

ONLINE NEWS PRODUCTION

COMM 621

Tuesday 11:20 a.m. - 2:10 p.m.

McKinley 100, T12, T14

Fall 2018

HELLO!

Rob Roberts is a freelance digital producer and strategist whose career has spanned journalism, government and advocacy.

He has worked in a number of high-profile positions, from producing video of the response to the World Trade Center attacks to covering the 2008 elections for USA Today. From 2009 to 2014, he served in the Obama administration, first in the White House and then as Director of Digital Strategy at the Department of Energy. Rob has taught video production, digital production skills and writing for communications as an adjunct professor at American University since 2009.

Jeremiah Patterson teaches a variety of multimedia and broadcast courses in the journalism division. He specializes in digital news production and storytelling, with a background in web and user-experience design.

He serves as SOC's liaison to the Online News Association, the world's largest association of digital journalists, where he was previously its digital manager. Before that, he served as a web producer and content developer at The Wildlife Society.

CONTACT

Please identify yourself with first and last name when emailing or texting. And include **[COMM 621]** in the subject line of any class-related email you send us.

ROB ROBERTS

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OFFICE HOURS

by appointment

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OFFICE HOURS

McKinley 240
Monday 1-4 p.m.
Thursday 1-4 p.m.
& by appointment

PURPOSE

This is an advanced-level digital journalism course focused in multimedia storytelling, online writing and production. It will teach you the fundamentals of running a digital newsroom, organizing a story budget and publishing online content.

This class covers how digital technology has transformed the media landscape, while providing hands-on experience with multimedia literacy and the use of new technologies in the practice of journalism.

During the course of the class, students will:

- Understand the new media industry landscape.
- Become proficient in visual and multimedia literacy for journalistic storytelling.
- Study the operation of digital newsrooms and the modern journalist's toolkit.
- Collaborate in teams and as a class to simulate a digital newsroom.

We will be creating a series of online issues and multimedia packages in teams and individually to experience the wide-ranging world of online journalism and multimedia storytelling. The course consists of lectures, discussion, critiques and lots of hands-on work.

Students will be doing their own reporting as well as soliciting work from others involved with COMM 621 and COMM 724. On occasion, we will partner with other classes on projects and also work with publications, news outlets and websites.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

After successful completion of this class, you should have a grasp of core concepts of multimedia literacy, including still photography, video, audio and other emerging platforms. You will be able to speak knowledgeably about contemporary digital storytelling and the implications of digital media on the journalistic craft. Other objectives include how to:

- Be an effective newsroom contributor in content and multimedia.
- Develop, write and edit online packages.
- Conceive and develop an online publication.
- Tell stories with emerging technology.
- Manage online journalism content and an online community.
- Work with social media tools and platforms.
- Negotiate ethical and legal decision making in online journalism.

COURSE STRUCTURE

During the first half of this course, we will learn and practice new or emerging digital storytelling skills. Each class will be devoted to a particular topic, like mobile reporting. We'll talk about it, look at examples, experiment with it in class and then you'll complete an assignment for that skillset. This phase is meant to refine your digital reporting skills before we enter the second half — when you'll put them into practice.

Then, for the remainder of the semester, this class will run much like a local, digital newsroom with the professors serving as the editors-in-chief. You will work individually and in teams to write, report and produce web stories and packages for weekly issues of our online publication, Beltway News. Each issue involves planning assignments, field reporting, editing, writing, formatting, rewriting, creating graphics, shooting photos or video or embedding other multimedia, publishing content and interpreting analytics.

You will be assigned various tasks and roles on these days, with some students serving as managing editors and others as reporters (or something in between). All of the reporting happens outside of class, while production and publishing happens in class. After every issue, you'll complete a self-evaluation.

ASSIGNMENTS

We'll complete five writing and producing assignments, meant to help you polish the material you learn in class, during the first half of the semester. Some assignments are technical in nature, so be sure to follow any examples given (scripts, videos or otherwise). Also pay attention to submission guidelines: some will be printed or emailed and others may get uploaded to the web. **No late assignments will be accepted.**

ISSUES

As a section, you'll produce seven scheduled issues of Beltway News. Most will be centered around a particular neighborhood, but some might focus on breaking or general news. Everyone will be assigned a task/role for these days and we will rotate positions throughout the semester. You are expected to contribute to the news team each week and — when serving as the managing editor — to lead your teammates. It's ultimately everyone's responsibility, as a team, to create a successful issue each week. The entire issue must go live by 2 p.m. Any work that fails to be published by that time is **considered late**, and no late work is accepted.

