

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • SCHOOL OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

Syllabus for Mobile and Social Media Journalism
MASC 491 • Section 001 • Spring 2013 (January 14 – May 2)

Dr. Marcus Messner, Assistant Professor

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Class Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

Location: Temple Building, 901 W. Main St., Room 2211

Class Web site: <http://wp.vcu.edu/socialmediajournalism> and <http://blackboard.vcu.edu>

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

MASC 491 – Mobile and Social Media Journalism is an intensive special topics seminar in which undergraduate journalism students utilize mobile devices and social media platforms to report on important news events and issues. Students will apply theories and concepts of online social networking to journalism. They will learn to identify compelling story ideas and effectively break news on social media and blogs via mobile phones, tablet computers and handheld video cameras. The course will integrate journalism skills and concepts from previous writing and reporting classes and adapt them to the mobile and social media environments. Students will develop their own professional social media portfolios as well as build online communities around the various platforms.

This class is a seminar in every sense of the word: You will talk, think, argue, disagree, probe and defend. All of these elements are essential for a deeper level of understanding of online social networking. Taking part in class discussion is not optional; it is required. We must all agree to do our best to make sure all students feel comfortable expressing their opinions. Class time is precious. Class will start promptly and you are expected to be on time and prepared.

PRE- OR CO-REQUISITE: To enroll in MASC 491, students must have successfully completed MASC 303 or obtain the permission of the instructor.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Apply networking theories and concepts to practical social media projects in journalism
- Utilize mobile technologies as learning and reporting tools
- Analyze and research social media needs and uses of news audiences

- Build online communities around social media platforms
- Produce multimedia news content for social media
- Develop and implement personal and professional social media strategies
- Produce a journalistic social media portfolio

MASC 491 also will also attempt to assess your mastery of each of the learning objectives required by the school's assessment plan and the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. These objectives include: Laws & Freedom of Speech; Media History; Diversity; Use of Images; Ethics; Critical & Creative Thinking; Research & Information-Evaluation Skills; Writing Abilities; Editing Abilities; Numbers & Statistics; and Tools & Technologies.

MOBILE TECHNOLOGY:

This class is part of an innovative technology project that is sponsored through a partnership of VCU's Center for Teaching Excellence and the School of Mass Communications. Each student in the class will receive an iPad 2 as a learning and reporting tool for the duration of the semester. The iPads will be handed to each student on the first day of class and will be returned on the last day of the semester. Each student needs to sign a release form to receive an iPad.

Students are also expected to use their mobile phones for social media reporting purposes. Handheld video cameras will also be available to be checked out.

TEXTBOOK AND OTHER REQUIRED MATERIALS:

Readings for this class will be posted every week through online social bookmarking.

The following is a recommended textbook for this course:

Mark Briggs (2012): Journalism Next: A Practical Guide to Digital Reporting and Publishing, 2nd Edition. CQ Press (e-book).

You can buy the e-book and have it directly delivered via wireless to your your iPad. Additional instructions will be provided upon request.

Every student will also be expected to buy a ticket for an event of the Social Media Club of Richmond (approximately \$20) and buy iPad apps throughout the semester (approximately \$40) as well as additional equipment if necessary (approximately \$40). Students need a VCU e-mail address and access to the Internet outside of class. You also should have a hard drive.

CLASS WEBSITE:

All class material is available on our class website at <http://wp.vcu.edu/socialmediajournalism/>. We will use the Blackboard course management system [<https://blackboard.vcu.edu>] only for grading purposes. After you log in to Blackboard, you will have access to your grades.

IMPORTANT RULES ABOUT E-MAIL:

VCU gives each student an e-mail account, and that is the address Blackboard uses (and we will use) for this class. I will communicate frequently in this class by e-mail. Therefore, you should check your e-mail regularly for messages about MASC 491. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are receiving e-mails from me.

When you send me e-mail, begin the subject line with “**MASC 491:**”. Otherwise, my spam filter may delete your message.

CLASS ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance is mandatory at all class meetings. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will be counted absent for that day’s attendance.

The attendance policy for this course is strict: If you have three unexcused absences, I will lower your final grade by one letter. If you have five or more absences (excused or unexcused), you automatically would receive an F in the course. You would be able to avoid the F by withdrawing from MASC 491. Decisions over whether an absence is excused or unexcused are solely made by the instructor. Written certification (e.g. doctor’s note) might be required.

DEADLINES AND LATE WORK:

For communicators, an essential skill is the ability to work against a deadline. Therefore, in this course, you must turn in work on time. Plan ahead, organize your time and do not procrastinate. If you miss a deadline, you will receive a zero for that assignment.

GRADES:

Your final grade will be based on the following assignments and exams:

| Component of final grade | Percent of final grade |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Social media portfolio | 20% |
| Cool tools and apps presentation | 3% |
| Social media critique (team) | 3% |
| Blog post | 3% |
| Live tweeting | 3% |
| Storify | 3% |
| Collaborative video campaign | 5% |
| Online discussion | 10% |
| News package 1 | 10% |
| News package 2 | 10% |
| News package 3 | 10% |
| Midterm Exam | 10% |
| Final Exam | 10% |
| Total | 100% |

Details on all assignments, including deadlines, are available on the class website.

