

MMC 6936 Digital Storytelling

Spring 2024

Meets Tuesdays, 4:05-7:05 p.m., Jan. 9 to April 23

Room 3324, Weimer Hall

University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 p.m. and by appointment

Course Objectives

Welcome to Digital Storytelling! Students can excel in this class without technical bravado or previous video-making experience – all you'll need is the desire to produce digital communication that makes an impact.

For students with a journalism background, parts of this course may serve as a review. For others, it'll be a paradigm shift away from academic writing.

This graduate-level course dives into journalism basics and focuses on transferring those skills to produce multi-dimensional stories for a digital audience's consumption.

This is a writing-intensive course. Writing is the base from which we will build creative stories as we experiment with different techniques and digital storytelling platforms.

We'll explore narrative traditions, and students will draw from their experiences to garner deeper empathy when sharing the narratives of others.

The course starts with journalism basics – writing, reporting and thinking like a journalist. Personal essay writing. Writing to the visual. We go into audio reporting, cellphone reporting and video production. Focus on the "digital" component includes researching and analyzing current and evolving industry trends.

Over the semester, your work will include combinations of the written word, photos, video, audio, graphics, apps, social media and other emerging digital storytelling tools.

Each desktop in our class is equipped with Adobe editing software that you can use for your projects. But you are welcome to utilize any video-editing platform that you prefer.

By the end of this course, you'll have produced two digital stories, which combined accounts for 50% of your final grade.

Inclusive Class Environment

- **As communicators**, we tell stories of a community and all individuals who make up a given community. We serve, help and inform everyone.
- **To best carry out** these ideals, we must exhibit respect, openness and an understanding for all people. These expectations are to be carried into our field work and into our classroom.
- **Our differences serve** as a strength that we embrace as we discuss relevant story ideas, developing contacts within a community or even storytelling techniques. Exposure to different perspectives, values, ideals and experiences will make us all better, more compassionate and understanding journalists. We all learn best and maximize our outcomes when we feel comfortable.
- **Please let me know** what I can do to make sure you feel respected and welcomed.

Course Outcomes

Students of this graduate-level course acquire a basic understanding of:

- **Journalistic writing structure** and the transferring of these skills to create stories based on facts for digital storytelling in the field of communications.
- **The unique opportunities** for and challenges of digital storytelling and the multiple platforms available.
- **Gathering, producing, publishing** digital content using the written word, images, audio, video, data, social media.
- **Why fairness, objectivity, credibility, diversity** and other ethical considerations matter in storytelling.
- **Key industry trends** and fundamental digital reporting and storytelling concepts.
- **Working to produce stories** designed primarily for online consumption.

- **Using social media** to distribute stories, build a following and “brand” oneself as a digital storyteller.

Multidimensional Goals

The University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications Division of Graduate Studies and Research embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by our differences and many dimensions, including race, ethnicity, national origins, gender, gender identity, sexuality, class and religion.

We expect each of our journalism courses to help foster an understanding of the peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

Noteworthy (Important to Know)

Each student is responsible for:

- Reading, understanding and abiding by this syllabus’ content and directives.
- Abiding by any announcements or directives that I send to the class via University of Florida email or our course Canvas. For example, expect to see Canvas postings and or emails concerning relevant matters that will be discussed at our next gathering.
- Completing – or not completing – all assigned readings, as related pop quizzes and class participation, will affect grading.

Each student should know that:

- This course will include in- and outside-of-class assignments.
- I welcome **emails**. Make sure the **Subject Line** includes **MMC 6936** and a one or two word explaining the topic. I give priority to emails addressed this way.
- Email responses from me will be short and sweet and within 24 hours.

Required Texts

Required reading material will be made available via links to online stories and articles as well as digital handouts, including chapters from:

- “Melvin Mencher’s News Reporting and Writing,” 12th Edition (2011), Melvin Mencher, New York: McGraw Hill.

