

News Center Practicum

JOU4201 | Spring 2022

Joint lecture (with JOU4202): Mondays from 3:00 p.m. to 4:55 p.m. @ [McCarty Hall A #2186](#)

Digital production shifts: One “digital desk” shift per week, as assigned, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Innovation News Center (located on the second and third floors of Weimer Hall)

Instructor: Gabriella Paul

Digital Desk Editor, Innovation News Center (INC)

University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications

Office: 2300 Weimer Hall (cubicles near western windows)

Office Hours: By appointment

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The prerequisite for this course is JOU3101. There is no required text for this class.

Course Goals

This three-credit practicum focuses on the fundamentals of digital news production. Our weekly class time, on Mondays, will prepare you for your newsroom shifts at the digital desk in the INC.

Students in this practicum will learn:

- What digital production is and the role it plays in modern journalism
- How to edit a news story from raw story format to publication
- What makes a story newsworthy for a local, statewide and national audience
- How to leverage WUFT News audience analytics to increase readership and audience engagement
- How to engage with WUFT News audience members via phone, social media and newsletters
- The basics of WordPress, Adobe Creative Cloud and Google Analytics

By the semester’s end, you will be able to:

- Edit, build and publish content through WordPress
- Craft, schedule and analyze social media posts for WUFT News
- Conduct comprehensive audience analytics reports for WUFT.org and social media channels
- Produce timely original content like news briefs or breaking news that’s expected of digital producers in the industry

Course Overview

Students are required to attend weekly class time on Mondays from 3:00 to 4:55 p.m. Lecture time will look different as the semester unfolds. It will include workshops where you will learn new production skills, digital strategy meetings led by the advanced producers (students enrolled in JOU4202) and Q&A time with guest speakers, including former members of the WUFT team who now produce for a career.

This is the tentative weekly schedule for Monday class and the digital skills you will learn this semester.

Monday class meeting schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 10): Meet the digital production team

- What is digital production and the role it plays in modern journalism?
- What does my digital production shift look like in the INC?
- Introductions: What are you hoping to gain from this semester? What background, skills and aspirations do you bring to the team?

Week 2 (Jan. 17): Holiday - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

- No class or shifts on Monday.
- Newsroom shifts remain scheduled Tuesday through Friday.

Week 3 (Jan. 24): Copy editing and headline writing

- Understand and practice the process of copy editing for digital publication.
- Understand and practice the rules of engagement with WUFT News reporters, editors and instructors when discussing copy edits
- Why accuracy matters in an age of growing misinformation.
- Review AP Style and successful news story structure

Week 4 (Jan. 31): Publishing in WordPress

- A full rundown of the WUFT.org content management system.
- Learn how to construct various layouts in WordPress and to publish or schedule content on WUFT.org.
- Learn how search engine optimization to improve organic traffic to the news site
- Understand the flow of stories in the WUFT Newsroom from reporting to publication.

Week 5 (Feb. 7): Social media for digital news

- What makes for compelling journalistic content on social media?
- What are the different ways a news organization can use social media to engage, retain and grow an audience?
- How to craft, schedule and manage social media posts on Social News Desk, Tweetdeck, Facebook Business Suite and Later.com.
- Introduction to audience analytics.

Week 6 (Feb. 14): Audience engagement & social media analytics

- Fielding direct calls, questions, news tips and/ or criticisms from audience members via WUFT phone, email and social media.
- Understand rules of engagement for a digital news producer on social media.
- How monitoring trending topics can inform digital production decisions
- How to leverage your personal social media account to improve WUFT News website and social media traffic
- Introduction to in-house social media analytics softwares that are used at the highest levels of the news industry including Tweetdeck, Social News Desk and Facebook Business Suite

Week 7 (Feb. 21): Guest speaker

- Lokela Blanc - Social visuals producer at USA Today

Week 8 (Feb. 28): Understanding website traffic & Google Analytics

- How audience, acquisition, behavior and interest reports completed in Google Analytics can inform your decisions as a digital producer
- How to leverage Google Analytics to create comprehensive statistics on your performance as a digital producer for future employers

Week 9 (March 14): Producing original content

- What kind of digital news can be reported while on a 4-hour digital shift?
- How can you leverage social media, Google Trends, news tips and press releases to identify local news to be reported?
- What makes a story newsworthy, particularly for *our* audience?

Week 10 (March 21): Guest speakers

- Kristen Altus and Amy Nelson - Digital production assistant and YouTube producer with Fox News

Week 11 (March 28): Newsgathering & News Literacy

- Crash course on news from around the state.
- Introduction to Feedly and The Point.
- How does The Point serve as a direct referrer to site traffic?
- What is the growing role of newsletters in digital journalism?

