MMC 5427 – Summer 2015
Research Methods in Digital Communication
University of Florida, Online Masters in Digital Media
3 Credit Hours
Section 72A6

Instructor: Kenny Zaron, M.S.
Email: kzaron@ufl.edu (Please put MMC5427 in subject line)
Response time: I will do my best to respond within 24 hours during weekdays. I will also try my best to check email on the weekends too, but plan on any email sent after 5 p.m. on Friday to be replied to on Monday.
Virtual office hours: By appointment on Connect
Connect Room: https://ufcoj.adobeconnect.com/mmc5427_summer15/
Course time: Wednesday 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Course website: Canvas - http://lss.at.ufl.edu

Course Overview

What you will learn
This course will help you think about how you use digital media and enable you to gain an effective working knowledge of methods and strategies to use when evaluating online communication tools. We often focus on discovering the meaning behind information through research and development. As a result of taking this course, students will learn how marketing on the web functions and how that relates to web design as well as the tools used to collect data on the web. You will understand Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and analytics tools, and how to successfully research and position your online marketing efforts. Finally, you will learn about communicating with consumers, stakeholders, and the general public in the online marketplace, as well as the costs, risks, and benefits associated therein.

Expectations
Students in this course are expected to attend class lectures and participate in a constructive way. They are also expected to communicate with both the instructor and classmates in a professional way. This includes using professional language when presenting in front of the class, in written assignments, in the class chat box, and in any email communications. Students are expected to turn in assignments on time, stay current with assigned readings, and be a dependable contributor to group project(s).

Vantage Point
The WDOC program utilizes a system called Vantage Point in addition to the Adobe Connect classroom software. Through Vantage Point, the instructor will be able to view student webcams throughout the duration of class time, not just when students are actively presenting. Students should be aware of this arrangement and be prepared to be constructive classroom citizens at all times.
Assignments
In this course, students are expected to write weekly blog posts responding to course readings and to comment on other students’ blog posts in a meaningful way. Students are also responsible for leading two discussion sessions during the term and three current events discussions. Students will also work on a group SEO/Google Analytics campaign for a company. This will require background research and a written report.

Reading Requirements
There are weekly readings required for this course. The posted readings should be read for the week listed on the syllabus and not as homework for the following class. Students will be responsible to check their syllabus for weekly assigned readings. 12 of our 14 weeks of class have assigned readings. Students are expected to have read assigned readings before class each week. While each specific reading text may not be addressed individually during class, the base of knowledge acquired by reading the assigned material will give students an enhanced ability to understand and participate in the class lecture and discussion each week. The final pages of this syllabus contain a calendar for this course, and the assigned readings for each week of class.

Recommended Readings/Resources:

1. Search Engine Marketing, Inc.: Driving Search Traffic to Your Company’s Web Site by Mike Moran and Bill Hunt

Course Structure
For the initial hour-and-a-half of each class, the instructor will lecture on the weekly topics. During this time, students will be continuously asked to engage in the online dialog about the material being covered and ask questions as they arise. The instructor may facilitate in-class break-out activities during this time to determine that students have mastered the concepts. The following 50 minutes will consist of a discussion leader presentation. The instructor may lead a follow-up discussion after this presentation. The final portion of class will be devoted to a SEO/Analytics group presentation. On weeks when there is not a group presentation, final project groups may be allowed to meet during class time if instructor provides time.

Grading Scale (Round up to next percentage point at .51% or above)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82-86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>72-76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>62-66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>below 60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grading Breakdown:
Your grade in this course will be determined as follows:

- Class attendance and participation in class discussions: 10%
- Discussion leader presentations: 20%
- Analytics Assignment: 7.5%
- Usability Testing Assignment: 7.5%
- Group SEO/Analytics Presentation: 15%
- SEO and Google Analytics Final Project: 40%
  - Situation Analysis...10%
  - Peer Evaluation...5%
  - Week 16 Presentation...10%
  - Final Report on SEO/Analytics Outcomes...15%

Individual Assignments

Class Participation & Discussion:

Much of our class time will be spent in discussion. **You may be called upon during class to share your thoughts about the topic being discussed.** Completing the readings before each class and paying full attention during the online discussions will be crucial in being able to participate fully. This portion of your grade should be the easiest to complete as you should all be interested in the topics already and want to engage in discussions on the topics. There is no way to participate in discussion without attending the online class time. **As such, any unexcused absence will result in a 10-point deduction in your overall participation and discussion grade.**

Make-up policy: I understand that sometimes students may have conflicts with their work schedules and class. Please email me ahead of time if you plan on missing class so that I know to expect your make-up reaction paper (see below). If this is going to be an ongoing issue, please make sure you also get permission from Vonne Smith.