- *"Aim for the Heart: Write, Shoot, Report, Produce for TV and Multimedia (3rd Ed.)," Al Tompkins © 2018 CQ Press.*
- *"Digital Storytelling Cookbook," Joe Lambert © 2010 Digital Diner Press*
- *"Seven Stages: Story and the Human Experience," Joe Lambert, Digital Diner Press.*
- *"On Writing Well," William Zinsser, 2016, Harper Perennial.*

Other Reading and Viewing

I'll be emailing you plenty of links and reading materials and uploading PDFs to Canvas. Some readings will be of

- *Journalism websites, including those of national, regional, local, alternative and campus newspapers*
- *National, regional, local and campus magazines and broadcast outlets (television/radio)*
- *Those created specifically to produce and present digital storytelling*

Production Tools and Data Storage

This course requires use of digital production equipment and editing software for graphics, audio, photography and videography.

Students in this course will need:

- *A laptop – desktops are available during class and when class is not in session.*
- *A capable camera – smartphones take great still photography and video.*
- *Set of headphones –headphone use when working on your projects is a sign of respect for others.*

Editing Platforms –Adobe Premiere and/or iMovie:

- *iMac desktops in our classroom, Room 3324, have access to editing software (for example, iMovie, Premiere, Photoshop, Lightroom).*
- *As a backup plan for cloud storage, additional digital-storage equipment is recommended.*
 - *SDHC cards should have a minimum 32 GB capacity and data speeds of 50 mbps and Class 10 UHS 3.*
 - *It's also a good investment to have your own external hard drive (minimum 500 GB; 1 TB recommended).*

- o *Flash or thumb drives could work as a temporary solution but might not be suitable for saving large amounts of data*

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

My students can check out cellphone-reporting gear from the G020 Equipment Room. But you must follow all established student/course access policies.

- o *These policies are in two documents – Spring 2024 Gear PickUp: Return Loading ZonePolicy and Spring 2024 MMC 6936 GearPolicy Agreement*
- o *We will go over both documents on the first day of class*
- o *Your signature is required for permission to take out equipment*
- o *Your signed agreement will be available in a folder in the Files section of Canvas*

Important: There are a limited number of kits for this class. Deadlines won't be adjusted in the event that no kit is available for checkout. Plan accordingly.

Class Policies

Be Respectful.

- *PLEASE BE ON TIME and stay until class is dismissed. Arriving late or leaving early is rude. AND we need you there to elevate everyone's experience.*
- *ENHANCE THE LEARNING environment for everyone by:*
 - o *Limiting any unnecessary distractions during lectures, critiques.*
 - o *Refraining from cellphone and laptop use unless part of discussion.*

Attendance.

- *ABSENCE IS NO EXCUSE for not handing in work on time.*

- *REGARDLESS OF THE REASONS* for being absent, a student who misses too many classes risks not mastering the coursework. In such a case, they may withdraw from the course, per UF policy, to avoid a failing grade:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

- *DO NOT GIVE ME EXCUSE NOTES* from your doctor, your mom, etc.
 - *IF I NEED DOCUMENTATION*, I will ask you for it.
- *IN GENERAL*, here's the way absences are being recorded:
 - *First absence*, 100% excused
 - *Second absence*, 80%
 - *Third absence*, 70%
 - *Fourth and following absences*, 0%
- *HOWEVER, REMEMBER TO EMAIL* me before the start of class to let me know that you will be absent— and if you don't, you will receive a zero for that session.
- *INTERRUPTION OF YOUR peers'* learning process with late arrivals or early departures could be considered a cause to lower your grade.

[Find more information in the university attendance policies here.](#)

Deadlines Are Deadlines.

- *You and I must have agreed upon an extension before deadline.* Otherwise, an assignment submitted late may be graded as low as a zero.
- *If an illness or a personal emergency prevents you from completing an assignment on time, give me advance notice as soon as possible.*
- *Generally speaking, we will function as if working in a professional workplace. In the real world, you don't show up for work (on time) or don't do your work (on time) – you risk losing your job. In other words, students who don't come to class and or miss deadlines will suffer consequences.*
- *Communication is key.*

A Few Words on Writing Assignments.

