

# Storytelling with Emerging Media

Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook Live, VR, AR: digital storytellers have a wealth of new platforms at their disposal. This course is designed for students who are looking to collaborate and experiment with new tools and technology in the journalism landscape.

You'll explore the transition from old to new media through hands-on journalism projects in these spaces. You'll also examine case studies of media organizations navigating the new platforms, both successfully and not.

Ready to dive in? Let's get started.

## Details

COMM 420-004

Spring 2020

Wednesday, 2:30 - 5:20 p.m.

McKinley 302

Hi! I'm Professor Patterson. I teach a variety of digital media and broadcast courses here at SOC. I spend a lot of my time thinking about journalism and user experience design.

I pride myself on teaching you the tools and helping you develop the skills you need for our ever-evolving landscape. I love collaboration, experimentation and iteration. We'll do a lot of that in this new course — together. Welcome!

**Jeremiah Patterson**  
jnpatter@american.edu

**Office Hours**  
McKinley 240  
Tuesday, noon - 2 p.m.  
Friday, noon - 2 p.m.  
appointment preferred

Please identify yourself with first and last name when emailing or texting for the first time. And include **[COMM 420]** in the subject line of any class-related email you send.

# Purpose

This is a new course, created to help you understand new media, design and experiment with it, collaborate with your peers and produce innovative storytelling.

More than anything, I want you to adopt an experimental mindset and to apply design thinking to everything we produce. You will fail fast, iterate and use agile approaches to quickly understand new storytelling tools and to create successful journalism products.

Along the way, we'll cover how digital technology has transformed the media landscape, while gaining hands-on experience with new technologies in the practice of journalistic storytelling.

Oh, and we'll have fun too.

We will be creating a series of packages and a final project in teams to experience the wide-ranging world of emerging media. The course consists of workshops, discussions, critiques, field trips, guest speakers (and innovators), fieldwork, hands-on experimentation and more.

You'll be doing your own storytelling and production as well as (perhaps) partnering with other classes, publications and news outlets.

# Objectives

After successful completion of this class, you should have a grasp of the evolving media landscape. You will be able to speak knowledgeably about contemporary digital storytelling, and you'll know how to apply design thinking to your future work.

Other objectives include how to:

- Be an effective team contributor.
- Develop, edit and produce digital packages.
- Manage online content.
- Work with social media tools and platforms.
- Experiment, iterate and prototype, quickly.
- Tell engaging stories with emerging technology.

# Structure

This course will run much like a lab. I will help you gain an introductory understanding of a tool or technology and then it'll be up to you to experiment with it and implement it for storytelling.

Primarily, we'll use a class period to break down an emerging tool. We'll critique it, understand it and look at case studies of other publications or news outlets that have used it (successfully or not). We'll also experiment with the tool in class.

The following class period we'll have a workshop. Working in teams, you'll design an implementation of that tool and develop a story. That story will become an assignment that you submit by the end of the following week. Rinse and repeat.

Along the way, we'll have guest speakers, field trips, collaborations with other classes and more. You'll also have the chance to design parts of this course — like your final project or some of the parameters for assignments.

**250**  
points

## Assignments

We'll complete five storytelling assignments, meant to help you develop your skill set with a particular technology or tool. Every assignment will be produced in teams. You'll find a story to tell that lends itself to that tech/tool and then you'll produce a product based on your iterative design. After each assignment, you'll assess your teammates through a Peer Critique. Each assignment is worth 50 points.

**250**  
points

## Final Project

You will conceive, pitch and execute a final project that showcases your experience this semester. Working in pairs, this project can use a platform we study or something else entirely. Along the way, we'll have brainstorming sessions, pitches, check-ins and peer editing to bring your product along. The entire final project is worth 250 points.

**150**  
points

## Experimentation

As I said, more than anything, I want you to adopt an experimental mindset for this class. That means I don't want you to worry about failing (experimentation-wise) on an assignment and then earning a bad grade. I'd rather have you fail, iterate and re-launch until you find success. As such, I'll evaluate your approach to experimentation, once per each assignment. Each experimentation grade is worth 25 points.

**100**  
points

## Peer Critique

Our industry — and life itself — is one huge group project. The quicker you understand how to successfully work in groups, the better equipped you'll be after you leave here. I want you to welcome and embrace one another's unique perspective. We all bring something to the table! After each assignment, you will assess and evaluate your teammates. Your average score (as evaluated by your colleagues) at semester's end makes up your Peer Critique grade.

**100**  
points

## Participation, Attendance & Professionalism

We are here to learn together, so get ready for active participation throughout this class. This is not a sit-back-and-relax course. I want you to lean in, speak up and stand out! I am here to guide you, but you should also feel ownership of our time together. Suggestions? Comments? Ideas? Let me know.

A team requires everyone to be present in order to contribute. I'll take attendance once at the beginning of class. Showing up late and/or leaving early without a legitimate, pre-approved excuse will be counted as an unexcused absence. Every class missed (excused or unexcused) will result in a 2.5 percentage-point reduction from your overall grade. If you have an excused absence, you will be able to make up that 2.5 percent with another product or story, which you brainstorm and pitch to me.

I also expect everyone to treat one another like colleagues. You are working in a storytelling design space. Learn the power of "yes, and" instead of "no, but." Be patient with the stresses of production deadlines. Pull your weight. But also help each other out. And finally, find a solution and implement it.

**150**  
points

## Media Responses & Critiques

If you want to learn it, you have to absorb it. Part of this course will include exploring what other publications and news outlets have produced with emerging media. Read it, watch it, listen to it, experience it. I'll be posting a boatload of links to relevant content on our class website. Periodically, you'll check them out and then pull together an assessment and/or critique. (The exact submission method is TBD — designed by you.) There will be five responses due — good for 30 points each.