Missed a Class? Make-up Assignment - Response Paper:

In lieu of missing a class (and having communicated with the instructor prior to class), students will be required to submit a response paper in order to receive full attendance and participation points. **Keep in mind that I take attendance each class, and also mark down when a student is late or leaves early.** It is your responsibility to turn in a response paper to me before the next class for any portions of class that you miss. I will not request or remind students to turn in response papers for class time that they have missed. The responsibility falls on you to turn one in on time. Failure to turn in a response paper will result in 10 points being deducted from your final attendance and participation grade.

Requirements: Response papers are due before the beginning (6pm) of the class following the class that a student missed. Response papers must be submitted in word
You can break the response paper into three subcategories: lecture, break-out activities (or discussion depending on the day) and student presentations. In this manner, if you were only absent from a portion of class, you will write in response to the portions of class that you missed. If you missed the whole class, you'll include all three sections. For the lecture portion, you should reflect on the content presented and write your contributions to the discussion. For the break-out activity, you can briefly write about your results and your experience/what you learned/any reflection on the topic. Lastly, for the student presentation, you should write a response that communicates that you watched the presentation and gained something from it. Each section does not have a minimum length, but the paper as a whole should be sufficient enough to show that you watched the entire class and understood the material for that day so that you will have the knowledge required going forward in the course.

Discussion Leader Presentations:

Each student will lead two class discussions by preparing a 30-minute presentation on various topics. Students will sign up for the week they will lead at the beginning of the term. As discussion leader, students should prepare to facilitate thought and debate about the topic having read through the materials and identified additional examples of the topic to share. These examples can be relevant websites, blogs, social media influencers, or magazine/newspaper articles about the topic.

The topics for many weeks of class will mirror content we have discussed in class. As such, I am not looking for students to give a presentation that repeats the introduction that I present to the topic as an instructor. Instead, I am looking for you to become knowledgeable about the topic you are presenting and take the next step in researching new ideas, trends and best practices regarding a topic and present them to the class in order to further everyone’s overall knowledge of the subject based on what you initially learned in class. I understand that pieces of your presentation may unintentionally mirror something brought up in lecture, but I am looking for you to take your own professional experiences, research the topic and make the presentation your own.

This is also not an opportunity to simply summarize the readings. Everyone in the class will already have done the readings and made blog posts about them. Use the readings as a starting point on the topic. As little as 5 minutes of your presentation should be about the readings. The remaining 25-minutes should be based on new material you provide to the class based on additional readings you find, and should allow a few minutes (less than 5) for Q&A at the end. The best presentations will focus on new material you bring to the presentation, and are well researched and supported. If you include videos in your presentation, limit them to less than 8 total minutes of your presentation and give the class time to watch the video before discussing.
Presentations will be done live with you presenting material while on your webcam. The easiest way to present your class discussion will be through a **PowerPoint which should be submitted on Canvas no later than one hour before class on the days you present.**

**Grading For Presentations**
You will be able to find a detailed rubric for how your discussion leader presentations will be graded in Canvas in the modules section under ‘Rubrics’.  

Keep in mind I require that the final slide(s) of your presentation contain the sources your researched that are referenced in your presentation. 5 points will be deducted from your presentation for not including your sources, and I may still require students to provide me their sources used in order to receive a grade for their presentation. Please do not lose “easy” points for forgetting to include your sources in your slides!

**Discussion Date, Topic, and Discussion Leader**

Send your instructor three topic/date preferences after the first class. I will operate on a first-come, first-served basis, but if a student’s demonstrates a specific, valid need, it may outweigh another student’s topic/date request. All scheduling will be done at the instructor’s discretion.