- *Writing is a main component of this course. For a typical story, I am looking for nicely focused, organized and confident writing that leaves the reader wanting more.*

- *If you think you can use an automated AI writing system and I won't notice, you are mistaken. We'll talk about usage of AI writing apps and explore how they can help or hurt your brand.*
- *In our class, you'll learn about news writing using the inverted pyramid format. You'll also learn how to find anecdotal ledes that summarizes why THIS person, activity, agency, etc., matters NOW as you learn techniques that otherwise helps the reader understand why this is a story worth reading.*
- *Your writing needs to exhibit proper, efficient use of background (research) information that doesn't slow the story down; transitions/quotes/attribution that helps move a story along and includes a diversity of sourcing; avoids errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation or AP Style, wordiness, prepositional traps, run-on sentences and demonstrates quality proofreading.*

Accommodations for Special Needs

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/> *(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.*

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 to 5.

UF Counseling and Wellness Center

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc> *(For various locations, hours, resources, etc.)*

Plagiarism, Academic Honesty and Conflicts of Interest:

Academic Integrity

- *The College of Journalism and Communications is committed to upholding the university's academic honor code. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated.*
- *Attribution is not the same as permission. Most online images are not free to use.*

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- *Using any work done by another person or automated system, such as an AI-text generator, and submitting it for a class assignment, quiz or exam.*
- *Submitting work you did for another class or course.*
- *Copying and pasting text written by another person or automated system without use of quotation marks AND complete attribution, including a URL (online) or page number (print).*
- *Paraphrasing text written by others, such that it constitutes de facto plagiarism (e.g. word substitutions).*
- *Sharing answers to exams or quizzes online or with anyone.*

Avoid Conflicts of Interest at All Times.

- *Students in this course shall not be used as sources for your field assignments. The same applies to relatives, roommates, friends (from campus or back home), sorority sisters, fraternity brothers, or members of any other co-curricular or extracurricular organizations to which you belong.*
- *Interviewing UF faculty, staff or employees is allowed provided they and the student do not have a prior relationship - and only with prior approval from me.*

Source Protocol

In Nearly All Cases, Multiple Sourcing Is Required.

- *By sources, I mean interacting with as many real live human beings - at a minimum, three - and not simply relying on organizational statements, news releases or websites.*
- *This also involves contacting as many people or obtaining as much related documentation as possible. It is wise to interview as many sources as possible, so you have more than you need for your story.*

Sources Are Best Interviewed Either in Person, On Zoom or the Phone.

- *Email interviews are permitted only with my permission in advance of the particular interview.*
- *Sometimes a source will want you to let him read a story before it's submitted or published. DO NOT DO THIS!*

All Facts and Opinions in Your Story Must Be Attributed to Sources.

- *Anonymous or off-the-record material is not acceptable any more than the use of fictional people.*
- *If there's a compelling reason to not use a source's full name in a story, it must be explained to the instructor in advance for approval.*

Focus on Fairness and Accuracy.

- *You will pursue storytelling that is fair, accurate and complete - and based on information gathered from a variety of sources.*
- *A greater understanding of the cultural and ethnic differences in our society will enhance the learning experience and help you develop habits and sensitivities that will be of great value in your workplaces and communities.*
- *This emphasis on different voices and sources is not a focus just on race and ethnicity or sexual orientation, but also age, education, gender, geography, occupation, politics, religion, socioeconomics, etc.*
- *Submitted assignments not abiding these sourcing, diversity and interview mandates may result in a lowered grade.*

Course Grading

While I will do my best to be fair and balanced, grading for this course will be, at times, subjective. Each assignment will be judged through the lens of professional quality journalism and communications as it pertains to accuracy, craftsmanship, effort and enterprise.

Grading Scale.

Grades are rounded to the nearest whole point: 89.4 rounds down to 89 (B+), while 89.5 rounds up to 90 (A-).

