

Sam Houston State University
Department of Mass Communication
MCOM 5330 Advanced Digital Writing, Spring 2017
Thursday 5:00-7:50 p.m. TWC #351

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Office hours: Huntsville: 1 – 3 p.m. Monday and Wednesday, or by appointment
The Woodlands Center: 2 – 4 p.m. Thursday, or by appointment

Course Description & Objectives

Blogging is a little like bowling: It's easy to do, but difficult to do well. Advanced digital writing skills are necessary to market yourself, your goals, and your passions on the W3, also known as the world wide web. This is especially true given how quickly the online media ecosystem is fragmenting, diversifying, multiplying, and democratizing. Digital writers must be cognizant of a variety of new media development and distribution platforms, new and evolving technologies, small and interest-driven audiences, and technocratic methods of source and interview collection and cultivation. This course teaches you to survive and thrive in that brave new world.

By May 4, you will be fluent in a wide range of online media distribution platforms. You will be capable of broad multimedia production and understand what constitutes strong online writing and production. You will have an impressive WordPress website and a diversified presence on social media. You will be ready to market yourself and leverage your online brand to employers in any field.

Most importantly, you'll have a blog that speaks your mind, showcases your talents, or explores your thoughts. You'll earn those writing and multimedia skills by adding your voice to the public sphere on a subject of your choosing.

Required Textbooks

Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism by Benedict Anderson. Verso. 2006. Second Edition.

Everybody Writes: Your Go-To Guide to Creating Ridiculously Good Content by Ann Handley. John Wiley & Sons, Inc, Hoboken, New Jersey. 2014.

Social Media Explained: Untangling the World's Most Misunderstood Business Trend, by Mark W. Schaefer. Published by Mark W. Schaefer. 2014.

How to Blog for Profit Without Selling Your Soul, by Ruth Soukup. Published by Ruth Soukup. 2014. Expanded second edition.

How to Podcast 2016: 4 Simple Steps to Broadcast Your Message to the Entire Connected Planet ... Even If You Don't Know Where To Start, by Paul Colligan. Colligan, Inc. 2016.

How to Shoot Video that Doesn't Suck, by Steve Stockman. Workman Publishing: New York. 2011.

Course Guidelines

Deadlines – Deadlines are absolute in newsrooms and media corporations, and are largely inflexible elsewhere in the so-called “real world.” Course deadlines are strict to reflect those priorities. Missing a deadline by up to 24 hours will result in a 10 point penalty on the assignment. After 24 hours, the student will receive a zero on the assignment. Exceptions can be granted for reasonable absences or uncontrollable events, including illness or family emergencies.

Attendance Policy – SHSU Student Handbook of University Policies states that regular and punctual class attendance is expected of each student at Sam Houston State University and that it is expected that each faculty member will keep a record of student attendance. A student will not be penalized for three absences or six tardies (defined as entering class after roll has been taken) when examinations or other assigned work has not been missed.

The Department of Mass Communication has adopted the policy that every absence or two tardies over the allotted three absences or six tardies will result in the loss of one letter grade. For example, if your class grade is a B and you have five absences your final course grade will be a D.

Additionally:

- Exceptions are for documented illnesses or family emergencies or for students attending SHSU activities in an official capacity. Documentation for illness or emergency should be presented upon the student’s return to the classroom. Documentation for activities should be presented prior to the absence and contain the signature of the SHSU employee sponsor.
- Each semester hour of credit entails at least two additional hours of work outside the classroom per week: so for this 3 credit course, you should expect to do at least an additional 6 hours of work a week beyond class time. This is on average; some weeks may require more, others less.

Grading scale

A	90% and above
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	59% & below

E-mail – You must be able to receive e-mail via your “@shsu.edu” account. You will be responsible for any messages you miss if you do not use this university-assigned address. Class announcements may also be posted on Blackboard.