Students will be assigned a topic no later than 3 days after the first class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W3</td>
<td>Audience Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4</td>
<td>Online Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W5</td>
<td>Search Engine Optimization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W6</td>
<td>Web analytics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W7</td>
<td>Communicating on Mobile Platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W8</td>
<td>Usability Testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W9</td>
<td>Message Testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W10</td>
<td>Customer Relationship Management*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W11</td>
<td>Crowdsourcing*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W12</td>
<td>Usability Testing*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W13</td>
<td>Reputation Management*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* I recommend that these presentations especially should focus on case studies.
Analytics Assignment:

After learning about analytics in class lecture, students will be required to set up google analytics on their own websites created earlier on in their coursework, and add the instructor as an authorized user in Google Analytics to be able to view their site results (students are welcome to remove the instructor’s privileges after they receive a grade for the assignment). Students will study and document their web traffic for a few days to see what their typical traffic is. Then, the students will review their site’s SEO characteristics including their meta tags, reviewing their site in Google webmaster tools for any factors that would prevent in from appearing in SERPs, and correct/enhance those factors, documenting the changes they made and their reasons for doing so. After a 3 week analysis period, students will evaluate their site traffic since their changes were made, and remark on the difference between the initial results and the final results of their efforts. They will also remark on any real world factors that caused their site to gain traffic during that period (for example, if the student went to a career fair and gave out their website address on their business card) while writing a short report that documents the changes they made and what they learned from the experience.

Usability Testing Assignment:

Students will conduct a live usability test with two different people using their own websites built in their previous classes, and see first-hand if their sites are ‘getting the job done’. Students will begin this assignment by reading a usability test script to each subject, and then asking them to complete a number of tasks on their site, including having the test subject identify what field the student is in without any guidance by the student, locating and downloading the student’s resume, finding and viewing work samples the student may have, and contacting the student using the information on their website. Students will write a paragraph before engaging in the tests describing their expectations for the test, then document in an organized manner the results of each phase of each test (including all commentary about what the person’s feedback about their site was), and write a conclusion that is 2-3 paragraphs long indicating what they learned from conducting the tests and what changes they can make to their site as a result of the test.
Group Assignments

Group Selection
Students will be asked to form groups in class during Week 1. This will be your group for the SEO/Analytics Final Project. Groups for the SEO/Analytics presentations will be formed separately in class.

Group SEO/Analytics Presentation:
Each group will give a 30-minute presentation about a more in-depth topic related to SEO or Google Analytics in order for the class to gain additional preparation for their final project. The topics will be given in week two and will depend on the prior level of SEO/analytics knowledge that everyone in the class has at the beginning of the semester. Some sample topics could include bidding on Google Adwords, understanding the Google Analytics dashboard, etc. Most importantly, you will include two or three credible current events articles that discuss trends, best practices, etc. The sharing of any industry leaders, blogs or videos (videos may last no more than 7 minutes total) that are related to the topic is encouraged.

SEO and Google Analytics Final Project:
Each group will select a small business/non-profit/organization with the goal of assisting with their SEO and Google Analytics. Students should not currently be working for the company/organization that is selected. At the end of the second class, I will allow time for students to draft a sample memo to send to the client, along with presenting a detailed handout of student expectations (e.g., that you will be in contact, virtually) and client expectations (e.g., that you are not their personal Web designers).

Note: I require that you do not pick a business that is restricted from advertising on Google Adwords. You may view Google’s list of restricted business types here: https://support.google.com/adwordspolicy/answer/6008942?hl=en#res. This policy is in place so that you may gain the full experience of working with a client and creating a project plan, and not because of any personal views or opinions of the instructor.

By Week 3, your group should send me an email with your client’s name, contact information, and confirmation that they are on board (a forwarded email from the client will suffice).

By Week 5, your group is required to send me a progress update on your situation analysis. Failure to submit this update will result in a 15 point deduction off of your total score on your situation analysis turned in during Week 7.

By Week 7, you will submit a situation analysis, which involves research on the client’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. You will also write about their competition, what the company has tried before, their SEO/Analytics goals, etc. In
addition, you will include a section that talks about how you would go about increasing their SEO, the Google Analytics goals that you will set up, and how the company can increase their online presence. It is expected that you do additional research on SEO and Google Analytics and cite your sources in APA format at the end of your proposal. Specific guidelines will be posted on Canvas.

During class on week 8, each group will be asked to talk about their client and their situation analysis in front of the class. This will be an informal way for the other students to learn about what other groups are doing.

Throughout the term it is expected that you maintain contact with your client and work on their analytics goals. This is not a last-minute assignment. I will also be sending out an evaluation form that your client will fill out at the end of the semester.

