

MEJO 463 News Lab – Spring 2021

T-TH 9:30 a.m.-10:45

Instructor: Kate Sheppard

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Office hours: Fridays 12 p.m.-2 p.m., or by appointment

Zoom: <https://unc.zoom.us/j/93233072085?pwd=amMwdVBtaTZoemRBb1V6My95Qmt2UT09>

PW: newstome

Description

The goal of this class is to get you thinking creatively about how we develop the news products and services of the future. This is not a typical journalism class. It is structured more like a startup, with a focus on developing sustainable media products and services.

This course combines elements of journalism, technology, marketing, public speaking and business. We'll be identifying problems and developing ideas about how to solve them, and then assessing the desirability, feasibility and viability of those ideas. Does anyone want or need this? Can we create it? Can it be sustained? We will do this both through our own ideas and observations, and by working with partners at professional news organizations to solve their challenges.

Students should be prepared to:

- Face extreme uncertainty
- Fail early and often, and learn from those failures
- Work effectively and respectfully in teams
- Make decisions with limited information
- Balance competing priorities
- Receive direct (painful and pleasant) feedback
- Have your actions and decisions challenged
- Find answers to the big questions (with my help)

Successful students will be curious, self-starters and will not expect to be told exactly how to do something. We will have fun, work hard, be creative, take risks and challenge the status quo.

Framework and Objectives

This syllabus sets the basic schedule for the semester, but I will be amending and updating throughout the term based on our needs. I will alert you to changes and

additions at least a week in advance. Class documents will be posted in Google Drive and linked to within the syllabus.

Our objectives for the semester:

- Understand and apply the concepts of desirability, feasibility and viability
- Develop a well-researched and tested proposal
- Build a highly effective team
- Construct and deliver a high-quality pitch

You will be evaluated on the process you follow to test for desirability, feasibility and viability. If your process is solid, you may find that your idea is terrible. That's not failure. That's structured, entrepreneurial-based learning. I want to know what you learned, how you learned it, and what you plan to do with that information. That includes:

- Listening to customers
- Conducting market research
- Producing a basic business plan
- Prototyping
- Public presentations

Books

Please buy or rent:

- Lupton, Ellen, *Design Is Storytelling*
- Lencioni, Patrick, *5 Dysfunctions of a Team*

I will distribute key chapters from these, but you may want to buy or rent:

- Osterwalder, Alexander and Yves Pigneur, *Business Model Generation*
- Reis, Eric, *The Lean Startup*

And we will use other resources including:

- Ferrier, Michelle and Elizabeth Mays, *Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship*
- Readings, videos, and podcasts throughout the semester

Teams

You will work in teams of 3 to 5 people for the better part of the semester, and each team will be assigned to work with one of our professional partners. The team will not succeed without you and you will not succeed without your team. The key to having a positive and successful experience is teamwork and communication. Some tasks can be completed individually on your own time. However, you will develop a better product,

strengthen your understanding of the process and receive a higher grade if you trust one another, respect each other and work together.

Attendance

You should approach this class as you would a job at a startup. I allow two unexcused absences, but anything beyond that will negatively impact your final grade. Because this class is largely based on teamwork, you will be letting your teammates down if you aren't present and on time.

Assignments

All assignments should be turned in via Google Docs at the date and time specified. Please share them with both my Gmail and my UNC email (at the top of this page), and make sure you have set the permissions so I can edit and comment.

Deadlines in the class are hard and fast. If you think you are going to miss a deadline, please talk to me at least 24 hours in advance so we can discuss how to address it.

Grade Scale

Each grade can have a minus or plus to allow for more granular evaluation

- A (93 and above)
- A- (90-92)
- B+ (87-89): Exceeds Expectations. Solid effort with some room for improvement.
- B (83-86)
- B- (80-82)
- C+ (77-79): Meets Expectations. Completed the basic assignments and requirements.
- C (73-76)
- C- (70-72)
- D (60-69): Below Expectations. Significant issues with work or attitude.
- F (below 60): Failure. Does not even attempt to meet expectations.

Communication and Seeking Help

We don't really know what spring 2021 has in store for us, so we will all need to be flexible, compassionate and communicative. If you are having a hard time with something, tell me! If you need something from your teammates, talk to them! The time to ask for help is before you are in crisis mode or have missed a deadline. I am pathologically responsive on email and easy to meet for a phone or Zoom call. Just speak up!

I will create a Google Group for this class, which will be the primary means of sending any class updates or information. Please make sure to check the email account you give me for this class. All of the class documents and resources will also be stored in a Google Drive folder for this class.

Honor Code

I expect students to conduct themselves within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Diversity and Anti-Racism

The University's "Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment and Related Misconduct" is available online here. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Additionally, given recent national and local events, I feel it is important to set out my expectations for class conduct and discussion -- both my own and yours. I do so in accordance with the main purposes of both academia and journalism: to distinguish between valid and invalid knowledge and judgments, and to broaden our perspective on the world and the experiences of others.

