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New Course: Writing with Data in the Public Interest

Paul A. Djupe

April 14, 2020

By Paul A. Djupe

This is a quick note about a new course that I'm offering called, "Writing with Data in the Public Interest." Currently, it is offered as an upper-level political science course (POSC 339.02), but it is meant to be in the core of a new concentration (Data & Design in the Social Sciences – D2S2) that I will start offering next year (I hope). Once offered in the D2S2 concentration, it will be cross-listed with Narrative Journalism.

What it is not

You do **NOT** need to have data skills.
It is not a political science content course.

What it is

You DO want to improve your writing.
You want to write about science/social science.
You want to learn how to translate scientific findings for a public audience.
You want to think about the ethics of science writing (e.g., when are we comfortable using studies to make recommendations to the public?).
You may want some of your writing to be published (optional).
You want to work in a collaborative environment, where we develop supportive editing skills.

The course description is below. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out: djupe@denison.edu.

This course addresses a critical goal that is often neglected in the sciences – the translation of scientific results for the public. Even if the goal of science is to make progress in the public interest, a key way that the public knows about scientific results as well as maintains support for scientific projects is through communication. Thus, the primary goal is to develop skills of written communication with scientific content that is appropriate for general public consumption. The course covers a concern for narrative, translating scientific jargon without loss of meaning, providing detail to convey appropriate levels of certainty, addressing audience needs, and packing considerable material into short passages, while respecting the ethics of reporting to the public. Integration with the onetwentyseven.blog is emphasized.

Paul A. Djupe is a local cyclist who coincidentally has taught social science research methods and political science at Denison for millenia. He started onetwentyseven.blog a few years ago in a bid to subsidize collective action. He's on Twitter and you should be too, along with your president.