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76

C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-63
E	<60

Assignments and Grading Rubric.

15%	Weekly Adobe Express Assignment – Learning Journal (due 11:59 p.m. Sundays)
5%	Digital Storytelling example (show class one over semester)
20%	Attendance/Class Participation /Homework
10%	Audio interview/postcard
25%	Midterm Project
25%	<u>Final Project</u>
100%	Final Grade

Assignments and Grading Rubric Explained.

15% – Weekly Adobe Express Assignment (Learning Journal).

Instead of weekly quizzes over the readings, I've found it more useful for students to actually reflect in writing on the readings. You may also raise questions about readings and/or lectures/class discussions, or anything at all. Consider it your journal. Please submit by 11:59 p.m. Sundays. EACH DAY LATE, 10% OFF – can submit up until day before next class – after that, it gets a zero.

5% – Digital Storytelling Examples.

To start seeing and exploring various methods of digital storytelling – and applying it to your work – you will be responsible for **bringing to class an example of a good/bad, effective/ineffective, or ethical/unethical digitally told communication** strategy. For example, these could involve an online advertisement, political spots, health campaign, advocacy, a news publication story or opinion piece, etc. Keep the example as concrete as possible for your colleagues. You may want to choose something relevant to your career interest.

I will assign each student a date to present digital storytelling examples. At least 24 hours before your presentation time arrives, **email me a link to your example and in the email include**

your thoughts on how it connects to at least one concept/principle covered in the readings.

15% – Attendance/Class Participation/Homework

Attendance is taken at 4:05 p.m., at the start of each class session.

- If you enter class late, please do so with the least amount of disruption.
- During the first break, be sure to let me know that you are present so that your attendance can be recorded.
- Students who are absent receive 0% (Zero) – unless you've notified me before the start of class via email that you will not be in attendance. This will prevent you from receiving a 0% for attendance that day – unless this is your fourth, or more, absence. You do not need to submit an excuse letter. See below for how absences are being recorded in this class (also stated above in the "Attendance" section on page 5):
 - First Excused Absence – 100% excused (not counted as an absence)
 - Second Excused Absence – 80% (out of 100% for daily attendance)
 - Third Excused Absence – 70%
 - Fourth and Additional Absences – 0%

Class Participation

- *You are expected to participate in classroom discussions.*
- *Every week, we will do writing prompts—writing for several minutes according to a theme/question/issue that I bring.*
- *While you don't have to share every time, please plan to share **at least three times** throughout the semester. I will keep track of this on Canvas and it will count it toward your participation grade.*
- *Don't be nervous about sharing your writing. This is just practice, and you'll be amazed at actually how good your writing can be when you do it quickly, and without the burden of thinking it has to be perfect.*

Homework

- You are expected to complete homework when assigned.
- Your first assignment will be a 300-word story that focuses on an interesting aspect about one of your classmates – your interview partner. I will also use it as a diagnostic writing assignment – to see how you write.

10% – Audio postcard/interview

This is an audio story. We will spend a couple classes covering the basics of sound/audio reporting. You can either do a profile of a place or a person.

25% – Midterm Project

The midterm project will be a digitally produced story that focuses on a personal topic of your choosing and comes out of the StoryCircle that we will have in class. We will use the StoryCenter theory/methodology.

25% – Final Project

The final project will be comprised of a written script that is complemented with a digitally produced story that focuses on a professional topic and involves reporting/research.

COVID-19 and other Health-Related Practices

- If you request a face-to-face meeting with me for any reason, I might ask you to mask up.
- Some people might feel more comfortable practicing physical distancing (6 feet between individuals). Please be conscious of the feelings of others and maintain appropriate spacing in class.
- Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down.
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 or any respiratory or health-related symptoms ([Click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), DO NOT COME TO CLASS. Rather, practice self-care and get medical advice. And email me to let me know what's going on.
- Course materials will be provided to you if you let me know about your absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. [Find more information in the university attendance policies.](#)