In my class, I expect students to:

- Refrain from judging individuals according to the collective groups they may belong to (e.g. race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability status, etc.);
- Assess ideas and arguments according to the evidence and not based on the identities of the individual who created them;
- Acknowledge and seek to better understand the historical and contemporary systems of racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism that have created real

disparities in people's lives, how they see the world, and the opportunities that are available to them;

- And consider the often invisible systems of power at play in a given situation and the perspective of those who do not have that power.

Special Accommodations

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

ACEJMC Core Values and Competencies

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. [Learn more about them here.](#)

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies. Specifically, this course is designed to help you:

- Think critically, creatively and independently
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

Week-by-Week Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Deliverables
Jan. 19	Introduction to course		
Jan. 21	Introduction to design thinking -- What is desirability, feasibility, and viability?	Design thinking readings here and here ; review Reese Lab site	24-hour app/tech diet memo
Jan. 26	Desirability - Idea discussion and sorting		Problem statements and HMWs

Jan. 28	Brainstorming workshop	Developing The Entrepreneurial Mindset and Ideation	51 "bad" ideas
Feb. 2	Feasibility - Design challenges	TED Radio Hour on design ; Design is Storytelling	10 "good enough" ideas
Feb. 4	Business plans lecture		
Feb. 9	Initial pitches	<i>Business Model Generation</i>	
Feb. 11	Viability in news/media	What Happens When The News Is Gone? ; How I Built This: Bumble ; HIBT: Kickstarter	Memo on news technologies due
Feb. 18	Audience engagement and metrics	Beyond Pageviews; How to Build a Metric-Savvy Newsroom ; You May Hate Metrics	
Feb. 23	Meet the partners		
Feb. 25	Team formation, meetings	5 Dysfunctions of a Team, pages 1-114	Memo on a newsroom startup due
March 2	Working in teams	Project Management for Journalists ; 5 Dysfunctions of a Team, pages 117-227	
March 4	What makes a good pitch?	How To Deliver The Perfect Pitch ; How To Pitch	Midterm assignment due
March 9	SWOT analysis		
March 16	Business model canvas and	<i>Business Model</i>	Initial user survey

	stakeholder mapping	<i>Generation</i>	
March 18	Empathy maps		
March 23	Market research workshop with Stephanie Willen Brown		Short pre-workshop research assignment
March 25	MVPs	Lean Startup Chapter 7	
March 30	Market evaluation presentation		Market evaluation due
April 1	Pivot or persevere?	Lean Startup Chapter 8, HIBT: Slack, Spectacular Failures: Kodak	
April 6	Group meetings		
April 8	Work on prototypes and storyboards	What is Storyboarding?	
April 13	Group presentation of prototype or storyboard		
April 15	Writing a business plan	How to write a one-page business plan ; How to write a business plan	Make a list of costs and expense; Start drafting plan from template
April 20	Business plans part 2		Written draft of business plan due
April 22	Work session		
April 27	Work session		
April 29	Pitch Day		
May 4	Entrepreneurship and your future (w/ guest speakers)		Final product report due
Final - May TK			Team and individual reflections due

Team Deliverables

Final Pitch and Q&A -- 20%

Due in class April 29

The presentation of findings and recommendations for your media product. It must be well prepared, rehearsed, and presented. You must be able to answer all questions appropriately, honestly, and sincerely using any and all data and feedback you've collected over the course of the semester. The pitch and Q&A session will be evaluated based on how well you articulate your basic value proposition, how you plan to deliver that value to your customers, and how you will financially sustain it. It will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Hook - Good, convincing, and quick
- Problem - Clearly defined problem with clearly defined customers
- Solution - Clear explanation of your solution to the problem
- Data - Clear, data-driven connections for the solution to your problem
- Revenue and Costs - Concise and simple revenue and cost structures
- Not to exceed 5 minutes

Final Product Report - 20%

Due in class May 4

A written/visual presentation that shows more of the work that went into your pitch. The report will be evaluated based on how well you prove the desirability, feasibility and viability of your business. The report should include a description of the product, evidence of desirability/feasibility/viability, team descriptions, timelines, and other supporting evidence. I'll be distributing a more thorough description of what this needs to include later in the semester.

Team Evaluation – 10%

Everyone will evaluate their teammates' contributions over the course of the semester. Your grade on this portion will reflect both your teammates' evaluation of your work and the detail/thoughtfulness you put into evaluating your teammates. [Evaluation form is here](#), to be completed for each team member.

Individual Deliverables - 50% final grade

Memos - 15%

Mid-term - 15%

Self reflection – 15%

Instructor evaluation – 5%

Instructor evaluation

The instructor will evaluate each student at the end of the semester based on:

- Resourcefulness and initiative: Ability to generate new and improved ideas, concepts, methods, techniques, processes and practices. Ability to deal with new situations effectively. Extent of efforts at creative problem solving, anticipating needs and planning accordingly.
- Collaboration and attitude: Effectiveness in working with others to generate ideas, seek mutual purpose/understanding, be receptive to differing ideas and opinions while continuing forward progress.
- Responsibility: Attendance, punctuality, preparation for class, and participation in discussions.

Self Reflection – 15%

Due during final exam period

Students will demonstrate understanding of media innovation and entrepreneurship by reflecting on the process. The essay [should explain in detail](#) the most important takeaways from their work and how they might apply it in the future (~1,000 words).