Week 12 (April 4): Guest speaker

- Dy'Min Cannon - Digital producer at CNN

Week 13 (April 11): Portfolio projects

- Students enrolled in JOU4202 will present their semester-long projects, in which they implemented an innovative digital strategy to a component of WUFT News news workflow

Week 14 (April 18): Portfolio projects

- Presentations continued

WUFT Newsroom shifts

You will be expected to complete one digital production shift per week in the INC for the duration of the spring semester. Digital production shifts are Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. We will assign shifts by the start of week two based on your availability.

I will serve as your supervisor during these shifts.

This means that — unless I say otherwise — please do not press publish on any story until I've approved it. In the event of my absence, you may report to Ethan Magoc for supervision.

WUFT News is a professional newsroom. Throughout this semester, you will be acting in a professional capacity as digital producers. Your digital production shifts are an opportunity to apply what you've learned during Monday class in an operating newsroom setting. Therefore, I expect you to treat this experience with the professionalism and seriousness that you would an internship. Depending on how you use your time this semester, you can walk away with a competitive portfolio for digital news production.

Past students in this course have been immediately hired upon graduation, in part, because of the effort they put forth to improve their skills and knowledge via this course.

Calendar

You can find the course calendar on Canvas. It will be updated with the official newsroom schedule and hard deadlines for your monthly logs and LinkedIn Learning certification(s). I recommend treating this as a work schedule and downloading/ importing the information into whichever daily scheduling system you prefer (Canvas, Outlook, Gmail, Passion Planner, back of your hand, etc.)

The coverage calendar “WUFT Future File” acts as a repository of predicted or recurring news events in our coverage area, like city council and county commission meetings. You can refer to this calendar for a preview of which new stories may be coming down the production pipeline or to identify which gaps in coverage *you* might be able to fill while on shift. You can find the calendar [here](#) or on the homepage of the newsroom intranet.

Grading

50% monthly logs

- This is the main way I will assess your work this semester. Therefore, it is in your interest to treat your monthly logs as a comprehensive review of everything you accomplished during your digital production shifts for that month. I will grade you on the completeness of your log, the effort you put in to learn new digital skills, how well you used your time at the superdesk (e.g. when things were slow: did you look for stories to cover, engage our audience, work on your certification, offer new ideas) and your overall thoughtfulness about how we - as a digital team - can do better. You can treat the monthly log rubric on Canvas as a general framework to track your web production from month to month.
- **Logs are due at 11:59 p.m. on the last day of the month on Canvas (see assignments).** I will deduct a letter grade for each day the log is late. I strongly recommend keeping a working document of “log-worthy” items to add to *during* your shifts to avoid having to track down everything at the end of the month. There will be a monthly log due for the months of January, February, March and April.

15% digital production quality

- This is how I will assess the *quality* of your digital production once a month this semester. I will evaluate your body of work—based on what we have learned in class and had the opportunity to practice in the newsroom—against the industry standard. This is how you will be able to identify your strengths and areas for improvement.
- You do not have to submit anything for this assignment. Your monthly log serves as your digital production repository.

20% attendance, professionalism and communication

- I will treat you with the same respect and flexibility that's offered to professional digital producers in an operating newsroom. With that said, I will assess you on attendance, professionalism and communication.
 - Attendance (50 points)
 - Were you on time for your digital production shifts and did you stay for the entire duration? If something prevented you from doing that, did you communicate with as much advance notice as possible? Were you focused on web production for the entirety of your shift?
 - Were you on time for Monday class and did you stay for the entire duration?
 - Each unexcused tardy or absence will result in a 10-point deduction.
 - Professionalism (50 points)
 - If seeking to swap a shift with a co-producer, did you do so in a professional manner?
 - When in the newsroom or representing WUFT News over Zoom, did you dress and act professionally? The full [dress code policy](#) can be found on the newsroom intranet.
 - Each infringement of professionalism will result in a 10-point deduction.
 - Communication (50 points)
 - Did you respond in a timely manner to all communications in Slack, Canvas and email? Were you actively engaged in the Slack thread(s) for daily workflow during your shift? Did you respond to the feedback and guidance of any 4202 co-producers during your shift? Overall, did you conduct yourself with an attitude, work ethic and communication style befitting of a professional digital producer?
 - Each case in which communication disrupts the class or news flow will result in a 10-point deduction.

10% weekly assignments

- There will be 8 to 10 assignments throughout the semester that mirror the syllabus (see Canvas).
- **Most assignments will be due *before Monday class*. For credit, you will need to submit these assignments via Canvas before 3:00 p.m.** You will receive a 100% if you do this. You will receive a zero if you don't. These assignments are designed to introduce you to digital skills that we will be learning in Monday class. This will allow us to optimize our class time and treat it as a "digital skills workshop."
- Some assignments will be completed and submitted *during Monday class*, too.