ROLES

On production days, your section will be broken out into the following (subject to change):

- Managing Editors
- Copy Editors
- Multimedia Editors
- Reporters

DEADLINES

Journalists live and die by deadlines in the newsroom. So, this is simple: **nothing late will be accepted.** Failure to complete an assignment on time or produce your story in time for publication will result in a grade of zero for that particular assignment/day. There is no flexibility with this policy, except for excused absences (see below). Check the schedule now to understand what is expected of you and when it's expected.

ATTENDANCE

This course will simulate a professional work environment — one that fosters the skills and discipline needed to produce online news. A news team requires all of its members to be present and active to create successful news site. For that reason, classroom attendance is vital.

We will take attendance at the beginning of each class, at exactly 11:20 a.m. Showing up late and/or leaving early without a legitimate, pre-approved excuse will be counted as an **unexcused absence.** If a medical problem, illness, religious observance or personal emergency requires you to miss class, let your assigned professor know by email prior to the start of class. (It's best to talk with us as soon as you know you'll be missing class.) Assignments are still due when they are listed despite having an excused absence. Again, **late assignments will not be accepted.**

Every class missed (excused or unexcused) will result in a **2.5 percentage-point reduction** from your overall grade. If you have an excused absence, you will be able to make up that 2.5 with another assignment. If you have an unexcused absence, you will not be allowed to make it up. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to figure out what you missed. During Tuesday newsroom hours, you are expected to check out of the classroom with the professor and the managing editors.

SOFTWARE, TOOLS & MATERIALS

We will use a number of software packages, programs and platforms in the course of our work, along with other materials including, but not limited to:

- Content management systems: WordPress, Trello.
- Cloud services: Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.
- Adobe Creative Cloud (CC): Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere, Audacity.
- Other interactive tools: Mapping and timeline tools, 360° video.
- Communication tools: GroupMe, Slack, Facebook Messenger.
- Online readings, assignments and resources (including this syllabus) will be posted on our class website at **beltwaynews.com/onp2018**. We'll refer to this site regularly. We'll also use it to publish our weekly issues.
- Special equipment rented from the Media Production Center.
- Headphones to listen to your video when you edit in the lab.
- External hard drive to store and backup your multimedia work.

EQUIPMENT RENTAL

You'll be checking out equipment from the Media Production Center to use for field reporting — including video cameras, digital audio records, still cameras and more. The equipment rental room is located in the lower level of MPC. Sign out the equipment using your name and valid university ID. You are liable for any equipment damage or loss, which will be traced back to the last ID used to check it out. That said, you are encouraged to use your own mobile device for certain assignments, such as those for photography and audio.

GRADING EXPECTATIONS

You should note well — and always keep in mind — that the average grade for average performance is a C, but you are expected to earn a B or higher in order to pass a graduate course in your major. The grade of A is not earned for simply attending class and turning in assignments. Excellence not only requires significant effort, but also successful demonstration that you have completely mastered the subject matter, skills and materials required in any assignment.

GRADING CONSIDERATIONS

The point of this course is to learn to produce digital news. Therefore, points are deducted for problems. Here are some examples:

Minor Problems

Small layout issues with text and embedded media, small producing issues with multimedia, wordy writing, missed leads.

Somewhat Significant Problems

Over/underexposed video or distracting audio, shaky video, spelling errors or grammatical mistakes, missing attributions, insertion of opinions, inaccurate quotes, sloppy writing.

Major Problems

Disorganized layout, missing/poorly captured audio or video, jump cuts and gaps in video, factual errors, disorganized/incomplete story budgets, incoherent writing.

GRADES

20% Assignments (5 total)

70% Issues (7 total)

10% Attendance and Professionalism

A High-quality professional work that's suitable for publication on a reputable media channel/site. Or professional quality work with insignificant, minor errors.

