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TEACHING ACTIVITY

Course Development Narrative

MAJOR CURRICULUM REORGANIZATION

NewsVision Lab Changes

The NewsVision Lab course has significantly changed over the course of the past five years, and I have worked with colleagues and individually to make changes in the course structure and outcomes. The two most significant changes have been:

- A) The successful completion of two commercially-broadcast newscasts in the coveted Washington, DC, metropolitan television market.
- B) The course transitioning from a 3-credit to a 6-credit course.

Washington, DC ranks #8 out of more than 200 television markets in the country. Over the past two semesters, students in my NewsVision class produced two “as-live” recorded newscasts with PBS affiliate WHUT TV, and one “as-live” newscast for HowardUniversityElectionProject.com on Election Day 2016. The most recent WHUT newscast was sponsored by NBCUniversal, and I was honored to have been the initial contact for this accomplishment.

Historically, the Capstone NewsVision course which is taken by seniors, has primarily focused on the reporting aspect of the business. I have changed this philosophy to ensure the students understand and appreciate *all* roles of media production and television station management, notably decision-making roles which they may not have been aware of-- from General Manager and Sales, to Engineering, the Assignment Desk, News Director and Producer. The students are multi-media journalists who write, report, edit and produce their own stories— much more than most traditional journalists. This prepares them for the new media news environment in which we live.

Challenges

During the Fall 2016 semester the capstone course transitioned to a 6- credit course without an official guideline on how to make the needed changes. The duration and frequency of the course remained the same in the fall semester—twice a week for three hours. Additionally, due to the 2014 changes in the new MJFC graduation scheme (see attached document), students in the capstone course receive more credit hours, despite having had fewer prerequisites than their counterparts who were in the journalism scheme. This has resulted in a unique challenge—

ensuring the students are adequately prepared to meet the outcomes for the course and prepare them for gainful employment upon graduation.

My approach was careful but deliberate. I added more significant assignments and classroom instruction, as well as added a “day of” newscast, on Election Day 2016. All students served as reporters and had same-day deadlines. They then produced a 17-minute newscast that evening which immediately was uploaded onto the MJFC Election website. While most students were overwhelmed, they accomplished all goals, and left much more appreciate and aware of the skills necessary for the industry. They also were able to take part in a historic election alongside other professional journalists in Washington.

This also allowed for the students to take part in the praxis, or practice of journalism through hands-on experience. They also had the unique opportunity to learn and practice the production side of television news—mainly directing, floor direction, and other production aspects which are vital for the successful execution of a newscast. I have found through experience that a more a person knows about all aspects of the business, the better equipped he or she is to excel.

In my NewsVision course, I added a new assignment on creating an original :30 promo for the NewsVision newscast. This project allowed the students to work in teams on a continued project throughout the semester, which culminated in the top two being selected for broadcast in the NewsVision Newscast on WHUT. The assignment promoted teamwork, originality and creativity and gave them opportunities to produce more than traditional news stories, while enhancing their understanding of the intersection of promotions and news. The students also received hands-on instruction on the Tricaster production software which allows users to direct newscasts and learn valuable technical production techniques. As a result, several students expressed interest in careers in television news directing.

Results

I am humbled that my teaching has surpassed the average requirements, in that our students are now accomplishing what has not been done in more than 20 years—self-producing professional newscasts on a public broadcasting station which is disseminated to more than two million viewers, despite the complexities of the current spectrum situation, and in alignment with the university, School of Communications and MJFC's departmental goals of producing journalists who can effectively transition from classroom to newsroom.

The students receive hands-on about the complexities and nuances of producing a professional newscast under strict deadlines, but the classroom transformed into a teaching laboratory for imparting professional skills as well as knowledge. Additionally, the professional staff at WHUT who had not worked alongside students in producing an "as live" broadcast. It has also set a new precedent for the department, school and university.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW COURSES

Public Affairs Reporting- Broadcast

I and with former colleague Prof. Keith Harriston, were charged with developing a new course and for journalism students in the Media, Journalism and Film Department “journalism” concentration-- Public Affairs Reporting. This course would be offered to students with interest in print, online, and broadcast. The

A) Create the new course in the new MJFC Department

B) Incorporating broadcast outcomes to the course

I helped create the concept, course outcomes, and guidelines for this class. I also created a “broadcast” version of the course for the students interested broadcast. In part the students “are expected to develop and interview sources, research documents, and use other techniques vital to reporting public affairs. Additionally, students gain experience in covering public issues to understand local and federal politics in Washington, D.C. Through field and classroom assignments along with fieldwork, students will sharpen their research, reporting and interviewing skills, polish their writing, shooting and reporting and gain practical experience in digital newsgathering and editing. They will learn effective application of ethics in covering a variety of subjects, apply First Amendment principles while developing style and technique. Successful completion of this course requires students to analyze complex issues and ideas, and to demonstrate your mastery of the material in digital and broadcast form.” (From my Public Affairs Reporting-Broadcast syllabus)

Under the new MJFC journalism concentration, many students arrived to this course without having mastered techniques in understanding broadcast terminology, shooting and editing for video news, and writing for broadcast. I have thus amended the course to amend some of the basic broadcast learning outcomes in those areas, while assuring they are understanding and then reporting on public affairs issues.

Some of the other challenges (in both courses) include working without standard technology-including news management software, industry-standard studio and field equipment, and up-to-date computers. This is akin to a biology student not having a lab in which to conduct study. I have met these challenges by using the “glass half full” philosophy. I use the most basic of software- Word and Excel for news and scripting, and traditional math for timing of stories and newscasts. We use free software to provide teleprompter for newscasting and producing. While the students graduate without having these standard tools of the trade, they are still equipped with the knowledge, and have been able to transition quickly and have commented the ease in which they are able to assimilate.

Colleges in the Journalism concentration have agreed to return to the prerequisite Broadcast Journalism I and Journalism II courses so that the Public Affairs Reporting class can focus more on outcomes and not as much on methodology. This change should take place in AY 2019-2020.