

MCOM 4325—Multimedia Writing and Storytelling
Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30 – 3:55 p.m.
CAS 102

Instructor: Lorri Allen (please call me Professor Allen or Ms. Allen)

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Course Overview

This rigorous, upper level course teaches skills to create multimedia journalism projects. Multimedia stories can incorporate text, images, audio, video and data visualizations. You will apply standards of journalistic reporting and writing to your work throughout the semester.

Whether you plan to work at a newspaper, TV or radio station, online outlet, production studio or PR/advertising agency, you need to be able to produce content for multiple platforms in multiple ways. Multimedia Writing and Storytelling provides those skills. This course has a specific emphasis on writing for broadcast, podcasts and the web.

The rest of the syllabus reads like a legal notice. Most of the items that sound like I'm tough have come about because I learned the hard way – it could have been one student who did something that necessitated a new policy.

The good news: this can be a fun class that prepares you well not only for a variety of jobs, but also for a career. I'll be asking you about your goals, and I can customize the assignments toward what you want to show off in your portfolio or reel.

Pre-requisites: MCOM 2306, 2311, 2313

Student Learning Objectives – Upon completion of the course, you'll be able to:

Competency: Writing/Storytelling:

- Write correctly and clearly using formats and styles appropriate for public relations/integrated communication or multimedia journalism for the audiences and purposes required.
- Demonstrate an understanding of digital medium requirements through written assignments, including research, scripts and projects.
- Demonstrate the ability to develop news stories for different media.

Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry:

- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to public relations/integrated communication or multimedia journalism professions.

- Analyze writing practices, strategies and procedures for multiple forms of news production.
- Demonstrate an understanding of and ability to apply First Amendment and other legal principles for PR/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism.
- Show an understanding of ethical principles and issues for PR/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of telling journalistic stories with different media and apply those skills to analyzing and developing your own content.

Competency: Mediated Presentation:

- Apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information using tools and technologies appropriate for PR/integrated communication or mediated journalism.
- Demonstrate an understanding of and proficiency with skills needed to make practical producing decisions.
- Demonstrate skills using multiple software and hardware for creating multimedia stories.

Competency: Argument: Construct a persuasive message, adapted to the audience, purpose and context of the situation.

REQUIRED TEXT and reading:

- Tomkins, Al (2017). *Aim for the Heart: Write, Shoot, Report and Produce for TV and Multimedia* (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press. ISBN-13: 978-1506315256
- Articles to be assigned.

Recommended equipment:

- Purchase or check out equipment needed to record and edit according to the principles discussed in class. You must pass a camera test to check out UT Tyler equipment.
- An SD card for use with field cameras and a separate one for podcasts.
- An external hard drive for storage of large projects.

Assignment Policy:

You are responsible for turning in all assignments by deadline. And they must be turned in the way the rubric instructs you. *If the assignment is not turned in correctly, it won't be accepted and earns a zero.*

WHY?

Being a good journalist, entrepreneur or employee requires good observation skills. To reinforce these skills, the assignments will differ, *so read each rubric carefully.*

- Due dates may change at my discretion with fair notice, always in your favor.

- NO LATE PROJECTS will be accepted. So I urge you to submit assignments well before the deadline. Sometimes it takes more time than you expect for video projects to render and upload, so give yourself margins and don't expect to turn something in at the last minute.
- You must complete all assignments to pass the course. This does not mean, however, completing all assignments guarantees a passing grade.
- According to Bloom's Taxonomy, the assignments will increase in difficulty and the grading will become stricter through the semester. Plus, you're required to show both a mastery of understanding and skills.

Classroom policies:

No eating or drinking is allowed in this lab.

Please be respectful of your classmates and me. Debates, challenging questions are welcome, but personal attacks, bullying and slurs are not. The latter three behaviors are also subject to disciplinary action.

Electronics policy:

- No cellphone, tablet or other device use during class unless the assignment calls for it. No calls, no texts, no social media.
- The first time you are using a device when you're not supposed to be, I will take it for the rest of the class period. The second time, you must pay \$5 to get it back, the third \$10 and so on. The money goes into a fund for my Tahiti vacation. Just kidding – I wanted to see if you were paying attention. It will be donated to a scholarship fund.

WHY am I so mean?

As a university student not that long ago, sitting behind and beside classmates on their laptops shopping and perusing social media, I was distracted. Read this:

https://www.technicianonline.com/opinion/opinion-write-don-t-type-your-notes-during-class/article_2bec2dd6-a1da-11ed-bba9-932d1e4b2879.html#:~:text=Recalling%20conceptual%20information%20is%20more,proficiency%20in%20recalling%20conceptual%20information

When you're on a laptop, you're tempted to capture every word; you're simply transcribing. When you take notes by hand, you *synthesize and prioritize*. Other studies indicate having your computer on EVEN TO TAKE NOTES lowers your grade. Students who have followed this policy in the past 9.5 years have made the highest grades in my courses.

Communicating

- I use Canvas to communicate, post readings, present feedback and grades.
- My email policy: on weekdays, I answer questions in 24 hours. On weekends, I will do my best to answer in 48 hours.