5% LinkedIn Learning certification(s)

- This practicum will teach you the basics of digital news production. But it should also prepare you to be a lifelong student in an ever-changing industry.
- This semester you will choose at least one LinkedIn Learning certification in the area(s) of digital production that most interest you or where you want to grow your skills. All content can be accessed for free through UF. You will choose from a catalog of courses that spans the Adobe Creative Cloud, audience analytics, deep editing and headline writing (see full list on Canvas). You may also earn a certification that is not listed, if you can justify its relevance to digital production.
- **To receive credit, you must earn at least one LinkedIn Learning certification *and* have completed at least two hours of total course time.** To meet this threshold, you can complete two courses on the same topic or mix and match . You will include an update on your progress in your monthly log. By the semester's end, you must upload the certificate(s) you earned to Canvas. You will receive 100% if you do this. You will receive a zero if you don't.

Information on UF's grading policies for assigning grade points can be found [here](#).

The official university policy on attendance can be found [here](#).

Technology and Communication

In this course, you are working as digital producers. During Monday class, you are encouraged to bring laptops/mobile devices for hands-on learning of digital tools and the production process. For your newsroom shifts, however, you will work on the desktop computers provided at the superdesk.

All assignments will be posted, submitted and graded through Canvas.

Our Slack channel **#digitaldesk** will be our day-to-day means of communication. This is *your* space. Take it up. Here you can expect:

- An early morning rundown by Ethan (possible story ideas, most read stories from yesterday, and most clicked stories in the newsletter)
- A daily wrap-up from the producers on desk (what you accomplished, what's leftover for tomorrow, moments of genius, etc.)
- Breakout DMs with the 3 to 4 producers on desk Monday through Friday to deal with the daily humdrum
- Space to collaborate, brainstorm, share news and bounce ideas off each other.

My preferred mode of communication is via direct message on Slack, especially for news-related business. I will also be readily available in the newsroom during your digital production shifts.

Most details about how to function for WUFT – from finding stories to writing headlines — are on its intranet (<http://www.wuft.org/newsroom>). The username is **newsroom** and password is **INCnewsr00m2021*** (the O's in newsroom are zeros).

COVID-19 Precautions

You are expected to wear approved face coverings at all times during your shift and within UF buildings, including the INC.

- The newsroom and our assigned classroom has enough capacity to maintain physical distancing. Please do not move chairs, desks or stations.
- Sanitizing supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) are available in the newsroom and in our assigned classroom to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of class.
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. [Click here for UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.](#)

Diversity and Inclusion

The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications Department of Journalism embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We expect each of our journalism courses to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

You will do your best work as a journalist when you feel comfortable bringing your whole self to the table. Please let me know what I can do to make sure you feel respected and welcomed in this space.

- If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official records, please let me know.
- If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you.
- If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, Joanna Hernandez and Ryan Vasquez, co-chairs of the [CJC Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access committee](#), are excellent resources. You can email them at jhernandez@jou.ufl.edu and rvasquez@wuft.org.

- If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it.

I am committed to creating an inclusive environment in which all students are respected and valued. I will not tolerate disrespectful language or behavior on the basis of age, ability, color/ethnicity/race, gender identity/expression, marital/parental status, military/veteran's status, national origin, political affiliation, religious/spiritual beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or other visible or non-visible differences.

Especially as a team of community storytellers, our differences will be our greatest strengths. I look forward to discovering those differences together and learning from each other.

Students With Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with disabilities and who have registered with the UF Dean of Students Office. This office will provide relative documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodations.

UF Disability Resource Center: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Counseling Center

Personal or health issues such as depression, anxiety, stress, career uncertainty and or relationships can interfere with your ability to function as a student. UF's Counseling and Wellness Center (CWC) offers support for students in need. CWC is located at 3190 Radio Road and open each weekday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

UF Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>

Resources

The University of Florida offers an abundance of resources that can help students throughout their academic career. Each student is encouraged to make use of these resources, which include but are not limited to the library, tutoring, career resource center, etc.

UF Student Resources: <http://ufadvising.ufl.edu/student-resources.aspx>

Academic Integrity

The College of Journalism and Communications is committed to upholding the university's academic honor code. Academic dishonesty of any kind shall not be tolerated in this course. The university's guidelines provide additional details, which each student is expected to understand. To be certain, academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to using any work done by another person and submitting it for a class assignment; submitting work done for another class; copying and pasting text written by another person without quotation marks and or without complete attribution, which usually includes a link to the original work; using images produced

by someone else without explicit permission by the creator. Attribution is not the same as permission. Most images found online are not free to use.

UF Student Honor Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the final weeks of the semester. Students will be given specific dates when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.