric)

Homework

Purpose

Homework serves two purposes: (1) Practice the tools we are learning in class; (2) Scaffold your final projects. Many of your homework projects will be steps toward your final projects. Most weeks, you will have **individual** and **team-based** homework. You should think of your individual homework as your rough sketch/first attempt at a problem. Your team-based homework helps you refine that first effort.

Format

Sometimes your homework will be a VoiceThread (early part of semester). In later parts, your individual and team homework will be turned in as a pdf or word doc through the Assignments tool on Canvas. During later parts of the semester, you may work with your team to present team-based work during the synchronous class session. These will be casual, informal presentations, with the goal of working together to solve problems.

Note that you are responsible for turning in your own team-based work, and you will be graded on what **you** submit. You should think of the team-based part as giving you the opportunity to improve and learn from others. For example, I might ask you to write three research questions as individual homework, and then meet with your team to revise your questions. You may decide that your questions are superior to your team-mates, and you may turn in the same questions for your team-based work. This is fine. Alternatively, as a team, you may revise and synthesize three new research questions, and then each

member of your team may submit the same three questions. This is also fine. I do ask that if your team decides to submit identical work, you mention that so I only have to grade it once.

When doing your homework, remember...

- Homework is a learning experience. Do what you can. Articulate your questions. If you can't answer a question, explain why. We will learn from each other.
- Sometimes homework will involve sketching ideas. Pay attention to the instructions, but often it is acceptable to turn in a hand- or digitally-sketched document. Particularly for individual homework, incomplete sentences, question marks, and arrows are acceptable.

Assessment: Homework grades

Unless otherwise noted, homework is graded in the same style as reflections, but on a 10 point scale.

See [this rubric \(https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/rubrics/57985\)](https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/rubrics/57985) for individual homework and [this rubric \(https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/rubrics/57986\)](https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/rubrics/57986) for team homework.

Final Stories (1 and 2)

Purpose

The purpose of the final story projects is to synthesize the information and formally practice the skills you have learned throughout the course.

Format


Each final project will be scaffolded, meaning that you will have a number of smaller assignments that build you up to the final project. These pieces of scaffolding will be part of your regular homework assignments. The format of the final story(ies) will be determined through class discussion in the first few weeks, and the syllabus will be updated appropriately. Options include individual shorter stories (such as individual social media posts or infographics) or a longer collaborative document developed by the whole class

Assessment: Final Stories

I will link to the Rubric here after we decide on the final format.


Academic Integrity

The consequences of scholastic dishonesty are very serious. You are responsible for reading and understanding our policy on academic integrity policy, available from the [Rutgers Academic Integrity](#).


[website](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers)  (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers>). Academic integrity means, among other things, that all Rutgers students are required to:

- properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others
- properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work
- make sure that all work submitted as his or her own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of unsanctioned materials or unsanctioned collaboration
- treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress


Inclusivity

I am committed to diversity and inclusion in this course and want to include all perspectives. Please let me know if you perceive any bias in any form in this course. I'll be asking for your pronouns in the first module, and will ask all class members to respect the pronoun and name choices of each individual in this class. Rutgers does allow students to request a preferred name change on official university documents and systems, [which can be submitted](http://socialjustice.rutgers.edu/trans-ru/on-campus-preferred-name-change/)  (<http://socialjustice.rutgers.edu/trans-ru/on-campus-preferred-name-change/>) at this link if you're interested. However, I understand that all students may not have the ability to have their preferred name displayed officially, and I will use the preferred name you submit informally in this course.

Food/Housing Security

When students face challenges securing food and/or housing, making learning a priority can be difficult. If you're in this situation, please reach out to the [Dean of Students](https://deanofstudents.camden.rutgers.edu/)  (<https://deanofstudents.camden.rutgers.edu/>). If you feel comfortable, please also let me know, and I will do what I am able to connect you to appropriate resources offered by our campus—you are not alone in dealing with these issues.