On Week 13, you will submit a report that details what you and your partners did throughout the semester, your goals, the outcomes, etc. You will also write about suggestions for future SEO and Google Analytics efforts.

During class on Week 13, you will present this information to the class in the form of a presentation. Feel free to invite your client to class (please let me know if they plan on attending so I can send them a link to our Connect room). My hope is that you gain real-world experience from this assignment and have something in your portfolio after graduation from this program.

**Peer Evaluations**
By 6pm the day following the last day of class, you need to submit peer evaluations for your group members this semester using the peer evaluation form provided on Canvas.

**Grading**
You will be able to find a detailed rubric on Canvas that breaks down the point values for this assignment (found in modules under ‘Rubrics’).

**General Policies**

**“Open Inbox” Policy**
I encourage students to contact me with any questions they have about anything relating to this class or any difficulties they encounter throughout the semester. As this is an online course, I call this an “open inbox” policy. If you encounter any issues during the semester that may affect your performance in the class, please feel free to contact me and I will do my best to work with you in order to help you be successful.

**University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities:**
Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office (http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not
retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

**University Policy on Academic Misconduct:**
Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at [http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php).

**Netiquette: Communication Courtesy:**
All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. [http://teach.ufl.edu/docs/NetiquetteGuideforOnlineCourses.pdf](http://teach.ufl.edu/docs/NetiquetteGuideforOnlineCourses.pdf)

**Getting Help:**
For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:
- [Learning-support@ufl.edu](mailto:Learning-support@ufl.edu)
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 2
- [https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml](https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml)

**Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from LSS when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.**

Other resources are available at [http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help](http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help) for:
- Counseling and Wellness resources
- Disability resources
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- Library Help Desk support

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit [http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints](http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints) to submit a complaint.

**Course Evaluations:**
Students are highly encouraged to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at [https://evaluations.ufl.edu](https://evaluations.ufl.edu). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at [https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/](https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/)."
Schedule

*This class covers topics that change quickly. Therefore, as the semester goes on, I may find more relevant and timely articles. If the reading list is ever updated, students will be notified in advance.

Any readings marked with “(Canvas)” should be accessed by logging in to Canvas and finding the document in its Module in the “Modules” section.

WEEK ONE – 5/13 – COURSE INTRO & OVERVIEW OF DIGITAL MEDIA

- Explanation of course requirements and assignments
- Introduction and overview of research tools for digital media
- Introduction to Social Media: Why they matter and what you need to know about their impact including blogs, wikis, tweets, podcasts, social networks, apps, bookmarking, etc.

Email individual discussion leader presentation requests AFTER class.

WEEK TWO – 5/20 – AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

- Audience Development & Goals of Interactive Media Use
- Discovering, reaching, and retaining your target audience.
- Writing a situation analysis (needed for Week 7 assignment)

READ:
- Canvas: Audiences Module:
  - What is Audience Development? - Forbes
  - Strategy and Digital Commerce Capabilities Toolkit
  - Next-Generation Strategies for Advertising to Millennials.
WEEK THREE – 5/27 – SURVEYS

Using surveys for both formative and evaluative research

Be ready to talk about a survey you have done recently (this may mean taking a survey if you have not done so recently) and we will discuss its validity and use in class.

READ:
- Canvas (Surveys Module): value of online surveys.pdf
- Canvas (Surveys Module): Overcoming Challenges Online surveys.pdf
- Familiarize yourself with http://www.surveymonkey.com/ and Qualtrics (get a free account through UF e-Learning at https://ufl.qualtrics.com/

Identify one service, register for it, and explore how you might use it to answer a research opportunity/problem you may be considering. I encourage you to create a survey and explore the different options for creating questions.

DUE: Submit client information and confirmation that they agree to participate in this class project.

WEEK FOUR – 6/3 – SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – Understanding who you want or need to reach and how to target them using optimization tools.

REQUIRED READING:
- Google Webmaster Guidelines - Watch video and read the guidelines.
- Canvas (SEO Module): Search Engine Marketing Glossary.pdf - Look through the terms and become familiar with the ideas. This is a good resource to refer back to later on during this course!
- Canvas (SEO Module): How to measure SEO success.pdf
- Canvas (SEO Module): How Not To Do Local SEO In A Post-Pigeon Era.pdf

RECOMMENDED READING:
- Canvas SEO Module:
  - Dont_Risk_Your_Rankings_With_Unethical_SEO.pdf
- Visit SEOmoz (http://SEOmoz.org) for more readings
- Unbounce Blog http://unbounce.com/blog/
- Internet Retailer http://www.internetretailer.com/
- Search Engine Land http://SearchEngineLand.com
**WEEK FIVE – 6/10 – WEB ANALYTICS**

- Web Analytics (i.e. Google Analytics)
- Measuring, collecting, analyzing and reporting Internet data for the purposes of understanding and optimizing Web usage.

