

Engagement Journalism: How to Harness the Power of Audiences

Spring 2018

Course Description

As the news business evolves, it's essential that journalists understand audiences in order to best serve those audiences' needs. Journalists must learn how to use social not only for distribution -- which is now essential for all newsrooms -- but also to communicate with and interact with audiences. Finally, journalists should understand how to use crowd-powered journalism to solicit and discover stories directly from the public, as well as how to collaborate with other newsrooms. This course will teach students how to create an engagement strategy, to use social media for newsgathering and distribution, to design crowd-powered projects, and to measure success through metrics and outcomes.

You will learn about how journalists use social media for distribution, personal branding, live reporting, newsgathering and community engagement. You will understand the basics of audience engagement and how newsrooms are working with readers, viewers and listeners. You will also learn the basics of metrics -- how newsrooms determine success of stories and projects -- and measuring impact of long-term projects. Finally, you will get an overview of engagement efforts in the industry and design an engagement project of your own.

Assignments

Reading and oral quiz

I will provide reading materials ahead of each class. This oral quiz makes up 10% of your final grade. Students are expected to read these ahead of time in order to discuss them in class. I will pick one to two students each class to answer questions orally about the readings. This means each student will have one oral quiz, but will not know what day they will be picked. Students who fail their oral quiz will be allowed a second attempt on a different day but will lose 50% of their grade.

Weekly presentation

Each student will research an engagement project and give a brief presentation on it. This makes up 25% of your final grade. Students may choose from a list of projects or pick another project in consultation with the professor. Presentations take place on a weekly basis and we will set a schedule of presentations during the first class. Students may give an oral presentation, a slideshow presentation, or prepare handouts. [See details on this assignment here.](#)

Final presentation

Each student will prepare a presentation pitching an idea for an engagement project. This makes up 45% of your final grade. Students must submit slides as well as presenting in front of the class. We will spend a class practicing these presentations and getting feedback from peers. [See details on this assignment here.](#)

Lesson Plan

Week 1: Introductions and syllabus

We will [get to know each other](#) and review the syllabus. I will also assign the weekly presentations and students will choose the project they wish to present.

Week 2: Social for media distribution

We'll discuss how media companies use social media -- including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, and others -- to share content with digital audiences.

Week 3: Social for journalists and live reporting

Students will learn how journalists use social media to break stories, build their profile, and share reporting live as it happens.

Week 4: Social for newsgathering

We'll explore how journalists can tap social media to find stories and use digital tools to do investigative reporting on social media.

Week 5: Social for community building

Students will learn how newsrooms are using social media -- such as Facebook groups, hashtags, and comments -- to create online communities to use for reporting.

Week 6: Audience engagement

We'll discuss how this concept means different things in different newsrooms, and about the goals and methods of audience engagement. We'll also do a survey to see what you think of the class so far.

Week 7: Comments

Students will learn about how newsrooms allow readers and viewers to give feedback, and why that matters for audience engagement.

Week 8: Metrics

We'll talk about how journalists measure the success of their stories through web traffic and reach on social media.

Week 9: Impact measurement

Students will learn how newsrooms measure the success of stories, projects and investigations through real-world results beyond web metrics.

Week 10: Engagement projects case studies

We'll look at more examples of engagement projects and break down the who/what/where/why/how in preparation for final presentations.

Week 11: Presentation practice and feedback

Students will rehearse their final presentations and received feedback from fellow students and the professor. Reminder: practice presentations count for a quarter of your grade on this assignment.

Week 12: Final presentations

Students will give their final presentations and give feedback on the class.

Major Assignments and Grading

Reading Assignments

Week 2: Social for media distribution

- [Demographics of Social Media](#), Pew Research Center
- [After a decade, it's time to reinvent social media in newsrooms](#), American Press Institute
- [How BuzzFeed mastered social sharing to become a media giant for a new era](#), Wired

Week 3: Social for journalists and live reporting

- [This Is Probably The Only Story You Didn't Hear About First From Bradd Jaffy And Kyle Griffin](#), BuzzFeed
- [Beyond 140 Characters: The forces that shape journalists' strategic Twitter engagement](#), Tow Center
- [How One Reporter Uses Social Media to Get Inside the Minds of ISIS](#), Wired

Week 4: Social for newsgathering

- [Reporting on Las Vegas, Pixel by Pixel](#), The New York Times
- [Using Google Reverse Image Search to see if an image has appeared online before](#), First Draft

