

NMIX4200: Digital Storytelling
Room 412 Journalism | Spring 2009
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Office Hours: By appointment

What this course is about:

Changes in media technology inevitably change certain aspects of our everyday lives. Radio and television brought electronic information and entertainment into the home and altered patterns of family and community life. Computers and mobile devices further reshaped the ways that we communicate, inform and entertain. Google, Twitter and Facebook have become common tools for staying socially and culturally connected.

This course asks the following question, “Are there compelling stories to be told *about the media we use to tell stories?*” Did I just blow your mind? Good. Think of it this way: why do we take our media technology forms for granted? Aren’t media technologies major characters in the cultural drama of American life? Let’s tell their story.

How does form influence content? Stories told orally are embodied stories, told by one human being to another complete with gestures, facial expressions and vocal inflection. Printed stories have an entirely different aesthetic. Printed words on the page must be brought to life in the mind of the reader. Digital media calls upon our oral, written, artistic and digital literacies. Voice, music, motion, animation, text and graphics are composed and presented in an array of different combinations and layers to craft stories. However, a brief tour of YouTube suggests that the convergence of these elements does not necessarily guarantee more compelling content.

For a story to be truly “multimedia,” we must appreciate and understand the various forms (print, radio, film, TV) and practices (oral tradition, printed stories, performance art, graphic design) that have given rise to the digital creative process; a process that has the potential to realize something greater than the sum of its converged parts.

This course will examine the elements of good storytelling, oral, written, artistic and digital. We will accomplish this by immersing ourselves in examples. American literature, journalism, radio, cinema and television will all be mined for the elements that make for compelling stories. You will then use the lessons you learn from “traditional media” to craft compelling multimedia stories about digital technology itself.

You will write stories, conduct interviews, take photographs, and shoot and edit video. Towards the end of the semester, we will team up with Dr. Janice Hume's *History of Mass Media* students to produce a final project that tells the story of media change through the eyes of American media professionals.

This class is not entirely about media technologies; they are only the tools. This experience is ultimately about *you* and the stories you feel compelled to tell.

Course Objectives

Students in this course will:

- Become intimate with the various forms and functions of storytelling
- Gain a proficiency in a range of multimedia production technologies
- Develop scripting, storyboarding and production planning skills
- Add to media literacy knowledge

Requirements

Digital Stories (20%)

The theme of this class is digital storytelling *about media change*. In what ways do media technologies influence our perception of the world? How do online communities compare to "real-life" communities? Do cell phones connect us, isolate us, or both? There are interesting stories to be told amidst these and other questions about technology. It will be your job to craft them and present them in a compelling manner. You will produce a 2-3 minute story about media technology from a personal perspective that incorporates your take on media change. Personal observations, class discussions, and readings should inform your perspective.

Group Project: Media Change (25%)

Your final project will be a collaborative effort with students from the *History of Mass Media* course being taught by Dr. Janice Hume. Together you will interview a media professional about how changes in the media industry have impacted their life and career. Details on this project will follow via a separate handout.

Final Exam (15%)

The Final Exam will cover readings, lecture notes and production knowledge gained in labs and group time. All students should be able to answer questions on editing in iMovie, modifying images in Photoshop, storyboarding in Comic Life and so on. Readings will taper off after Spring Break leaving more time for production on the final project, but pertinent information from early readings will be part of the final exam. There are no MAKEUP EXAMS in this class. **Our final exam is scheduled for Thursday May 7, 2009 from 3:30-6:30pm. The test will be administered in our classroom on WebCT.**

Blogging (15%)

Good writing is always the product of a lot of bad writing that came before it. In order to sharpen your storytelling skills, you must write A LOT. To that end, you will keep a *weekly* blog of everyday events that draw on the elements of story that we discuss in class. All I ask is that you spend 30 minutes on your blog each week. I will not be counting words or entries. Instead, I will be looking for evidence that your storytelling is evolving and incorporating what we discuss and read in class.

Reading & Quizzes (10%)

Weekly readings can be found in the Course Content>Online Readings section of WebCT for this class (NMIX4200). Required articles will both guide and supplement weekly discussion. Sharing ideas as they relate to the background material will be a key component in the listening and learning process. Read before you come to class! Unannounced quizzes will be administered periodically. All students in the New Media Institute are also required to take the Weekly “Tech News Quiz” covering topics from national newspapers and the Web related to media technology.

StoryCorps Podcasts (10%)

The best way to learn the art of storytelling is to listen A LOT. Listening to the NPR podcasts will give you a feel for how amateur storytellers are using digital media to share personal stories. Each week, two students will present their thoughts on the story. Was the story compelling? Why? Was it boring? Why? The weekly leaders will also hand in a 250-word critique of the podcast.

http://www.npr.org/rss/podcast/podcast_detail.php?siteId=9157743

Attendance (5%)

There will be a fair amount of group and “lab” work in this class. It is imperative that you are in class for these sessions as they will involve detailed instruction on multimedia authoring and production. Each unexcused absence, from *any* class session, will mean a 1-point reduction in your 5-point attendance score. Five absences will result in the loss of one letter grade.

Topic Outline

Week1 (Jan13-Jan15)

“Homo Narrans & Functions of Story”

Week2 (Jan20-22)

“Understanding Media Change”

Week3 (Jan27-Jan29)

“Straight Reporting vs. Literary Journalism”

Week4 (Feb3-Feb5)
“Documentary, Poetry and Children’s Stories”

Week5 (Feb10-12)
“The Production Process”

Week6 (Feb17-Feb19)
“Designing in Digital”

Week7 (Feb24-Feb26)
Production of Digital Stories

Week8 (Mar3-Mar5)
Digital Stories DUE MARCH 5th

Week9 (Mar10-Mar12) SPRING BREAK

Week10 (Mar17-Mar19)
“Oral History”
Guest Lecture: Dr. Janice Hume

Week11 (Mar24-Mar26)
Pre-production begins on Oral History project

Week12 (Mar31-Apr2)
Production – Oral History Project

Week13 (Apr7-Apr9)
Production – Oral History project

Week14 (Apr14-Apr16)
Post-Production – Oral History project

Week15&16 (Apr21-Apr28)
Post-production & Presentation of Projects DUE APRIL 23rd

Academic Honesty

All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

Please Note:

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.