**READ:**

- [Google 101: How Google crawls, indexes and serves the web.](#)
- [Google Analytics – social reports](#)
- Canvas (Analytics Module): Landing Page Mistakes You'll Never Make Again.pdf

**DUE:** Situation Analysis progress check.

**WEEK SIX – 6/17 – COMMUNICATING WITH MOBILE USERS**

- Communicating effectively with mobile users and best practices
- Marketing opportunities and the second screen phenomenon

**READ**

- Canvas (Mobile Module):
  - cisco_mobile_analytics_white_paper_2014.pdf – Read about the trends of mobile data traffic
  - Search Ads Work Way Better on Tablets Smartphones.pdf
  - Think Apps Not Ads.pdf
  - What You Need To Know About Facebook Mobile Ads.pdf
- [https://developers.google.com/mobile/articles/analytics_end_to_end](#) (Note: For the purposes of this class, I do not expect you to understand the code parts, just focus on the analytics parts.)

**WEEK SEVEN – 6/24 – USABILITY TESTING**

- Usability Testing

**WATCH:**

- UX prototyping tutorial: Paper prototyping techniques: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS00UIo12Xk](#)

**READ:**

- Canvas (Usability Testing Module): Usability Testing Demystified.pdf
- 4 forgotten principles of usability testing: [http://www.userfocus.co.uk/articles/4-forgotten-principles-of-usability-testing.html](#)

**DUE:** Situation Analysis (before start of class)
WEEK EIGHT – 7/1 - MESSAGE TESTING

- Message testing – How do you know who’s reading your online media and how are they reacting to what you say? An exploration of multicultural perspectives.

READ:

- Canvas (Message Testing Module):
  - media interventions.pdf
  - comparing website visitors.pdf

DUE: Analytics Assignment

WEEK NINE – 7/8 – CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

- Managing customers through effective brand management and customer management techniques.

READ:

- Canvas (CRM Module):
  - Effective social media analytics.pdf
  - Effects of the Recession on Public Mood in the UK.pdf
  - Social CRM a Tough Worthy Goal.pdf

- http://hootsuite.com/features/custom-analytics
- http://mashable.com/2012/05/05/adobe-digital-selves/
- http://mashable.com/2012/03/28/google-adobe-social-media/
WEEK TEN – 7/15 – INFORMATION AGGREGATORS

- Opportunities and struggles for content creators on the web in dealing with third party aggregators.

READ:
- Canvas (Aggregators Module):
  - Spain set to introduce new law against aggregators.pdf
  - Media, old and new, takes heat for Boston coverage - Chicago Tribune.pdf
  - Reddit launches 'pressiquette' guidelines for journalists.pdf
  - FromInformatonToAudiences-January2012.pdf

DUE: Usability Testing Assignment

Pace yourself on your final project!

WEEK ELEVEN – 7/22 – BIG DATA AND DATA SECURITY

- Big Data, Data security, privacy and ethical issues of collecting data online.

READ:
- Canvas (Big Data Module):
  - LinkedIn connects big data human resources.pdf
  - I’m Being Followed How Google and 104 Other Companies Are Tracking Me on the Web.pdf
- http://verdict.justia.com/2012/03/27/can-employers-legally-ask-you-for-your-facebook-password-when-you-apply-for-a-job

WEEK TWELVE – 7/29 – REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

- Reputation management and environmental scanning

READ
- Canvas (Reputation Management Module):
  - Online reputation the only asset worth protecting.pdf
  - Reputation Management Is Becoming Increasingly Important Socialnomics.pdf
WEEK THIRTEEN – 8/5 – FINAL PRESENTATIONS

- Final presentations
  - Students will present their SEO/Analytics process and outcomes to the class

DUE:
  - Final Report
  - Class Presentation
  - Peer Evaluations (Day after final class)

Disclaimer:
This syllabus represents my current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.