

# Advanced News Center Practicum

JOU4202 | Spring 2021

**Joint lecture (with JOU4201):** 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 is the next step beyond the essentials of digital news production.

Students in this practicum will learn:

- How to leverage advanced production methods, like SEO and A/B headline testing to maximize audience impact
- How to apply audience analytics and a cycle of creative experimentation to grow the WUFT news site and social media channels
- How to build and publish featured content through Wordpress, including using Block Builder and basic functions of HTML code for custom layouts
- How to supervise beginning digital producers to ensure their growth while maximizing team results

## **Course Overview**

As advanced digital producers enrolled in JOU4202, you are leaders within the team. Set the tone for an exciting semester of original ideas and innovative thinking, much the same way your 4202 colleagues did for you when you first joined the newsroom.

## **Monday Class**

**Joint lecture:** I will often require you to attend the first half of Monday class (from 3:00 p.m. to 3:55 p.m.). During this time, JOU4201 students will be learning and workshopping digital production skills (WordPress, crafting social media posts and audience analytics, et al). This will

allow you to refresh your digital skills and develop your soft skills as a leader. I may also tag you to co-teach on a day when 4201s are learning a digital skill you are particularly proficient in – or that relates to your portfolio project. Guest speakers will also be visiting during this hour.

**Digital strategy meetings:** The second half of Monday class (4:00 p.m. to 4:55 p.m.) will be treated like a digital strategy meeting, during which the team will debrief the week’s website and social media content, analyze audience metrics and brainstorm new digital strategies to be implemented. You are expected to be well-versed in the website and social media analytics *before class* so that we can spend the hour discussing findings. This time will also serve as a space to workshop ideas and tackle hurdles you might be facing in your portfolio project (see grades section of syllabus).

## **Monday joint lecture 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 be your supervisor for 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 is a professional newsroom. Your digital production shifts are an opportunity to apply what you've learned 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 course certification. 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 and to identify which gaps in coverage *you* may be able to fill while on shift. You can find the calendar on the homepage of the newsroom intranet (see Technology and Communication section for log in).

## Grading

### 35% 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. I will grade you on the quality of the work produced this semester and 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) as well as your thoughtfulness about how we - as a digital team - can do better. You can use the [monthly log guide](#) (also 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.

### 35% 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 producing for the entirety of your shift? Each unexcused 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 over

Zoom, did you dress and act professionally? The full [dress code policy](#) can be found on the newsroom intranet.

- 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 offer consistent support and guidance to the 4201s during Monday class and digital shifts? Did you help set the tone and lead conversations in the #digitaldesk Slack? Overall, did you conduct yourself with an attitude, work ethic and communication style befitting of a supervising digital producer?

### 30% portfolio project

- You will develop one main idea from conception to execution over the course of the semester (see assignment in Canvas). The idea is to develop an innovation for our platform that you can show to a potential employee. Being able to show real results, reflected in analysis, stemming from your innovation will make you a competitive candidate in the job market for digital producers. I am very flexible on this, and I encourage you to focus on something that will retain your interest and energy throughout the spring semester. The only limit is that it must justifiably fit within the realm of digital production. I will work with you at the beginning of the semester to identify and refine what this idea looks like for you. **Note: Your monthly logs will also serve as intermittent checkpoints on your progress.**

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 Team Huddles, you are encouraged to bring laptops/ mobile devices for hands-on workshopping of digital production. For your newsroom shifts, however, you will work on the desktop computers provided at the superdesk.

All assignments (monthly logs and final portfolio project) 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 for the producing crew on desk Monday - 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.

For class- or grade-related concerns or questions, you are also welcome to email me at [gabbympaul@ufl.edu](mailto:gabbympaul@ufl.edu).

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](mailto:jhernandez@jou.ufl.edu) and [rvasquez@wuft.org](mailto: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 one of 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>.