

COMM3317 – Multimedia Journalism

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Course Description

This course will teach you how to use text, still and moving images, sound and other visual elements to tell compelling news stories online. Our main goal for the semester is to learn how different media can be combined to narrate stories more effectively. In order to acquire these skills, this course will mirror as much as possible the processes and dynamics of real news organizations and/or production companies. You will work in teams to conceptualize, produce and deliver high quality, engaging and ethical multimedia stories. You will face tight deadlines, you will have to teach yourself new skills, and you will need to face the praise and criticism of your peers and audience.

At the onset of the semester, it is important that you remember that journalism is a craft; you will not become a journalist overnight. It will require practice – lots of practice. Throughout the semester you will have numerous occasions to practice basic skills that a multimedia journalist must master, such as planning and pitching stories, capturing and editing audio, writing for the web, creating interactive data visualizations... Some of these skills take time to command, so be prepared to spend quite some time learning on your own. You will not be expected to become proficient in using any of the tools and equipment selected for this course, but, if you want to survive in a hyper competitive job market, you must learn how to become an independent learner.

Expectations

This course is oriented toward practice. Yes, we will go through some of the key theoretical concepts behind the practice of digital journalism and multimedia storytelling, but, most importantly, we will be spending large amounts of time outdoors, talking to sources, taking pictures, shooting and editing video, analyzing other people's work, and discussing how to improve your own work. Be ready to embrace criticism.

By joining this course, you and me go into an informal contract. I commit myself to

- 1) provide you with as many opportunities as possible to practice what we learn in class;
- 2) offer you detailed feedback to each of your assignments;
- 3) make extra exercises, drills and samples available to you whenever needed;
- 4) monitor your progress so that, by the end of the course, we can both agree that your multimedia production skills have improved.

In return, all I request from you is that you set aside enough time each week to complete the assignments, watch the tutorials I select for each week, and review/practice what we learn in class. Do we have a deal?

Learning Outcomes

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

- 1) Identify and discuss the principles of multimedia journalism and digital storytelling;
- 2) List the pros and cons of using different media as storytelling tools;
- 3) Use professional hardware and software to produce audio, photo, video and other digital journalistic content;
- 4) Plan, design and publish quality and ethical journalism online;
- 5) Recognize the importance of lifelong learning to a successful career in (digital) journalism.

Prerequisites

This course does not require prior knowledge of media production. If you have never used a camera, edited a video or created a website before, you do not need to worry. However, you are expected to have completed basic training in writing for print (COMM 2310) or broadcast (COMM 2328) media. Unfortunately, we do not have time to cover the basics of news reporting and writing.

If you are not confident on your news writing skills, you can try getting in touch with UH's Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.uh.edu>) and ask for advice. They specialize in academic writing, but can sometimes offer specialized support.

Recommended Texts and Resources

No single textbook covers all the content that you will learn this semester. This is mostly due to the fact that multimedia journalism evolves fast, very fast. Once a textbook is out, a large amount of its content has already become obsolete.

There are, however, three reference books that you can turn to if you want to learn more about the concepts we discuss in class. These are not required textbooks, but they might come handy.

- Bradshaw, P. (2013). *The online journalism handbook: skills to survive and thrive in the digital age* (2nd edition). London: Routledge.
- Bull, A. (2015). *Multimedia journalism: a practical guide* (2nd edition). London: Routledge.
- Hernandez, R. K., & Rue, J. (2015). *The principles of multimedia journalism: Packaging digital news*. London: Routledge.

I have ordered copies of these for the library and—hopefully—they will be here soon.

Your second best ally this semester will be Lynda.com. This is an online database of online courses that cover 90% of the material for the semester. This is an expensive service that you can access for free through the Houston Public Library (HPL) system (<http://houstonlibrary.org/lyndacom>). You will need a MY Link card to access Lynda.com. Details on how to get an HPL card will be provided in class.

Evaluation

Your progress will be assessed throughout the semester using a combination of group and individual assignments. There are no final or midterm exams for this course. Most group assignments will be completed during class hours, but you will need to complete individual assignments outside class hours. From time to time I might use pop quizzes to test your knowledge of the content included in video tutorials. The following is a breakdown of the major assignments you will need to complete:

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| * Group Project – long form multimedia story | 50% |
| Audio Production Exercise | (10%) |
| Photojournalism Exercise | (10%) |
| Video Production Exercise | (10%) |
| Data Visualization Exercise | (5%) |
| Final Submission | (15%) |
| * Individual Project – multimedia story | 40% |
| * Attendance, Participation and Pop Quizzes | 10% |

Equipment and Software

While many multimedia journalists today use their mobile phones to record audio and video, and take photographs, in this course you will be expected to step up your game, and use professional or semi-professional equipment for your assignments. This includes DSLR cameras, tripods, microphones and others. Almost all the equipment you will need can be checked out at the School. We will go through the process of checking out equipment in class. You can borrow any item for a maximum of four hours. This should be enough for most assignments. If you need to borrow the equipment for a longer time, you will need to come to me first as I need to sign the form authorizing a longer check out period.

If you already own a camera or any other equipment, and would like to use it instead of the one provided by the School, please come talk to me first as not all equipment will be suitable for this course.

