Lesson Plan for Chapter 3: All I Care About are W’s and L’s

*The Signal and the Noise*, Nate Silver

*To be used along with the FYB screening of Moneyball in Hoff Theater, STAMP Student Union on Tuesday, October 8, 2013.*

Prepare for class:

- Have students read the Introduction and Chapter 3: All I Care about are W’s and L’s
- Review ‘Key Points’ in the Reading Guide on the FYB website and be prepared to discuss
- Go through the Resources on the website for Chapter 3
- Bring laptops to class

Main Objectives:

- Distinguish between instinct and data in decision-making.
- Discuss the ways this informs the way we sort and evaluate information.
- Recognize when we, and others, tend to gravitate towards data that confirms what we want to know rather than bringing us closer to objectifying truth – finding the ‘signal’ in the ‘noise’.

In class:

One of the main themes in this chapter is instinct vs. data when making predictions. In baseball, Silver illustrates this using the methods of traditional baseball scouts, who have in the past relied on instinct, and the ‘statheads’ of the Moneyball era who rely largely on data when predicting a player’s performance. This theme extends beyond the example of baseball and into other real world situations. This lesson will focus on two examples: the first is a decision all students have made recently – the choice of which university they would attend and how instinct and data factored into their decision-making process. The second example beyond baseball is political elections and how data vs. instinct affects the way we evaluate candidates.

**Exercise 1: Choosing a University**

1. Break into small groups of 2-3 people.
2. Turn to pg. 97 and review the 5 points of success Nate Silver identifies for predicting baseball player performance. As a group, choose two of these points. The point of the exercise is to extend these concepts beyond baseball and apply them to evaluate how they selected their university.
3. Answer the following questions:
   a. How do the two points you chose relate to the method(s) you used to choose a university?
   b. When selecting a university, how did you use data to choose the one that was right for you? How did you use instinct? Did you rely more on instinct or data when making your decision?
c. Having completed the process of selecting a university, what advice would you give to others on how to make the right choice?

Exercise 2: The 2012 Presidential Candidates

1. Remain in small groups.
2. Ask each group to list three things they remember about the two main candidates: Obama and Romney. List each point on paper.
3. Once the points have been written, each group should decide whether each point is an example of data or of instinct.
4. On the blackboard, make two columns: one for ‘Instinct’ and one for ‘Data’. Have the students read aloud their points and designate under which category they belong. After all the points have been sorted on the board, discuss as a class how they have distinguished between instinct and data.
5. Answer the following questions:
   a. Which factored more into your evaluation of a particular candidate: instinct or data?
   b. Before this exercise, had you distinguished between instinct and data in the way you evaluated the candidates? If not, why do you think you did not?
   c. Do you think people gravitate toward data that confirms their instincts? Did this show up in the way that the points about each candidate have been listed on the board?

Finish-up:

- Are there other ways that instinct and data affect the ways we make decisions in our daily lives?
- Is there a difference between instinct and bias? Can we make predictions based on instinct without giving into our personal bias?

Follow-up:

- Go to the FYB screening of *Moneyball* on October 9 in Hoff Theater.
- List the instances of instinct vs. data as you see them in the movie.
- When did Billy Beane use instinct? When did he use data? Which made for better predictions?
- Be prepared to discuss in class.