Students with Disabilities

Students who have a diagnosed disability on file with the [Office of Disability Services](http://learn.camden.rutgers.edu/disability-services/)  (<http://learn.camden.rutgers.edu/disability-services/>) are eligible for accommodations, as specified by the University. Please contact the Office of Disability Services at 856-225-6442 if you need to begin the process of receiving accommodations.

Students who do not have a letter of accommodation from the university will not be eligible to receive accommodations in this course.

Preliminary Schedule (Subject to Revision)

Module 1: Aug 31-Sept 6, Intro to Course

Module 2: Sept 7 - Sept 13, Basic Context: Health Disparities and the Social Determinants of Health

Module 3: Sept 14 - Sept 20, Introduction to Storytelling

Module 4: Sept 21 - Sept 27, Getting to Know the Data

Module 5: Sept 28 - Oct 4th, How to Look for Stories in Data

Module 6: Oct 5th-Oct 11th, Identifying Possible Stories

Module 7: Oct 12-Oct 18th, Defining Story Elements (Data Analysis)

Module 8: Oct 19th - Oct 25th, Visualizing Story Elements (Data Analysis 2)

Module 9: Oct 26th - Nov 1, From Elements to Stories

Module 10: Nov 2 - Nov 8th, Stories, Genre, Revision

Module 11: Nov 9th - Nov 15th: WRITING NARRATIVES -- FORMS TO BE DECIDED IN CLASS


Module 12: Nov 16th - Nov 22nd: WRITING NARRATIVES -- FORMS TO BE DECIDED IN CLASS


(Note, there will be no module the week of Thanksgiving)

Module 13: Nov 30th - Dec 6th: WRITING NARRATIVES -- FORMS TO BE DECIDED IN CLASS












Module 14: Dec 7th - Dec 13th: WRITING NARRATIVES -- FORMS TO BE DECIDED IN CLASS












Course Summary:












Date	Details	Due
Tue Sep 1, 2020	 Module 1 Content Reflection: Questions about structure or content of course? https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/930632	due by 11:59pm






Date	Details	Due
	 Module 1 - Lecture Intro to Course Content	to do: 11:59pm
	 Module 1 - Overview & Readings	to do: 11:59pm
Wed Sep 2, 2020	 Module 1: HW#1 - Introduce yourself on VoiceThread (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/872547)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Sep 4, 2020	 Module 1: HW#2, Respond to Peer VT (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/931222)	due by 11:59pm
Tue Sep 8, 2020	 Module 2 Reflection: Voice Thread on Health Disparities (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/980493)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 2 - Lecture	to do: 11:59pm
Wed Sep 9, 2020	 Module 2 HW#1 - Claims and Evidence (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/980689)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Sep 10, 2020	 Attendance Sept 10 (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1010107)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Sep 13, 2020	 Module 2 HW#2 - Synthesize class (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/980872)	due by 11:59pm
Tue Sep 15, 2020	 Module 3 Content Reflection: What Makes a Good Story? (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/872264)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 3 Content Reflection: Variables in the Data Set (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/991130)	due by 11:59pm
Wed Sep 16, 2020	 Module 3 HW (#1): Practice with Data (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/991162)	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
Thu Sep 17, 2020	 attendance 9/17 (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1010110)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Sep 20, 2020	 Module 3, HW #2: Revision HW#1, Synthesize (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/991185)	due by 11:59pm
Mon Sep 21, 2020	 Module 4 - Overview & Readings	to do: 11:59pm
Tue Sep 22, 2020	 Module 4 Reflection: storytelling and academia (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/995509)	due by 11:59pm
Wed Sep 23, 2020	 Module 4: Homework 1/2, VT on viz (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/995512)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Sep 24, 2020	 2020FA - Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 (https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=225763&include_contexts=course_83649)	6pm to 7pm
	 Attendance 9/24 (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1110034)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Sep 27, 2020	 Module 4: Homework 2, respond to VT on Viz (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/995568)	due by 11:59pm
Tue Sep 29, 2020	 Module 5 Reflection: Challenges to KWDYDIS (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1012809)	due by 11:59pm
Wed Sep 30, 2020	 Module 5 HW 1: KWYRWTS, KWDYDIS (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1012805)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Oct 1, 2020	 2020FA - Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 (https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=233596&include_contexts=course_83649)	6pm to 7pm

