

MEJO 711: Multiplatform Storytelling

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Course overview

How do you communicate a message through multiple platforms? How do you balance and navigate today's blurring roles for media professionals, who now serve as producers/consumers, writers/readers and message senders/message receivers?

These questions and the demands that they place on communicators are the focus of this course. Understanding our fragmented audiences and exploring how communicators operate will help you develop content across platforms.

This semester, you will analyze the possibilities of digital environments and discuss trends and ideas. You will also acquire skills to help you succeed in digital media.

This course is about communicating across platforms — clearly, precisely, accurately, with energy and voice, and for specific audiences. Good writing is valued on screen just as it is on paper. Effective writing is, as an editor at the Los Angeles Times website once said, about putting the right words in the right order.

Whether we are content creators or site editors, we recognize that first and foremost we are storytellers. Throughout history, humans have taught, learned, entertained and communicated with stories. Stories transmit information and transfer experience.

Specifically, this course aims to help you:

- Express yourself concisely and clearly.
- Create stories that can be disseminated through a variety of channels, including social media platforms, audio, video and text.
- Distill and transform relevant, credible information into usable and compelling messages for content marketing, social media or journalistic storytelling
- Create flexible and strategic stories that can be disseminated via multiple platforms

Course format

MEJO 711 is an asynchronous course. We will not meet together at the same time.

Each week of the semester will include a theme, readings, discussion and an assignment. During that week, it's up to you when you want to complete those tasks, but be sure to manage your time well. A couple of assignments are more complex, and you will have more time to complete them.

Once a week, I will hold an "office hour" via Zoom. Feel free to stop by, but you are not required to do so. I am tentatively setting this meeting for 7 p.m. Eastern each Thursday. I will be available for individual Zoom meetings by appointment. I also respond quickly to questions and comments via email or direct message on Twitter.

Course materials

- *Writing and Editing for Digital Media*, 4th edition (2020) by Brian Carroll
- *Associated Press Stylebook*, 2020 edition (available at in print or online at <https://www.apstylebook.com>)
- *Need To Know*, the daily email newsletter of the American Press Institute (subscribe at www.americanpressinstitute.org)

Diversity and inclusion

UNC-Chapel Hill is committed to providing a welcoming environment for all members of our community. The university does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

If you have any disability or other situation that might make it difficult to meet the requirements of the course, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. You should also contact the Department of Accessibility Resources & Service (AR&S) at 919-962-8300 or accessibility@unc.edu.

Honor code

The UNC honor system and code are in effect for MEJO 711. They are available in full at <https://studentconduct.unc.edu>.

In brief, the Honor Code is the heart of integrity at UNC-Chapel Hill. It says that all students shall "refrain from lying, cheating, or stealing."

Plagiarism and digital media

We all use the internet for research. With a wealth of information available, including everything from pre-written essays to scientific papers, the potential for plagiarism is enormous. Keep in mind that as easy as it is for students to find and copy information from the internet, it is just as easy for instructors to find the same information.

To avoid plagiarism, remember that the same rules apply to information found on the internet as to information found in print sources:

- When you take ideas or quotes from a source, you must paraphrase accurately and give credit by appropriately citing the original source.
- If you take a sentence or phrase directly from a source, you must indicate it by using quotation marks around the direct quote and citing the source.

Course schedule

Weeks 1 & 2 – The Values of Writing Well

Objectives: Review and further develop writing skills applicable to any medium. Identify weaknesses in writing and begin improving in those areas.

Week 3 – Writing Well Online

Objective: Learn how writing for digital environments differs from writing for traditional print media and what remains constant.

Week 4 – Links, Lists, Video and the History of the Web

Objective: Understand and apply the evolution of digital communication.

Week 5 – Headlines, Pushes and Subject Lines

Objectives: Learn to write attention-getting display type.

Week 6 – Writing for Spaces and Places

Objectives: Plan and curate written content for digital spaces.

Week 7 – Journalism in the Digital Space

Objectives: Brainstorm story ideas for text, audio and video.

Week 8 – Social Media and Society

Objectives: Explore strategies for effective use of social media and consider ethical implications.

Week 9 – More Journalism in the Digital Space

Objectives: Post a news story package.

