Syllabus: Communication 117/217 (DIGITAL JOURNALISM)

Winter Quarter 2013
Tuesday, 3:15 to 6:05 p.m.

Instructor -- R.B. Brenner
Course Technologist & Web/Social Workshop Leader -- Drake Martinet
Database & Data Visualization Workshop Leader -- Phillip Reese
Teaching Assistant -- Sam Fisher
Classroom -- Wallenberg Hall Learning Theater (Room 124)
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Course description -- Traditional newspaper journalists had no need to learn how to operate the printing presses. Or to understand strategies the Marketing and Circulation departments used to promote and distribute their work. Their interactions with readers were one-sided at best, antisocial at worst, and computers were treated as glorified word processors. The Internet blew that world up. Mobile technologies are shaking it yet again. This course will explore the mind-sets and skill-sets of digital journalism, covering website development and design; data analysis and visualization; search engine and social media strategies; audience engagement; mobile platforms; and web analytics.

Graded assignments -- You will be evaluated on three projects (deadlines and grade weights noted in bold), as well as on class participation and an in-class final exam. The details:

- Envision, build and maintain a self-hosted WordPress site as your personal media platform. Deadline: March 8; course grade weight = 25%
- In teams, produce a data-driven story utilizing data exploration, analysis and visualization tools. Feb. 19; grade weight = 20%
- Advise a media website of your choosing on how to grow its audience and improve its journalism. Feb. 26; grade weight = 20%
- March 12 in-class final exam; grade weight = 20%
- Class participation; grade weight = 15%

Grading -- Final grades will be determined on a point system, as follows: (96-100 = A; 90-95 = A-; 86-89 = B+; 82-85 = B; 78-81 = B-; 74-77 = C+; 70-73 = C, etc.)

Guidelines -- This is a seminar that relies heavily on in-class workshops. Please approach it in the way you would work with colleagues in a newsroom. Avoid distractions, be prepared and collegial, show up on time and meet all deadlines.
We have two ground rules, which double as guiding principles:

1. No textbooks or paper handouts of any kind.
2. No nostalgia.

   ▪ All of the materials you will need this quarter can be found on our course website: comm117.stanford.edu (site will be made public on Dec. 1).

**Honor Code** -- Be sure you are familiar with Stanford’s Honor Code: [http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/judicialaffairs/policy/honor-code](http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/judicialaffairs/policy/honor-code)

**Professional Journalism Disclosure** -- For any course assignment, on or off campus, that could (even conceivably) be for the Peninsula Press, our program’s news site, you need to identify yourself as “a student reporter working on both an in-class assignment and a public story that could be published by major media outlets via the Peninsula Press.” Make sure every subject understands at the outset that his or her words could appear in major media.

And now for the good stuff:

**>> Pre-Class Requirements**

   ▪ Material referenced below will be on course website, starting Dec 1. The site address: comm117.stanford.edu
   ▪ Watch [Don’t Fear The Internet](#) videos, up through installment 3.
   ▪ Follow our tutorial for purchasing web hosting, registering a domain name and properly installing WordPress.
   ▪ Download and install the latest version of the Firefox browser.
   ▪ If you don't them them already, sign up for accounts with Twitter and Flickr (or Google's Picasa).
   ▪ Install the latest version of Microsoft Excel.

**>> Week 1 -- WordPress and Personal Platforms, Tues. 1/8:**

   ▪ Survey of classes, assignments and learning goals.
   ▪ Introduction to personal platforms in digital journalism.
   ▪ Web workshop Leader: [Drake Martinet](#), NowThisNews Social Editor.
   ▪ Cosmology of WordPress, from its lingo to components parts.
   ▪ Begin to build your WordPress site.

**In-class workshop:**

   ▪ Identify two WordPress themes you like. Be ready to explain your choices.
   ▪ Configure File Transfer Protocol (FTP) and WordPress administrator access.
   ▪ Install WordPress themes; activate top choice via platform’s back end.
For next class: assignments, see below.