Date	Details	Due
	 Attendance 10/1 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1110043	due by 11:59pm
Sun Oct 4, 2020	 Module 5 HW2: Revision of KWTDIS - KWYRWTS https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1019276	due by 11:59pm
Wed Oct 7, 2020	 Module 6 Reflection: Add story elements to google doc https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1020061	due by 11:59pm
Thu Oct 8, 2020	 Class 10/8 2020FA - Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=239274&include_contexts=course_83649	6pm to 7pm
	 Attendance 10/8 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1110044	due by 11:59pm
Sun Oct 11, 2020	 Module 6 HW: KWYRWTS exploration https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1020063	due by 11:59pm
Wed Oct 14, 2020	 Module 7: HW 1: Audience, Story, Evidence https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1027848	due by 11:59pm
Thu Oct 15, 2020	 Class 10/15 2020FA - Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=244195&include_contexts=course_83649	6pm to 7pm
	 Attendance 10/15 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1110045	due by 11:59pm
Sun Oct 18, 2020	 Module 7 HW 2: Revision https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1028047	due by 11:59pm
Tue Oct 20, 2020	 Module 8: Asynchronous material	to do: 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
Wed Oct 21, 2020	 Module 8: HW#1, Progressive Depth Outline https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1039555	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 8: Story Plan https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1039554	due by 11:59pm
Thu Oct 22, 2020	 Class 10/22 2020FA - Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=248911&include_contexts=course_83649	6pm to 7pm
	 Attendance 10/22 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1110046	due by 11:59pm
Sun Oct 25, 2020	 Module 8: HW2, Revision of Progressive Depth Outline https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1039556	due by 11:59pm
Wed Oct 28, 2020	 Module 9: HW#1: Draft visualizations and text https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1065867	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 9: Question for guest speaker https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1065902	due by 11:59pm
Thu Oct 29, 2020	 Class 10/29 - 2020FA - Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=252803&include_contexts=course_83649	6pm to 7pm
	 Attendance 10/29 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1114234	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 1, 2020	 Module 9: HW#2, revision of draft https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1065898	due by 11:59pm
Wed Nov 4, 2020	 Module 10 HW, Visualization Practice	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
	https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1073389	
Thu Nov 5, 2020	 Class 11/5 Data Motivated Storytelling https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=256578&include_contexts=course_83649	6pm to 7pm
	 Attendance 11/5 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1114235	due by 11:59pm
Wed Nov 11, 2020	 Module 11: HW Revise Visualizations https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1079059	due by 11:59pm
Thu Nov 12, 2020	 Class 11/12 2020FA - Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=260839&include_contexts=course_83649	6pm to 7pm
	 Attendance 11/12 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1114238	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 15, 2020	 Module 11: Peer review https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1089923	due by 11:59pm
Wed Nov 18, 2020	 Module 12: Visualizations and text https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1080781	due by 11:59pm
Thu Nov 19, 2020	 Attendance 11/19 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1114240	due by 11:59pm
Wed Dec 2, 2020	 Module 13: Rough drafts https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1096663	due by 11:59pm
Thu Dec 3, 2020	 Class 12/3 Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=273796&include_contexts=course_83649	6pm to 7pm
	 Attendance 12/3 https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1114241	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
Sun Dec 6, 2020	 Module 13: Peer Review (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1109587)	due by 11:59pm
Wed Dec 9, 2020	 Module 14: story evaluation (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1109751)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Dec 10, 2020	 Class 12/10 2020FA - Data Motivated Storytelling 56:830:678:40 (https://rutgers.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=278827&include_contexts=course_83649)	6pm to 7pm
Thu Dec 17, 2020	 Attendance 12/10 (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1114243)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Dec 17, 2020	 Final Project (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/83649/assignments/1110001)	due by 9pm