Week 10 – Digital Public Relations

Objectives: Learn how PR is changing in the digital era.

Week 11 – Digital Marketing

Objectives: Explore how digital media are changing marketing.

Week 12 – Optimizing for Search

Objectives: Use tools to help readers find information.

Week 13 – The Future of Digital Storytelling

Objectives: Examine trends with an eye toward what's ahead.

Week 14 – Reflection, Contemplation and Closure

Objectives: Contemplate learning experiences. Complete revisions. Wrap up loose ends. Say our goodbyes.

Sakai

Course materials and links are available on the class Sakai site at <http://sakai.unc.edu>. Folders for each week contain a list of items to be read/viewed during that time. You also will find details of assignments due and links to weekly discussion questions. We will use the Forums tool for discussions.

The ITS Response Center provides 24/7 assistance with Sakai requests and questions via:

- Phone: 962-HELP(4357)
- Submit a Help Request
- Live Chat (M-F 9am - 6pm)

Weekly discussions

Each week we will discuss issues related to the readings. The readings will come from the textbook, links to articles on Sakai and updates from the API newsletter.

Discussion questions will be on Sakai at the start of each week, and the discussions are critical to your learning experience. We do not have the benefit of synchronous classroom lectures and discussion, instead putting a focus on our regular participation online. Your involvement is essential.

Submit your reactions to the questions and post new questions, thoughts and ideas. These posts may and should include thoughts and opinions. "I agree!" or "Me too!" posts fail to push the discussion forward. Post with an eye toward substance and specifics.

Setting up a website

In the first week of the semester, you will create a website specifically for this course. If you have never created a site, have no fear. It is easy. Even if you already have a personal website, please create a new one for this course.

The recommended platform is WordPress, available for free at web.unc.edu. WordPress is open-source software, providing great latitude in experimenting with code, features and content. It also has user-friendly templates.

You will use your site to publish most of the assignments, putting into practice the skills and techniques we will be discussing. The sites also provide a kind of diary for the learning experiences this course will create, making them useful beyond the semester.

The important thing now is to set up your site and add the URL to the Class Sites folder in Sakai. You'll find instructions on how to do that on our course site on Sakai.

Grading

Here are the components used to determine your grade for the course:

- 1) Assignments that you will post to your website by midnight Sunday night (50%).
- 2) Class participation in our weekly discussions. You are required to post a minimum of **five meaningful posts per week**, with "meaningful" excluding one-line posts. Fewer than five substantial posts results in a weekly participation mark of "L" or "Low Pass," unless the total is zero, in which case the weekly mark is "F" (50%).

A word about UNC's graduate school grading system: It is different from the traditional A/B/C/D +/- system you are probably familiar with. Per the UNC Graduate School handbook, the grade scale used for graduate-level courses is:

- H for High Pass
- P for Pass
- L for Low Pass
- F for Fail
- IN for work incomplete

This grade scale does not equate with the A/B/C/D scale. An H is rare throughout UNC's graduate-level programs. It is not the equivalent of an A, nor is a P the equivalent a B or C. It is a different system. A grade of P in no way communicates deficiency. As UNC graduate students say: "P is the first letter to get to Ph.D."

Workload

1. Completing assignments: Detailed instructions on these are on Sakai. Weekly assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. Sunday nights. Two larger assignments — a news story and a digital press kit — are more complex, so you will have more time to complete them. Late work will not be accepted.
2. Leading discussion: As the semester progresses, you will pair off with a classmate to lead the discussion. In previous semesters, this has been a valuable experience, as students often bring in valuable perspectives as discussion leaders. When it is your week to take on this task, make sure you have done all of the assigned readings for that week and that you understand the material. This will mean reading ahead. The assigned readings are posted on Sakai sorted by week. Discussion leaders are responsible for coming up with questions to generate and sustain discussion on that week's topics.
3. Budgeting your time: "It's too much! I can't keep up! Information overload!" You may feel this way on occasion. Don't panic.

The "ounce of prevention" for this problem is to allocate a fixed amount of time each week to participate in the discussion and complete assignments. As the instructor, I will do the same.

Best wishes for a successful semester!

Core values and competencies for this course

This course covers the following competencies required by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.