We will use the following grading scale:

A = 90-100; B = 80-89; C = 70-79; D = 60-69; F = below 60

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES FOR NEWS PACKAGES

News packages that are published by CBS 6 or another credible news organization will receive an “A.” Excellent stories that are considered publishable without further editing will receive an “A-” before they are sent to a news organization. Solid stories that can be published with relatively little editing effort will receive a “B.” Acceptable stories that include the basics and can be published with fairly heavy editing will receive a “C.” Stories that miss something important and are not acceptable for publication will receive a “D.” A story that is not turned in or that shows no sign of effort will receive an “F” and cannot be rewritten.

Making a factual error (e.g. misspelling a name) in a story will also automatically result in an “F,” but it is an infallible way to get a rewrite assignment. If you hand in a rewrite, it is expected that you do more than “cosmetic” corrections (e.g. correcting spelling errors). Rewrites have to fundamentally improve stories and will be due two days after an assignment is returned. There are no exceptions to these rules. Late rewrites will not be accepted.

EXTRA-CREDIT

Extra-credit work must be approved by me. It must be completed by April 30, 2013.

INCOMPLETES:

No incompletes will be given in this course, except for dire emergencies. All assignments must be completed by the end of the semester to pass.

ETHICS:

Fabricating material or using another’s work without attribution is an extremely serious offense, and your name will be turned in to appropriate university officials. In this course, as in the communication profession, plagiarism is not tolerated.

The VCU Honor System will be enforced in this class. Unless I specify otherwise, all work done for this course is “pledged” work, as defined by the Honor System. Each assignment implicitly carries this pledge:

“On my honor, I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment.”

For a complete copy of the VCU Honor System, see www.provost.vcu.edu/policies/#H.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

According to the student conduct policy in the VCU Undergraduate Bulletin, you are entitled to receive instruction free from interference by other students. If you believe that another student’s behavior is disruptive, tell me and I will deal with the situation.

During class, you may use the iPads only as I allow; you may not read e-mail, browse the Web, play games, write letters or do other activities unless authorized.

You must not install any programs on the school's computers without my permission. It is a violation of VCU policy for you to install file-sharing, chat, instant-messenger or other programs on the school's computers. You must not install screensavers or desktop images, either. Action will be taken against violators. Tell me immediately whether unauthorized programs have been installed on the computer you are using.

No food or drink is allowed in the classroom. Turn your cellular phones to silent mode before class begins. You may not sleep, wear headphones or use electronic devices (such as computer games) in class. You must not conduct side conversations or create other disruptions. It is disruptive to arrive late and/or pack up early. Be on time for class and plan on meeting for the entire class period.

VCU rules prohibit anyone "to have in his possession any firearm, other weapon, or explosive, regardless of whether a license to possess the same has been issued, without the written authorization of the President of the university."

Be polite; respect your classmates, your instructor and others with whom you will interact during this course. If you engage in any behavior that I deem disruptive, you will get a verbal warning for the first incident and a written warning for the second. A third incident will result in your being administratively withdrawn from this class.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY:

It is vital that students in this course broaden their mass communications experiences, with guidance from the instructor, by including in their course work people and subjects such as ethnic, racial and religious minorities, people with disabilities, gay men and lesbians, and other groups. The intent is to ensure that students are exposed to diverse ideas and perspectives. In this class, it is the responsibility of the instructor and students to foster an environment that supports free expression.

Under VCU policy, you may not harass or intimidate any person or "interfere with the lawful freedom of other persons, including invited speakers, to express their views." (For more about these policies, see www.students.vcu.edu/docs/policy_student_conduct.pdf.)

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires Virginia Commonwealth University to provide academic adjustments or accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability that requires an academic adjustment or accommodation, you must contact Joyce Knight, the coordinator of services for students with disabilities on VCU's Academic Campus. Ms. Knight's office is in Room 102 of the Student Commons, 907 Floyd Ave. Her e-mail address is jbknight@vcu.edu, and her phone number is 828-2253.

After meeting with Ms. Knight, you then should meet with me to discuss your needs and how we can address them. For more information, see the university's Web page on Services for Students with Disabilities:

www.students.vcu.edu/dss/

STUDENT TECHNICAL STANDARDS

The School of Mass Communications has created descriptions of technical standards required for various professions within communications, including but not limited to print journalism, broadcast journalism, online journalism, advertising, public relations and photography. These technical standards – in the areas of motor skills, sensory-observation abilities, communication skills, cognitive skills and behavioral capabilities – reflect the performance abilities and characteristics that are necessary to successfully complete the requirements of the academic programs at the school. These standards are not requirements for admission into the programs. The School of Mass Communications complies with the requirements and spirit of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Therefore, the school will endeavor to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities who are otherwise qualified. The complete technical standards may be found at:

www.has.vcu.edu/mac/ugrad_programs/tech_stand.html

WHAT TO KNOW AND DO TO BE PREPARED FOR EMERGENCIES AT VCU

1. Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (www.vcu.edu/alert/notify). Keep your information up-to-date.
2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information (www.vcu.edu/alert).
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS TOPICS

The detailed schedule for MASC 491 will be handed out on the first day of class and will be available on the class website at <http://wp.vcu.edu/socialmediajournalism/>.

I hereby acknowledge that I have received a copy of the syllabus for MASC 491 (Mobile and Social Media Journalism) in the Spring Semester 2013. I have read and understood the course policies, including the policies on class attendance and grading.

Signature

Printed name

Date