Assignments:

- Create a contact page, including an “About Me” paragraph, contact email and links to social media presence.
- Install TweetDeck or Twitter for Mac.
- Find and install Cyberduck and Textwrangler. (if not completed in class)
- Complete the FTP configuration with Cyberduck. (if not completed in class)
- Have a professional-quality bio photo ready to upload.
- Find out what a favicon is, what its parameters are and how you go about making one.
- Explore options for choosing your site’s color palette.
- Locate, install and activate at least one specific Twitter plugin.

>> Week 2 - A Deeper Dive into Web Development, Tues. 1/15:

- Clarification of WordPress goals, and a look ahead to weeks 3-6.
- Web workshop Leader: Drake Martinet.
- Introduction to teaching yourself on the web.
- Learn to use Firebug and developer tools.
- Math for web production: basic ratios, image rules.
- How to embed things the right way.
- Plugins 2.0 and Themes 2.0 -- Did you choose wisely?
- Demo Google Analytics Install via FTP.

In-class workshop:

- Make a favicon and upload it to your site via FTP.
- Change website colors using CSS.
- Install Google Analytics the hard (FTP) way. Check that it is running properly.

Assignments:

- Complete in-class assignments from weeks 1,2.
- Use Google Trends and Insights for Search to figure out the most searched-for terms from the Jan. 21 presidential inauguration.
- Based on what you find, be ready to pitch a “Day Two” story, explaining your angle and what will separate your story from the pack.

>> Week 3 -- Atomic Unit of News and Reporting in Real Time, Tues. 1/22:

- Introduction to "The Atomic Unit of News," drawing upon The Washington Post's coverage of the presidential inauguration.
• When does it matters to be first? How a scoop quickly can become perishable, and why getting it right never goes out of fashion.
• The path from “what?” to “so what?” to “what’s next?”
• Ethical cautionary tales.
• Washington Post editors and reporters speak to us via Skype.

Assignments:

• Work on your WordPress sites.
• Data mining prep materials to be distributed.
• Become familiar with the Sacramento Bee data center.

>> Weeks 4 & 5: Data Mining and Basic Data Visualization, Tues. 1/29 and Tues. 2/5:

• Workshop Leader: Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee database reporter.
• Introduction to data mining and data visualization tools.
• Gallery of great data-driven stories.
• Excel formulas and pivot tables.
• Best places to find data.
• The importance of cleaning data.
• Using Google Docs and Fusion Tables to create charts and maps.

In-class workshops:

• Hands on: Finding and analyzing data.
• Hands on: Putting data visualizations on the web.

Assignments:

• Crunching numbers for hypothetical news story.
• Creating online data visualizations for stories.

>> Week 6: Advanced Data Visualization, Tues. 2/12:

• Hands-on data visualization tutorials.
• Quick review of the syllabus, looking ahead to weeks 7-10.

In-class workshop:

• In teams you will create data visualizations -- best work will be published.

Assignment:

• Complete your data visualization. *Graded project due Feb. 19*
>> Week 7: Audience Engagement, Online Metrics and SEO, Tues. 2/19:

- Guest speaker: Eric Johnson, community manager, *AllThingsD*
- The role of online metrics in journalism.
- How editors and reporters can read the stats and discuss them effectively.
- Why stats don't tell the whole story.
- Pageviews vs. engagement, and how to optimize both.
- Breaking down a news website’s analytics report.
- Search Engine Optimization: How the Google bots see you.

In-class workshop:

- Tutorial using Google Analytics interface.
- Choose a news site, dissect the SEO strategies, highlight standout practices, identify use of plugins, etc. Write a memo recommending better practices for that site. You will begin the memo in class and then work on it more in the week ahead. *Graded project due Feb. 26*

Assignment:

- Continue to work on your WordPress sites.

>> Week 8: Apps, Mobile and Prototyping Your Ideas, Tues. 2/26:

- Guest panelists from the cutting-edge of mobile and tablet journalism.

Assignment:

- A look at what will be covered in the course final exam.

>> Week 9: The State of Social: Social for reporting, distribution and product, Tues. 3/5:

- Drake Martinet returns for a demo on issues of the moment in social media.

In-class workshop:

- Workshop to finalize WordPress sites.

Assignment:

- Finish and submit your website by 4 p.m. on 3/8.

>> Week 10: In-Class Final, 3/12