Academic Honesty:

- Practice academic integrity and accept responsibility for your actions.
- Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, unattributed use of others' work (including test and paper "banks"), disruption of class, and discourtesy to, or harassment of, other students or your instructor.
- Anyone caught cheating will earn a "0" for that assignment and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action.

PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. This includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit. Students caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment, may fail this class and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action.

Thanks to Dr. Emily Scheinfeld for the following nuances:

- **Intent:** When reviewing a possible case of plagiarism, your intent will not be taken into consideration. In other words, an act of plagiarism is plagiarism.
- **Mistakes and accidents:** The possibility you mistakenly or accidentally committed plagiarism will not be taken into consideration.
- **Appeal to ignorance:** Your claim to ignorance about this policy is not ever a valid justification to plagiarize.

REQUIRED podcast consumption:

<https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/the-broadcast-clock/>

REQUIRED media consumption:

To understand and complete assignments, you **MUST** watch and listen to broadcast news programs, commercials, social media and podcasts. Immerse yourself in mass media.

Suggested sources:

- **Viewing:** 60 Minutes, CBS Sunday Morning News, PBS Frontline documentaries
- **Online:** TexasTribune.org, <https://www.propublica.org>
- **Listening:** NPR (100.1) or streaming at NPR.org and any podcasts you like.

WHAT TO KNOW:

Attendance: ALL CLASSES are mandatory. Since we only meet twice a week, each discussion and activity build toward the next. Attendance and *participation* make up 10% of your grade.

- If you anticipate being absent due to religious observance or university-sponsored activities, inform me by the second class.
- **WORK is not an excused absence.**

- You're responsible for turning in all assignments by deadline. You are also responsible for lecture materials, announcements and assignments made during any absence. But DON'T BE ABSENT.
- If you are 10 minutes late or leave early, you may be considered absent.
- No make-up tests or quizzes provided.
- Students late to class on test/quiz days will not be allowed to take the exam if students have already completed it.
- To qualify for an excused sick absence, you must provide a doctor's note.
- You may be excused for a death in the family if the person who died is your parent, grandparent, sibling, spouse or child. Bring the obituary or funeral program.
- I won't ask for your doctor's note or funeral program. Unless you show evidence to me, you simply lose your A and P points for the day.

Because instruction and feedback are so valuable for this class, I don't plan on posting slides to Canvas. And if you're not in class on the days assignments are due for "Show and Tell," your project will not be reviewed, and you'll get a zero.

Academic Honesty:

- Practice academic integrity and accept responsibility for your actions.
- Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, unattributed use of others' work (including test and paper "banks"), disruption of class, and discourtesy to, or harassment of, other students or your instructor.
- Anyone caught cheating will earn a "0" for that assignment and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action.

GRADING: You can earn up to 1,002 points.

- **Attendance and Participation** (100): Prepare for and attend all classes.
- **News and culture quizzes:** To encourage media immersion, expect 10 current events quizzes over the semester for 10 points each. The questions may include sports, trending topics and class content in addition to current events. These won't be "gotchas" but questions an engaged media student should know. Here's a hint—in an election year, know the major national and state candidates.
- **Video Basics** - VOs, Interviews, SOTs (Each element can earn up to 34 points, for a total of 102)
- **Six Sounds** (100 points)
- **Standups** (100 points)
- **Non-news video** (100 points)

- **Podcast** (100 points)
- **News package – broadcast or web** (100 points)
- **Semester Capstone project** (100 points) (+/- points for meeting milestones)
- **Final Exam** (100 points)

Extra Credit is available.

Grades are based on the total number of points you earn.

A: 900-1,000 **B:** 800-899 **C:** 700-799 **D:** 600-699 **F:** 0-599

Grading rubrics: You will get a rubric to guide you in completing each assignment. However, the following applies to everything we do for this class:

- **Get it right in writing or digitally.** Grades for each will be reduced for grammar, spelling, punctuation or AP errors.
- **Facts are important.** If a fact is incorrect, you earn a zero for the assignment.
- **Names are important.** If you misspell a name (including mine), you get a 0.
- **Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** Students caught plagiarizing fail the assignment, may fail the class and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action. <http://www.utt Tyler.edu/judicialaffairs/scholasticdishonesty.php>

Thanks to Dr. Emily Scheinfeld for the following additions to this course:

Expectations and Structure:

Come to class ready to participate. Ask questions, answer questions, share insights and engage. Lectures will not duplicate readings, because this is a hands-on class. Stay atop of the readings, complete them before coming to class and be prepared for activities that assess your understanding.

Email:

It's my preferred form of contact (note the address on page 1). I don't guarantee a response to emails sent to other addresses, including Canvas. If you send email after 6 p.m. on any given day, you might not hear back before 9 a.m. the following business day. Emails about assignments will not be responded to after 9 p.m. and are not guaranteed after 6 p.m. the night before an assignment is due. Treat our online correspondence with the same respect as any business or legal communication. Emails that do not conform to these standards (including correct GSP) will not be answered. So it's in your best interest to write emails with intelligence and respect.