**Total:**  
**1000** points

## Deadlines

Journalists live and die by deadlines in the newsroom. So, this is simple: nothing late will be accepted. Failure to complete an assignment or submission on time will result in a grade of zero. There is no flexibility with this policy. I want you to experiment, yes, but I also want you to meet your deadlines. Check the schedule now to understand what is expected of you and when it's expected.

## Grading Guidelines

The point of this course is to experiment with new storytelling tools and technologies. But I still expect you to produce high-quality work, worthy of publication on a media/tech site. You should also be working to build polished portfolio pieces, which you can use to showcase your experience and skill sets in digital media.

|          |  |                         |                    |                     |
|----------|--|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| <b>A</b> | High-quality professional work that's suitable for publication on a reputable media channel/site. Or professional quality work with insignificant, minor errors. | <b>A- 90-93.9</b>       | <b>A 94-100</b>    |                     |
| <b>B</b> | Good quality work but some minor problems exist. Or work that meets assignment requirements but needs some corrections before publication.                       | <b>B- 80-83.3</b>       | <b>B 83.4-86.6</b> | <b>B+ 86.7-89.9</b> |
| <b>C</b> | Incomplete work that does not meet portions of the assignment and has significant or major problems. Could not be published.                                     | <b>C- 70-73.3</b>       | <b>C 73.4-76.6</b> | <b>C+ 76.7-79.9</b> |
| <b>D</b> | Incomplete work that has excessive problems, indicating a lack of effort and attention to the assignment.  | <b>D 60-69.9</b>        |                    |                     |
| <b>F</b> | Incomplete work that missed assignment deadline or had major errors.   | <b>F 59.9 and below</b> |                    |                     |

## **Academic Support**

There is a wide range of university services available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements, including:

Academic Support Center (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

Counseling Center (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

Disability Support Services (x3315, MCG 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical or psychological disabilities.

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify me in a timely manner with a letter from the Academic Support Center or Disability Support Services so we can make arrangements to address your needs.

## **Academic Integrity**

Please don't even think about cheating on your work. Plagiarism is to present any information or language that was prepared and written by someone else as if it were your own work. This would include copying and pasting information from the Internet without attributing the source. It would also include passing off another student's work as your own. For this course, plagiarism also includes using photos, audio, video or code from the Internet that you are presenting as original work. In other words, don't do it.

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur.

The Academic Integrity Code includes but is not limited to: plagiarism; inappropriate collaboration; dishonesty in exams, papers; work done for one course and submitted for another; deliberate falsification of data; interference with other students' work; misrepresenting yourself (or having someone misrepresent you) as present during roll call; and copyright violations.

Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course.

## **Emergency Preparedness**

In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community.

Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency.

Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU email and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU email regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies.

In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.

## Integrity, continued

Specific to this class, it is a violation of the Integrity Code to use someone else's writing, video, audio, code or other forms of media as your own without proper credit or attribution. Additionally, other media that you do use must be open-source, from Creative Commons and/or have the proper licenses.

All work for this class must be original and must be completed specifically for this class. No duplicate work will be accepted. If there is ever a question, please ask me before you hand it in.

## Materials

- Online readings, assignments and resources (including this syllabus) will be posted on our class website at [bit.ly/storytellingemerging](https://bit.ly/storytellingemerging). We'll refer to this site regularly.
- Special equipment rented from The Cage.
- Mobile device for quick video and audio recording.
- Private Facebook group used for discussion and class announcements.

## Equipment Rental

Sometimes you'll need equipment from The Cage to use for field reporting — including video cameras, digital audio recorders, 360° video cameras and more. The Cage is located on the lower level of the Media Production Center. Reserve equipment using your name and valid university ID. You are liable for any equipment damage or loss, which will be traced back to the last ID used to check it out.

## Lab Hours

McKinley: Labs

301 Editing Lab: Open 24/7

T12, T14, 302: Open lab available until 11 p.m. *whenever classes aren't meeting*

Library: New Media Center (downstairs)

Monday-Thursday: 8 a.m. - 11 p.m.

Friday: 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.; Saturday: 9 a.m. - 9 p.m.; Sunday: 10 a.m. - 11 p.m.

**Warning:** The New Media Center currently may have an older version of Adobe Creative Suite than labs in McKinley. The software is backward-compatible (2020 can open 2019) but not vice-versa. Check ahead of time.

# Schedule

Our schedule is subject to change. If it does, I'll post updates on our website and also announce changes in class and by Facebook. **Media Responses** are due by 2:30 p.m. the day they're listed. We will critique **Assignments** in class the day they're listed. Then, submit by 5 p.m. Friday of that week.

**Jan. 15**

Welcome, Design Thinking

**Jan. 22**

Mobile/Web Video & Tik Tok

**Jan. 29**

Workshop: Video

**Response: Video**

**Feb. 5**

Comics, Graphic Nonfiction

**Assignment: Video**

**Feb. 12**

Workshop: Comics

**Response: Comics**

**Feb. 19**

Instagram & Facebook Live

**Assignment: Comics**

**Feb. 26**

Workshop: Social Media

**Response: Social Media**

**Mar. 4**

Open Topic — TBD by class

**Assignment: Social Media**

**Mar. 11**

Spring Break — No class

**Mar. 18**

360° Video

**Mar. 25**

Field Trip: VR @ Augment Arcade

**Apr. 1**

Workshop: 360° Video

**Response: 360° Video**

**Apr. 8**

Amazon Alexa Skills

**Assignment: 360° Video**

**Apr. 15**

Field Trip: Drones at Airlie Resort

**Apr. 22**

Workshop: Final Project

**Assignment: Alexa Skill**

**Apr. 29**

Final Exam Period

**Final Project**