Beat Reporting: The Journalism of the Web
JRN U606 and G306 • Fall 2006
Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:50 to 4:30 p.m.

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Overview

A course called “The Journalism of the Web” is, in a sense, a course about all of journalism. Newspapers increasingly are mere adjuncts to their Web sites. Television and radio stations have repurposed much of their content for the Web. Moreover, media that appear to be quite different in the analogue world — that is, newspapers, magazines, television, and radio — are very much alike in the digital world, as news organizations of all kinds increasingly combine text, photographs, video, and audio. It’s all zeroes and ones.

But there is far more to Web-based journalism than mere convergence. The Web makes possible new forms of reporting and new ways to connect with the public through such technologies as online chats and staff-written blogs. It has also given rise to new competition, both from established media that are now available well beyond their home bases to new types of media that would have been inconceivable before the rise of the Web. Moreover, the Web, and especially easy-to-use blogging software, enables anyone to be a journalist, which has sparked what is often called the “citizen journalism” movement.

In this course we will explore what I call the six concentric circles of Web-based journalism, starting at the core of the traditional newsroom and moving farther out with each circle:

1. Computer-assisted reporting via Web-based resources
2. Enhancing traditional reporting with multimedia features, links, original source documents, and the like
3. Using the Web to interact with what citizen-media pioneer Dan Gillmor calls the “former audience” — blogs, online chats, and beyond
4. New competition from established media
5. New competition from new media
6. The “former audience” becomes the media through citizen journalism and media- and politics-savvy blogs

This course will consist of some lecturing, a lot of Web and multimedia demonstrations, extensive classroom discussions, readings, and guest speakers. By the end of the semester, you will be familiar with the concepts and trends that are revolutionizing the way we think about journalism.

This is a time of great pessimism about traditional forms of journalism such as newspapers, magazines, and television. I hope you will all become forward-looking optimists over the next few months.

Required reading

There is no textbook for this course. However, I expect you to read extensively in order to keep up on what’s going on in this rapidly changing field. Since you will all be writing blogs about developments in Web-based journalism, you will find that this reading will be essential raw material.
There are three webzine/blog sites that are devoted exclusively to the journalism of the Web. I expect you to check these sites at least once a week and to read them comprehensively:

- PressThink (www.pressthink.org), by New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen
- Online Journalism Review (www.ojr.org), published by the Annenberg School for Communication
- Media Shift (www.pbs.org/mediashift), by new-media commentator Mark Glaser

Rather than putting together a printed Classpac, I have posted an online reading list with links. You will find it at www.atsweb.neu.edu/dakenney/jow_reading.html. We will discuss these readings in class. You may also find blog-worthy material in those readings. If you don’t like to read long articles on a computer screen, you may, of course, print these out.

In addition to the three webzines and the online reading list, I will assign reading from time to time, especially as it pertains to guest speakers.

Finally, your blogs and the two feature articles you’ll be writing should conform to AP style — so in the unlikely event that you don’t already have an Associated Press Stylebook, you will want to get one.

**School of Journalism attendance policy**

The School of Journalism requires that you attend at least 80 percent of all scheduled class meetings. If you miss 20 percent or more of scheduled classes for any reason, you will automatically fail. Every absence will have some effect on my assessment of your class participation, which will be factored into your final grade. Chronic tardiness may result in my marking you down for additional absences.

**University statement regarding academic honesty**

Northeastern University is committed to the principles of intellectual honesty and integrity. All members of the Northeastern community are expected to maintain complete honesty in all academic work, presenting only that which is their own work in tests and all other assignments. If you have any questions regarding proper attribution of the work of others, please contact me prior to submitting the work for evaluation.

**Special accommodations**

If you have physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities that may require accommodations for this course, please meet with me after class or during conference hours to discuss what adaptations might be helpful to you. The Disability Resource Center, 20 Dodge Hall (x2675), can provide you with information and assistance. The university requires that you provide documentation of your disability to the DRC.

**Assignments, deadlines, and grades**

You will have four assignments this semester:

1. During the first two weeks of class we will start blogs. I expect you to post items on topics related to new media and Web-based journalism three or four times each week, with at least two of those items going well beyond the quick sentence, link, and blockquote. Your blog will count for 20 percent of your grade.

2. Class participation is vitally important in this course. Starting on Week 3, I will begin each class with a 10- or 15-minute presentation/demonstration from a student on topic of your choice related to new media or Web-based journalism. Since you’ll be blogging, there should be no shortage of material. I envision this class as a seminar, which means that I also expect regular in-class contributions from all of you. Your class participation will count for 20 percent of your grade.

3. At the midterm, you will turn in a 1,500-word feature story on a topic of your choice, again related to new media or Web-based journalism. Your story must be accompanied by a one-page memo outlining how you think your story
could be enhanced with Web features such as links, multimedia, online chats, and the like. Deadline: Wednesday, October 18, at the beginning of class. Your mid-term feature story will count for 20 percent of your grade.

4. Your final project will be the same as your midterm, only more in-depth: a 2,500-word feature story on a new-media or Web-journalism topic, also with a memo on how to enhance your story for the Web. Deadline for a one-page story pitch: Wednesday, October 25, at the beginning of class. Deadline for your first draft: Wednesday, November 29, at the beginning of class. I will return your story to you, with comments, on the last day of class — Wednesday, December 6. The deadline for your final draft will be sometime during finals week, on a day and time to be announced. Your final project will count for 40 percent of your grade.

Semester schedule

Weeks 1 and 2

• Introduction and setting up your blogs. What will the news of the future look like?
• Reading: “Adapt or Die,” by Rachel Smolkin; “More Media, Less News” and “Who Killed the Newspaper?,” from The Economist; “Now in Its Adolescence, the Internet Evolves into a Supplementary News Source,” by Mark Jurkowitz.

Weeks 3 and 4

• Web-based computer-assisted reporting, and how it enables not just traditional investigative reporting but an entirely new kind of journalism.

Weeks 5 and 6

• Repurposing content for the Web. What is “convergence journalism” and why is it important?
• Note: There will be no class on Monday, October 9, which is Columbus Day.

Weeks 7 and 8

• Using the Web to interact with the “former audience” through staff-written blogs, reader comments, online chats, and the like.
• Deadline reminder: Your midterm feature story is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, October 18. Your one-page story pitch on your final project is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, October 25.

Weeks 9 and 10

• The Web has given established news organizations unprecedented reach, which is both an opportunity and a threat.
Weeks 11 and 12  
November 13, 15, and 20

- The Web has given rise to *new forms* of journalism, such as Slate and Salon, The Smoking Gun, Romenesko, MySpace, podcasts, and YouTube — not to mention the ever-growing world of blogs.
- Reading: “Amateur Hour: Journalism Without Journalists,” by Nicholas Lemann (be sure to read Jeff Jarvis’s response as well); “Feed Your Head,” by Dan Kennedy.
- *Note: There will be no class on Wednesday, November 22, which is the beginning of the Thanksgiving recess.*

Weeks 13 and 14  
November 27 and 29, December 4 and 6

- The “former audience” becomes the media, from large, national, politically oriented sites such as the Daily Kos to hyperlocal projects such as H2otown.
- *Deadline reminder: The first draft of your final project is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, November 29. I will return it to you in class on Wednesday, December 6.*

Finals week  
December 8–15

- *The final draft of your project will be due on a date and time to be announced.*

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