Grade Grievance Policy:

If you wish to appeal a grade, please follow this procedure:

- Wait 24 hours before contacting me unless I made a math error. Wait so you can look back over the assignment or exam, your notes and think about the reasons you earned the grade. Act rather than react to the grade.
- Submit the appeal in writing. Email me within one week; include your specific appeal and which grade you believe you earned.
- Disputes will not be entertained after 7 days of the date the assignment was returned. *If any grade is to be reevaluated, the new grade may be lower than the previous grade.* If I reevaluate an assignment, I may find errors I didn't find before that lower the grade.
- I won't have conversations in the last week of class or after final grades have been posted about being "only a few points away" from earning a particular letter grade. I provide bonus points and extra credit, so you receive the grade you earn throughout the semester. Please start working hard now.

General Classroom Infractions:

- All electronic devices must be silenced or turned off before class begins. If I can hear it vibrating, it must be turned off. Cell phones, ear buds, headphones and other electronic devices are not welcome in the classroom unless we're using them on a project. It doesn't matter why you have a phone out. Without permission to have it out, you'll be asked to put it away.
- Working on unrelated material, copying or writing on someone else's notes during class is prohibited.
 - If you need a pen, paper, etc., raise your hand - a lack of preparedness on your part doesn't give you the right to interrupt.
- Private comments, jokes, nudges, pokes, texts or written notes between students are a major disruption.
 - If your attention is not exclusively on the board, your notes, or the person talking, then you may be told to leave.
 - For quizzes and the final exam, laptops, tablets, phones and Smart Watches are not allowed on desks or in view on the floor.
- Inattention, sleeping or the appearance of sleeping (as decided solely by the professor) is prohibited.
- Disruptions such as closing books, zipping bags or packing up before being dismissed is distracting—please don't do it. I will end class on time.
- Please be extra polite and attentive if we have guest speakers.

Consequences: Attendance/Participation grade drops. Further infractions will result in your permanent dismissal from class. Also, I reserve the right to permanently assign seats to counter disruptive behavior.

Major Course Infractions:

- Arguing during class time with me, especially when you've been accused of an infraction.
 - We can discuss your behavior later in my office, but arguing with me during class worsens your offense.

- If you find yourself being sent out, gather your things and quietly leave. Be aware that, from the moment the infraction started, everything you say and do will be written in a report to the Dean.
- Disrespectful or uncivil conduct of any form, either online or in the classroom. While you have the right to your own opinion, inflammatory language, including discriminatory language based on race, religion, appearance, class, ethnicity, gender, dis/ability, sexual orientation or national origin, is unacceptable.
- Academic dishonesty is prohibited in any form.

Consequences: You will be dismissed from class and sent to the Dean for disciplinary action. The Dean may determine a note be permanently placed on your transcript, barring you from any future college plans.

AI policy:

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence tools as appropriate for the and task. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool.

Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research.

You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. You will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

For this course, **AI is permitted for specific assignments or situations, and appropriate acknowledgment is required.**

- a. During some class assignments, we may leverage AI tools to support your learning, allow you to explore how AI tools can be used, and/or better understand their benefits and limitations. Learning how to use AI is an emerging skill, and we will work through the limitations of these evolving systems together. However, AI will be limited to assignments where AI is a critical component of the learning activity. *I will always indicate when and where the use of AI tools for this course is appropriate.*
- b. You are always allowed to use Descript, Buzzsprout, Otter.ai or a similar TRANSCRIPTION tool to log interviews. Please note which app you use when you do.
- c. You are always allowed to use Grammarly and spell-check but do not rely on them for correct AP Style usage.
- d. Assignments in this course **may** permit using artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT or Copilot. When AI use is permissible, it will be documented in the assignment description, and all AI use must be appropriately acknowledged and cited. When using AI tools for assignments, add an appendix showing (a) the entire exchange (e.g.,

prompts used), highlighting the most relevant sections; (b) a description of precisely *which AI tools* were used, (c) an explanation of *how* the AI tools were used (e.g. to generate ideas, elements of text, etc.); and (d) an account of *why* AI tools were used (e.g. to save time, to surmount writer's block, to stimulate thinking, to experiment for fun, etc.). Students shall not use AI tools during examinations or assignments unless explicitly permitted and instructed to do so.

Using AI tools outside of these parameters violates UT Tyler's Honor Code, constitutes plagiarism, and will be treated as such.

This document was adapted from AI Syllabus information from Carnegie Mellon University, Stanford University, The University of Texas at Austin and The University of Texas at San Antonio. This document was edited for grammar using Grammarly, an AI tool for writing.

CENSUS DATE is Sept. 9.
Last day to withdraw is Nov 4.

Please read the paragraph below, print this page only, and sign your name where indicated, and turn into me Wednesday, Aug. 28. Thanks!

I have thoroughly reviewed this syllabus and understand it. If I have questions about turning in assignments, how to behave in class or how grades are earned, I promise to check this syllabus and Canvas before asking.

Print your name _____

Sign your name _____

Date _____