There are two items that you must purchase in order to follow this course:

- 1) An SDHC card (32 or 64GB).
- 2) A portable external hard drive (100GB+ recommended).

You can buy any of these items at Cougarbyte on campus (<http://cougarbyte.com>) or at any other retailer of your choice. If you have trouble paying for any of these expenses, please come to me and we will try to work something out.

This course will teach you how to use Adobe Creative Cloud software, which is available for free on all the School's computers at the Communication Technology Center (CTC). You are welcome to use any other software when working on your assignments, but I cannot guarantee that I will be able to assist if you opt not to use Adobe software.

Communication Tools

The preferred communication platform of the University of Houston is Blackboard. I will post announcements, grades and other essential information there. However, in this course we will be having most conversations on #slack, an online space that is used in many

communication companies today. While you might be reluctant to “learn” how to use yet another tool, this one might come very handy in the future. Make sure to install the #slack app on your phone and to check it on a regular basis.

I encourage you to message me on #slack before sending me an email as this will get you a reply sooner.

Attendance and Lateness

You are expected to come to class every week. This is a hands-on class with a lot of team work involved, so not coming to class will have an impact on your classmates’ performance. Also, we cover a lot during this semester and each week builds on the previous, so repeated absences will greatly hamper your learning progress. If you need to miss a class, please let me and your colleagues know in advance. **If you are absent from class on the day an assignment is to be submitted, you will not get points for that assignment.** I will keep attendance records informally, and will use them in determining borderline grade decisions.

Deadlines

I take deadlines very strictly. After quite a long time working as a journalist, I learnt the hard way that deadlines are not to be missed. **Therefore, I will not accommodate late submissions under any circumstances.** It is your job to organize your time effectively in order to meet the deadlines. If you submit an assignment late, you will get 0 points for that assignment.

Mobile Phone Use and Other Devices

Refrain from using your mobile phones in class, as they are a major source of distraction (at least for me). If you have something important to tweet (such as how cool this course is), an Instagram post to like, or a text message to reply to, you can do that after class. At times, I might ask you to use your phone for in-class assignments. Only at that point the use of mobile phones would be justified.

You are free to use tables and laptops to take notes, but you are not allowed to use them in class to access social media, shop online, watch cat videos or any similar activities. If I find you using your phone, tablet or laptop for any non-class related purposes, I might ask you to leave and you’d get 0 points for any graded assignments due on that day.

Academic Honesty and Student Conduct Policies

To cultivate an environment of academic integrity, the University of Houston expects students to abide by the University’s Undergraduate Academic Honesty Policy, found in the Undergraduate Catalog: <http://www.uh.edu/academic-honesty-undergraduate>. Make sure you read the provisions included in the catalog as they are important.

Specifically for this course, remember that you cannot use the work of other creators and pass it as your own, including audio and video. If you borrow footage from another source, you must clearly state that it is not your own. Also, when using video or audio from another source, you must first make sure that is not copyright protected. You might use small fractions under the [principle of fair use](#).

Also, it is not acceptable to reuse your previous work for other courses. All assignments you submit for COMM 3317 must be original, must be your own creation and must not use any materials that are copyrighted. Even if you violate any of these premises unintentionally, it will still be considered as a form of plagiarism. If you have doubts as to what constitutes plagiarism, ask in class.

Finally, I need to remind you that CLASS students are expected to abide by the University of Houston's [Code of Student Conduct](#). Familiarize yourself with its content.

Students with Disabilities

The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, in accordance with 504/ADA guidelines, is committed to providing reasonable academic accommodations to students who request them. Students seeking accommodation must register with the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) 713-743-5400.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) are available for students having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or somebody you know is in crisis, the "Let's Talk" program provides a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. Read more about the services provided by CAPS [on their website](#). If

Schedule

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| 8/21/18 | Introduction to COMM 3317 |
| 8/23/18 | What is multimedia journalism? |
| 8/28/18 | The fundamentals of multimedia journalism |
| 8/30/18 | Structuring your multimedia news story |
| 9/4/18 | Storytelling techniques in multimedia journalism |
| 9/6/18 | Introduction to photojournalism |
| 9/11/18 | Photojournalism Lab I |
| 9/13/18 | Photojournalism Lab II |
| 9/18/18 | Photojournalism Principles + Photojournalism Lab III |
| 9/20/18 | Basics of audio production |
| 9/25/18 | Introduction to sound equipment + Sound Production Lab I |
| 9/27/18 | Sound Production Lab II |
| 10/2/18 | Sound Production Lab III |
| 10/4/18 | Work on your team project |
| 10/9/18 | Photojournalism Lab IV |
| 10/11/18 | Sound Production Lab IV |
| 10/16/18 | Introduction to video production |
| 10/18/18 | Introduction to video equipment |

- 10/23/18 Video Production Lab I
- 10/25/18 Video Production Lab II
- 10/30/18 Video Production Lab III
- 11/1/18 Video Production Lab IV
- 11/6/18 Introduction to Data Visualization
- 11/8/18 Data Visualization Lab I
- 11/13/18 Data Visualization Lab II
- 11/15/18 Work on your feature story
- 11/20/18 Introduction to Medium
- 11/27/18 Advanced Functions in Medium
- 11/29/18 Group project review