



## **MPJO-505-01: DIGITAL ESSENTIALS**

### **GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM**

Mondays, 8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. | Autumn 2015

**Instructor: Sudeep Reddy**

**Instructor: Claire O'Neill**

Class hashtag: #mpjo505

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

### **REQUIRED READING**

There is no required text for this course. Instead, the instructors 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](http://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. We'll expect this both in your verbal communication but also in your non-verbal communication. This means: Pay attention and be empathetic.

**Communication:** We expect that you will send all assignments to both instructors via email (unless otherwise stated in the syllabus or during class). The preferred mode of communication is through email, but if we need to set up a time to talk by phone, we will do that as well. We also expect you to communicate with both instructors for all other communications, so as to keep us all in the loop.

**Participation:** Classes are long. We'll take a break each class, but we 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 instructors, 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 instructorS 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 (Online by October 26)
3. Three two-page papers
  - Career case study (Deadline: October 5)
  - Personal brand audit (Deadline: November 2)
  - Mobile analysis (Deadline: November 23)
4. Final exam (Online by December 7)
5. Final project (Deadline: December 14)
  - 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%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100%</b>

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 instructors 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](mailto: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](mailto: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>. 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 instructors will provide ample warning of any changes.



## CLASS SCHEDULE

Each week, by 11:59 p.m. Saturday, students are expected to write a brief summary of ideas and lessons drawn from *at least three* articles, blog posts, videos, conference sessions, etc., pertaining to digital news or the changing news industry. We may assign specific pieces of required reading some weeks. These short summaries should be posted online (to a blog/Tumblr/Medium/etc.) and must be emailed to the instructors each week by the deadline. They will be graded as homework and will be part of class discussion the following Monday.

### WEEK 1 (WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2)

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

### NO CLASS ON SEPT. 7 – LABOR DAY

### WEEK 2 (MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14)

- 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, September 21

### WEEK 3 (MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21)

- 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, SEPTEMBER 28)

- Basic tenets of digital news.
- Understanding audiences for your site.
- 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, October 5

### **WEEK 5 (MONDAY, OCTOBER 5)**

- 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, OCTOBER 12) NO CLASS FOR COLUMBUS 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, OCTOBER 19)**

- 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.
- Midterm content review.

Midterm exam: Exam will be conducted outside of class over Blackboard with a time limit. It will be available online starting October 22 and due at the beginning of class, October 26.

### **WEEK 8 (MONDAY, OCTOBER 26)**

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

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

Deadline: Beginning of class, November 2

### **WEEK 9 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2)**

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



**WEEK 10 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9)**

- Business models and advertising trends.
- How to manage change in news platforms.

**WEEK 11 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16)**

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

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, November 23

**WEEK 12 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23)**

- In-class discussion: Your mobile analyses.
- How to innovate and create new opportunities for your content.
- How to have impact.

**WEEK 13 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30)**

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

Final exam: As with the midterm exam, students will take a timed final exam outside of class on Blackboard. The exam will be available online starting December 3 and due by the beginning of class on December 7.

**WEEK 14 (MONDAY, DECEMBER 7)**

- Final project preparation.

Assignment: Finish the final project and paper outlining your contributions and group dynamic.

Deadline: Beginning of class, December 14

**WEEK 15 (MONDAY, DECEMBER 14)**

- Final project presentation.





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*Journalism*

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