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2014

It's in the Details: How Analytics and Data Shape News Decisions Lesson Plan

This lesson plan can be used in classes covering subjects such as English, Journalism, Ethics, Sociology, Government or Media Studies. It was created to be used with the 2014 Poynter KSU Media Ethics Workshop session, "It's in the Details: How Analytics and Data Shape News Decisions."

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Objectives:

To encourage students to begin thinking about how data can be used to shape news stories.

To encourage students to begin thinking about the ethical decisions that needs to be considered when using data in reporting.

To make students aware of the implications that data has on them as a future reporter.

Estimated class time: 2 hours

Procedures:

1. Ask students to define the term, "data journalism."
2. Present students with the following quote, and ask them if they agree or disagree.
     " The open question in 2014 is not whether data, computers, and algorithms can be used by journalists in the public interest, but rather how, when, where, why, and by whom. Today, journalists can treat all of that data as a source, interrogating it for answers as they would a human" (Howard, 2014).
Alexander Howard wrote this in "The Art and Science of Data-driven Journalism", in a Tow/Knight Report. http://towcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Tow-Center-Data-Driven-Journalism.pdf This report includes recommendations and predictions for journalists using data as a source.
3. Then, ask students what ethical decisions need to be made when using data when reporting, creating a press release etc. Ask students if they agree that data should be treated as a human, used as a supplement or in replace of.
4. Watch "It's in The Details: How Analytics and Data Shape News Decisions" live streaming on September 18th or via the archives at http://mediaethics.jmc.kent.edu/2014.
5. Do the following group activity:
     a) Have each student write a type of news report on a piece of paper and put them folded up into a basket. For example: Sports, crime, health etc.
     b) Split the students into groups.
     c) Have each group select a piece of paper from the basket.
     d) Instruct each group to come up with an example of how they could use data in their report. They should support their example with information on how they would collect this data; public records etc. Encourage students to describe how this data could enhance their story.
     e) Then, have each group present their findings to the class.
     f) Conclude, by asking students to express the benefits and any problems with using data to report news.

Students should come away from the discussion with a better understanding of data journalism. White data journalism is not new, students need to understand the importance of data and begin thinking about how they can use them in reporting.