A- 90-93

A 94-100

B Good quality work but some minor problems exist. Or work that meets assignment requirements but problems exist. Or work that fulfilled the assignment but had significant problems.

B- 80-82

B 83-85

B+ 86-89

C Incomplete work that does not meet portions of the assignment and has significant or major problems.

C- 70-72

C 73-75

C+ 75-79

D Incomplete work that has excessive problems, indicating a lack of effort and attention to the assignment.

D 60-69

F Incomplete work that missed assignment deadline or had major errors.

F 59 and below

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

There is a wide range of university services available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements, including:

Academic Support Center (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

Counseling Center (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

Disability Support Services (x3315, MCG 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical or psychological disabilities.

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify me in a timely manner with a letter from the Academic Support Center or Disability Support Services so we can make arrangements to address your needs.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Please don't even think about cheating on your work. Plagiarism is to present any information or language that was prepared and written by someone else as if it were your own work. This would include copying and pasting information from the Internet without attributing the source. It would also include passing off another student's work as your own. For this course, plagiarism also includes using photos, audio, video or code from the Internet that you are presenting as original work. In other words, don't do it.

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur.

The Academic Integrity Code includes but is not limited to: plagiarism; inappropriate collaboration; dishonesty in exams, papers; work done for one course and submitted for another; deliberate falsification of data; interference with other students' work; misrepresenting yourself (or having someone misrepresent you) as present during roll call; and copyright violations.

Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community.

Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency.

Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU email and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU email regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies.

In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

INTEGRITY & PROFESSIONALISM

Specific to this class, it is a violation of the Integrity Code to manufacture information — such as scripting quotes for an interview, making up names or other information or staging multimedia to represent any news event. **No reenactments are allowed.** Other potential violations include using someone else's writing, video or audio as your own.

All work for this class must be original and must be completed specifically for this class. No duplicate work will be accepted. If there is ever a question, please ask us before you hand it in.

You will not be able to get a grade in this class for work completed in your Reporting of Public Affairs course. While we may end up using material from that class on our website, you may not get a grade for them in COMM 621. Additionally, on production days, while you may end up using material from the five assignments, you will still be expected to contribute additional stories. For example, if you're assigned to be a reporter for a particular issue, your most recent assignment could be published, but you would still need to report, write and produce an additional story.

You are expected to act in a professional manner to meet deadlines, solve problems, cooperate with your peers and generally contribute to a positive class environment. We will evaluate you on your professional demeanor in the classroom. As such, you should not disrupt class with personal conversations, by accepting phone calls or by completing homework for other classes.

HOW TO SUCCEED

- Actively contribute to the team and complete the job you're responsible for.
- Find a way to get your story done.
- Show up with a good attitude and be ready to work under deadline pressure.
- Backup your work — corrupted/lost files aren't an excuse.
- Come to class, participate and turn in work on time.
- Keep us informed if you're struggling, behind or need to miss class.
- And, let us know if you have comments, issues or suggestions.

SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to change. We will post updated versions on our website and also announce changes in class when they happen. *Assignments* are due the day they're listed.

| SKILLS | | ISSUES | |
|-----------------|--|----------------|--|
| AUG. 28 | WELCOME | OCT. 16 | ISSUE 1 |
| SEPT. 4 | MOBILE REPORTING | OCT. 23 | ISSUE 2 |
| SEPT. 11 | MOBILE VIDEO <i>Mobile Reporting Assignment</i> | OCT. 30 | ISSUE 3 |
| SEPT. 18 | LIVE TWEETING <i>Mobile Video Assignment</i> | NOV. 6 | ISSUE 4 |
| SEPT. 25 | COMMUNITY REPORTING <i>Live Tweeting Assignment</i> | NOV. 13 | ISSUE 5 |
| OCT. 2 | A LA CARTE: EMERGING MEDIA <i>Community Reporting Assignment</i> | NOV. 20 | NO CLASS FRIDAY CLASSES MEET |
| OCT. 9 | ISSUE PLANNING <i>Emerging Media Assignment</i> | NOV. 27 | ISSUE 6 |
| | | DEC. 4 | ISSUE 7 |
| | | DEC. 11 | FINAL 11:20 A.M. |