



MPJO-505-01: DIGITAL ESSENTIALS

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Mondays 8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. | Spring 2015

Instructor: Jeff Sonderman

Georgetown Downtown, Room C226 (Mac Lab)

- Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course examines the essential digital skills needed in the field of journalism today. We will study the current media landscape to help students understand how digital skills and sensibilities are integrated with reporting, content creation, information dissemination and audience-building efforts at news organizations of all sizes.

The course involves a survey of key issues affecting the day-to-day work of modern journalists, as well as an examination of emerging technologies, platforms and ideas. Case studies, readings, media surveillance and guest lectures will help students learn the core skills needed to add to their fundamental reporting background, to broaden their career opportunities and to think entrepreneurially about how to shape journalism.

The final project will consist of a semester-long, team-created news website that implements the full range of skills covered in the course.

This is a core course of the MPS Journalism program, and students must earn a “B” (83) or higher to pass the course. Please see the Graduate Student Handbook for more details.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will:

- Possess practical, effective and applicable digital skills
- Know how to create a news website and distribute original content using free tools
- Be familiar with how today’s journalists are building new digital careers
- Know how to find, track and discuss current trends and issues in digital news media
- Know how to conduct an audit of their personal digital brand

READING

There is no required text for this course. Instead, the instructor will assign specific pieces of required reading during relevant weeks. But students are expected to pay attention to discussions about digital news and the news industry from sources, including:

- AmericanPressInstitute.org / Need to Know newsletter
- NiemanLab.org
- Poynter.org



- Journalism.org
- PewInternet.org
- MediaGazer.com
- DigiDay.com

ATTENDANCE

Missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). **Absences for classes, beyond the initial two, will result in further reduction of the final grade.** If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

In addition, any absence or lack of engagement will lower the portion of your grade determined by in-class participation. Attendance and active participation during class lectures and discussions are extremely important to the quality of the learning experience. In the case of an emergency or extreme circumstances that will require you to miss multiple classes, please contact me immediately.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND LATE WORK

Respect: You should treat your classmates with respect. I'll expect this both in your verbal communication but also in your non-verbal communication. This means: Pay attention and be empathetic.

Participation: Classes are long. We'll take a break each class, but I expect you to be attentive while we're in session. This means: If we're having discussion, you're participating. If we're working on our projects, you're engaged and interacting with your teammates or other classmates. Also: Park your phone and messaging apps unless instructed to use them for class purposes.

Late work: Deadlines matter. Late assignments will be marked down one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). Work will not be accepted more than one day after it is due, but will receive a zero instead. Students may discuss with the instructor, in advance of a deadline, the possibility for extending an assignment deadline in the case of extreme, unforeseeable personal issues. Such requests may or may not be granted.

Instructional continuity: In the event of a weather emergency (or any other widespread emergency) that would close the Georgetown Downtown building, we will plan to meet virtually through online videoconferencing tools. More information will be provided on how this will work later in the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS



All written assignments will be submitted to the instructor by email, or uploaded to a Google folder, depending on instructions. All should follow AP style. Exams will be administered through Blackboard.

1. Weekly analysis of current events readings (Due by 11:59 p.m. each Saturday prior to a class)
2. Midterm exam (March 23)
3. Three two-page papers
 - Career case study (Deadline: February 9)
 - Personal brand audit (Deadline: March 16)
 - Mobile analysis (Deadline: April 13)
4. Final exam (April 27)
5. Final project (Deadline: May 4)
 - Create a small-group news website
 - Write an individual paper about the site, the group & your contributions
 - In-class presentation

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

In-class participation:	10%
Weekly reading summaries:	15%
Papers:	15%
Midterm exam:	15%
Final exam:	15%
Final project:	30%
Total:	100%

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

A	100-93	B-	82.99-80
A-	92.99-90	C	79.99-70
B+	89.99-88	F	69.99-0
B	87.99-83		

The instructor will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:



- MPS Writing Resource Program
202-687-4246
<http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>
- Academic Resource Center
202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
<http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
202-687-6985
<http://caps.georgetown.edu/>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>.



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If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION

The instructor reserves the right to update the syllabus during the semester, especially as it pertains to the timing of guest speakers. In those instances, the instructor will provide ample warning of any changes.