Week 5: Social for community building

- [What Vox Learned from Building Groups and Creating Communities on Facebook](#), Facebook
- [The Washington Post on Reddit Surprises Users with Its Non-Promotional Ultra-Helpful Presence](#), Nieman Lab

Week 6: Audience engagement

- [How 10 news organizations look at issues of online engagement](#), Nieman Lab
- [Listening Post has expanded to 7 cities. Here's a free guide to bring it to yours](#), Poynter
- [WNYC's Note to Self sent 300,000 texts to 15,000 people; here's how they did it and what they learned](#), Nieman Lab

Week 7: Comments

- [Coral Project guides to audience engagement teach newsrooms how to fish](#), Columbia Journalism Review
- [De Correspondent: A New Kind of Journalism](#), Coral Project

Week 8: Metrics

- [Essential tools for measuring audience metrics and engagement](#), IJNet
- [The Pageview is Passé: New Metrics Emerge to Measure Audiences](#), American Journalism Review
- [When metrics drive newsroom culture](#), Columbia Journalism Review

Week 9: Impact measurement

- [Center for Investigative Reporting Impact Glossary](#)
- [What We Talk About When We Talk About Impact: One News Organization's Approach to Practicing Journalism with a Purpose](#)

Assignment: Engagement Project Presentation

What: A 5 to 10 minute oral presentation on a journalism engagement project of your choosing. Students can pick from the list of projects or select another project in consultation with the professor.

When: Each student will be assigned a date to give their presentation. See below for the schedule.

How: Each student will research an engagement project and give a brief presentation on it. Students may give an oral presentation, a slideshow presentation, or prepare handouts. Be prepared to answer questions.

Example

presentation: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1_nmawFsu7DBxEC_AK4bYrbZcfspBmmFLmV0y5ojuCqo/edit?usp=sharing

What to include in the presentation:

- The name of the project
- The company/organization that did the project
- The purpose of the project
- When the project took place, or if it's ongoing
- How the newsroom engaged with the audience (Twitter, Google form, real-life events, etc)
- The results/outcome/findings of the project
- What impact the project had, if any

Grading: This presentation accounts for 25% of your overall grade.

- If you volunteer to present first in the class (on Week 2), you'll get 10 extra points.
- If you miss one of the bullets to include in the presentation, you'll lose points.
- If you are absent or unprepared to present on the day you're assigned, you'll lose 40% of your overall grade and you'll be expected to present during the following class.

Engagement projects to research

Each student will present on an engagement project during each class. Students may choose from this list or pick another option in consultation with the professor.

- [Clear Health Costs](#)
- [Crossfire](#)
- [Curious City](#), WBEZ
- [On Shaky Ground](#), California Watch
- [Hospital ER Fees](#), Vox
- [East Boston, Nuestra Casa](#)
- [Lost Mothers](#), ProPublica
- [Reliving Agent Orange](#), ProPublica
- [The Voices of Patient Harm](#), ProPublica
- [Student Debt](#), Reveal
- [Student Debt](#), Death, Sex & Money
- [Wisconsin Baking Challenge](#), Wisconsin Public Television
- [Voting Block](#), WNYC
- [Hurricane Irma Map](#), The New Tropic
- [Listen to America](#), HuffPost

Assignment: Final Presentation

What: A 10-minute presentation proposing your own engagement project. You can either come up with your own idea, or take an existing story/investigation and develop an engagement strategy for that story.

When: Each student will practice their presentation in class on April 24 and get feedback from other students. Final presentations will be given on the last day of class, April 30.

How: Students will prepare a deck outlining their proposal to share with the class. Be prepared to answer questions.

What to include in the presentation:

- The who/what/where/why/how of your story/investigation
 - Why is this project necessary?
 - Who is your intended audience?
 - How would you reach your audience?
 - What is your ask?
 - What is the problem/question you're hoping to solve?
 - What tools would you use to reach your audience?
 - What mediums would you use for storytelling?
 - Where geographically would you target?
- Brief overview of the existing story/investigation (if applicable)
- Why the existing story/investigation needs an engagement component (if applicable)
- What organization/company you'd pitch the story to, and why
- How you would measure the impact of your story/investigation

Grading: This presentation accounts for 40% of your overall grade for the class.

- Practice presentations will count for 25% of your grade on this assignment. If you are absent or unprepared to present on the practice day, you'll lose this amount on your grade.
- Your final presentation will account for 75% of your grade on this assignment. I'll take into account the effort that went into your deck, your oral presentation, and your ability to answer questions about the project.