



MPJO-892-01: PRODUCT INNOVATION LAB WITH WASHINGTON CITY PAPER

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Tuesdays, 5:20 p.m. to 7:50 p.m. | Fall 2014

Instructor: Jeff Sonderman

Downtown campus, C116

- Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Modern digital news is delivered through technology products (apps, websites and more) that must strategically combine content strategy, software features and business models that are valuable to a targeted group of users. This course offers a small group of students a unique experience in strategizing and building new news technology products, in partnership with Washington City Paper. Students will be responsible for conducting audience research to identify product opportunities, assessing feasible product creation options, and possibly executing the creation of a new product.

The primary goal is to give students hands-on experience with modern, user-focused methods that lead to successful products. Students will learn cross-disciplinary skills that prepare them for future careers in this type of product management, or to specialize in content strategy, technology or business models of news products. As part of the project, students may do some reporting and writing that would be used in the final product.

Students should expect to meet as a group in a variety of formats, including in a traditional classroom setting, through Google Hangout sessions, at Washington City Paper's offices and other arrangements as necessary.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Identify the needs and desires of potential users that could be solved through new products
- Match audience needs to the resources and capabilities of a particular media organization
- Determine what kinds of products and features would be uniquely valuable to the audience
- Oversee creation of a minimum viable product and follow-up learning and improvement

REQUIRED READING

There is no required text for this course. Instead, the instructor will assign selected readings



throughout the semester. Students will be expected to read materials before class and to discuss them in class.

ATTENDANCE

As outlined by the university, 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.

This class relies heavily on attendance and participation. Punctual attendance is critical, whether the meetings take place in person or online. If you have to miss a class – family emergency, medical emergency or other act of God – you must let the instructor know in advance and work out a proposal for making up whatever work you will miss. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances.

At least one class will be held at the Washington City Paper offices at 1400 I St, NW, #900, Washington, DC. Several other classes will be held virtually via Google Hangouts or other online videoconferencing tools. The attendance policy relates to all in-person and virtual meetings.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND OTHER GUIDELINES

This lab course is heavily dependent on students' using initiative and active participation to conceive and create a successful news product. The learning and outcomes students will get from this course depends largely on the effort they put into it.

Also, as a small class working collaboratively to produce one news product, classmates will depend upon each other to participate and contribute to the group's efforts.

Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers or other communication devices while in class, unless required to use them for an in-class assignment. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions. Students should come prepared for class discussions and for talks with speakers.

In the event of a weather emergency (or any other widespread emergency) that would close the Georgetown Downtown building during one of the in-person classrooms sessions, we will plan to meet virtually through Google Hangout or other online videoconferencing tools.

ASSIGNMENTS

Students will be responsible for many tasks related to the overall course goal of conceiving and developing a news product. Some of these tasks and assignments may be determined or altered by the instructor during the course of the semester, as necessary to complete the goal.

The anticipated assignments include:



User interviews / stories: Early in the semester, students will conduct research interviews with five subjects who represent segments of the target audience for the news product. Students will first design the interview script of questions as a group, work in pairs to conduct the interviews and then write a report summarizing the “user stories” of each subject as they relate to potential areas of focus for our news product.

Deadline: Start of class, Sept. 30

Product opportunity report: After analyzing the user stories in class to determine themes, insights and user needs, students will each write a report suggesting the opportunities for potential news products that could solve the needs of the target audience. The concepts suggested in the reports must be firmly rooted in the research.

Deadline: Start of class, Oct. 7

Contributions to build phase: Once a product concept has been chosen and defined, students will each have roles over the course of several weeks in helping to create the content or technology for the product. These roles will be determined by the instructor to suit the nature of the chosen product and the interests and strengths of each student.

Deadline for Minimum Viable Product: Start of class, Dec. 2

Contributions to final report: In the last week, students will collaborate on a final report that summarizes in detail the news product, its intended audience and features, the underlying user research, the business models it may support, and a suggested roadmap for future development and improvement of the product by the City Paper.

Deadline: 11:59 p.m. Dec. 12

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

General class participation:	15 points
User interviews / stories:	25 points
Product opportunity report:	25 points
Contributions to build phase:	25 points
Contributions to final report:	10 points
TOTAL:	100 points

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 (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:



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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 syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of the agenda. The instructor will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.



CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 2) – Washington City Paper offices

Course goals and objectives
Student roles and expectations
Briefing and discussion with WCP representatives

WEEK 2 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 9) -- Classroom

Introduction to product development concepts and strategies
Design script for research interviews with target audience

Assignment: In student pair teams, recruit and schedule interviews.

Deadline: Start of class, Sept. 16

WEEK 3 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 16) -- Hangout

How to conduct user interviews

Assignment: Begin conducting interviews.

Deadline: Check in on progress on Sept. 23

WEEK 4 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 23) -- Hangout

Check in on interviews so far

Assignment: Finish interviews and write user stories.

Deadline: Start of class, Sept. 30

WEEK 5 (TUESDAY, SEPT. 30) -- Classroom

Present user stories to the group. Identify themes and user needs.

Assignment: Write product opportunity report.

Deadline: Start of class, Oct. 7

WEEK 6 (TUESDAY, OCT. 7) -- Hangout

Group discussion of product opportunity reports. Agree on which product concepts offer solutions likely to be desirable to the audience. Assess existing competitors.

WEEK 7 (TUESDAY, OCT. 14) – Washington City Paper offices

Meet with WCP staff to explore feasibility and viability aspects of the potential product concepts. Select the most desirable, feasible and viable product concepts for further refinement.

WEEK 8 (TUESDAY, OCT. 21) -- Classroom



Define specific visions for the product concepts. What forms it would take, what features are essential.

Assignment: Research into product creation options.

Deadline: Start of class, Oct. 28

WEEK 9 (TUESDAY, OCT. 28) -- Classroom

Group discussion of product creation options. Select one to proceed with, and create 4-5 week roadmap for delivery of Minimum Viable Product.

Assignment: Begin product creation process and execute roadmap, tasks TBD.

Deadline: TK

WEEK 10 (TUESDAY, NOV. 4) -- Hangout

Check in on progress. Plan tasks for the week.

Assignment: Product creation tasks TBD.

Deadline: TK

WEEK 11 (TUESDAY, NOV. 11) -- Hangout

Check in on progress. Plan tasks for the week.

Assignment: Product creation tasks TBD.

Deadline: TK

WEEK 12 (TUESDAY, NOV. 18) -- Hangout

Check in on progress. Plan tasks for the week.

Assignment: Product creation tasks TBD.

Deadline: TK

WEEK 13 (TUESDAY, NOV. 25) -- Hangout

Check in on progress. Plan tasks for the week.

Assignment: Product creation tasks TBD.

Deadline: TK

WEEK 14 (TUESDAY, DEC. 2) -- Classroom

Delivery of functioning Minimum Viable Product. Evaluate product performance. Determine next steps.



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Assignment: Write final report with documentation of the product, including process, technology and user research, plus recommended business models, next steps and further opportunities.

Deadline: 11:59 p.m. Dec. 12

TUESDAY, DEC. 9 – NO CLASS DURING STUDY DAYS

WEEK 15 (TUESDAY, DEC. 16) – Classroom

Presentation of final report before to the City Paper.