CLASS SCHEDULE

Each week students are expected to email a brief summary of their ideas and lessons from *at least three* articles, blog posts, videos, conference sessions, etc., pertaining to digital news or the changing news industry. I may assign specific pieces of required reading some weeks. These assignments are due every Saturday night at 11:59 p.m. and will be graded as homework as well as be part of class discussion the following Monday.

WEEK 1 (WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7)

- Introductions.
- Course objectives and expectations.
- Assignments and weekly news summaries.

WEEK 2 (MONDAY, JANUARY 12)

- Editorial content planning: user-centered design.
- How to choose topics.
- Forming project teams.
- Collaboration and teamwork: Strategies and expectations.
- Project management and execution strategies.

Assignment: User interview. Use empathetic interview form to focus project idea.

Deadline: Beginning of class, January 26

NO CLASS ON JAN. 19 – MLK DAY

WEEK 3 (MONDAY, JANUARY 26)

- Discussion of empathetic interview results and project focus.
- WordPress overview. Writing and editing, using themes and plugins, defining a taxonomy with categories and tags.
- Overview of useful tools.
- Your “About” page and disclosures.
- Expectations for your blog and how it will be graded.

WEEK 4 (MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2)

- Basic tenets of digital news.
- Social media strategies and tools.
- Search engine optimization.

Assignment: Career case study. Find a journalist doing a job you want to do someday, interview him or her about how he or she got there. Submit a two-page paper telling his or her story and the lessons you learned.



Deadline: Beginning of class, February 9

WEEK 5 (MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9)

- In-class discussion: Your career case studies homework.
- How to write for the web / what is blogging?
- How to do live blogs and live chats.

WEEK 6 (MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19) NO CLASS FOR MLK DAY – MAKEUP DATE/PLACE TBA

We will do a makeup session at some point this semester that will consist of a field trip offsite. The date, time and location are TBD and will be announced as soon as possible in class. Please be aware that the time will be outside of normal class hours. Once the date and time are set, please get in touch with the instructors individually if your work schedule will make it difficult to attend this session.

WEEK 7 (MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23)

- How to curate, aggregate and cite.
- Copyright rules. Attribution / fair use principles. Creative Commons rules.
- WordPress Site Stats — What are the metrics and which ones matter.
- Other metrics and tools.
- Begin building your site.

WEEK 8 (MONDAY, MARCH 2)

- Building your personal brand & portfolio.
- Build your site.

Assignment: Complete your own personal brand audit. Email 1-2 pages.

Deadline: Beginning of class, March 16

NO CLASS ON MARCH 9 – SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9 (MONDAY, MARCH 16) -- WEBINAR

- How to do photos and galleries.
- How to do video / audio.
- University equipment overview.
- Midterm content review.

WEEK 10 (MONDAY, MARCH 23)

- Midterm exam.
- Exam will be conducted outside of class over Blackboard with a time limit. I will provide more details as the exam approaches.



WEEK 11 (MONDAY, MARCH 30)

- Mobile and tablets overview.
- Device ownership & market overview / forecast.
- Native apps, web apps, responsive design.
- Usage patterns.
- Business models.

Assignment: Analyze mobile websites (or apps) of one news organization. Describe strengths and weaknesses. Analyze design, user experience, product strategy and business model. Suggest changes and new products that would benefit both the news org and the readers. Submit a two-page paper.

Deadline: Beginning of class, April 13

NO CLASS ON APRIL 6 – EASTER BREAK

WEEK 12 (MONDAY, APRIL 13)

- In-class discussion: Your mobile analyses.
- Business models and advertising trends.

WEEK 13 (MONDAY, APRIL 20)

- Introduction to data journalism.
- Crowdsourcing and user-generated content.
- Emerging content-contributor models.

WEEK 14 (MONDAY, APRIL 27)

- Final exam.
- As with the midterm exam, students will take a timed final exam outside of class on Blackboard.

WEEK 15 (MONDAY, MAY 4)

- Final project presentation.
- Your site demo and elevator pitch.
- Submit paper accounting for your individual contributions and the group dynamic of the project.