Academic Dishonesty – All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

[Dean of Student's Office](#)

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy – Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/documents/861001.pdf

Students with Disabilities Policy – It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/811006.pdf

Campus Carry Policy – Texas law allows the concealed carry of licensed handguns on certain parts of campus. Sam Houston State University policy allows the concealed carry of licensed handguns in university classrooms. Both state law and university policy require handguns be concealed at all times. If at any time a firearm becomes visible, the student will be asked to leave and given an absence for that class day. If the student becomes disruptive, University Police Department staff will be notified. If a firearm is discharged for any reason, deliberately or accidentally, UPD staff will be notified.

Mental & Physical Health Policy - If you find yourself struggling with your mental or physical health this semester, please feel free to approach me. I try to be reasonably flexible and accommodating, just as any competent boss or supervisor in the so-called “real world” would assist her or his employees. Also, please feel empowered and encouraged to reach out to the Student Health Center at (936) 294-1805 and the Counseling Center at (936) 294-1720.

Course Requirements

The majority of your course grade will revolve around the completion of a stable, functioning, frequently updated, and well-maintained WordPress blog. That blog will include multiple posts including embedded photographs, podcasts, videos, and tweets; a page with biographical information, including a biographical video; a frequently used Twitter page, complete with a matching introduction and an embedded widget in your WordPress site; a YouTube channel; and other features. Many of those features will be counted as individual grades throughout the semester.

You are expected to keep up with assigned readings, discuss them at length in class, and participate in active feedback on your classmates’ ideas and websites. In the final class period you will formally present your website to classmates and guests.

Assignments:	40%
Website:	40%
Final Presentation:	20%

Course Assignments:

- A1)** Prepare a detailed report on a blog idea. Include links to similar blogs, goals and objectives, and opportunities for written and multimedia content.
- A2)** Create a functioning, professional, customized WordPress website. Adopt an appropriate theme and include at least one dummy post and page.
- A3)** Write a blog post emphasizing a deviant topic in your niche: Timeliness, conflict, and celebrity.
- A4)** Write a professional, sincere About Me page. It should introduce you and the subject of your blog.
- A5)** Bring to class an unedited photo of you for a mugshot. That photo should reflect the subject and nature of your blog. Edit that photo in Photoshop and post it to your WordPress website, either as a Widget or in your About Me page. NO SELFIES.
- A6)** Write three detailed blog posts, due on your WordPress site, which emphasize a deviant topic in your niche.
- A7)** Write two detailed Q&A interviews with individuals relevant to your niche
- A8)** Write a detailed blog post with an accompanying, embedded podcast
- A9)** Write a detailed blog post with an accompanying, embedded podcast
- A10)** Write a detailed blog post with an accompanying, embedded podcast
- A11)** Create a functioning Twitter page and Twitter widget for your blog
- A12)** Tweet your latest blog posts, follow other blogs, and become as visible as possible on social media
- A13)** Write three detailed blog posts, with embedded podcasts, and tweet them
- A14)** Shoot and edit a video introduction for your blog. Post that introduction on a YouTube channel and embed it into your blog's About Me page
- A15)** Shoot videos for either three new blog posts, three old blog posts, or a combination. Post those videos to YouTube and embed them in your blog.

Assignments:

Class Schedule:

Week 1: January 19

Topic: What is "News?" What are "Blogs?" Introduction and Overview

Readings: None

Due: None

Assigned: A1

Return: None

Week 2: January 26

Topic: Blogs I: Trolling, Democracy, and WordPress I

Readings: Emailed articles

Due: A1

Assigned: A2

Return: None

Week 3: February 2

Topic: Imagined Community I

Readings: Anderson 1 - 6

Due: A2

Assigned: A3, A4

Return: A1

Week 4: February 9

Topic: Imagined Community II, WordPress II, and Photoshop I

Readings: Anderson 7 - 11

Due: A3, A4

Assigned: A5

Return: A2

Week 5: February 16

Topic: Digital Writing I

Readings: Handley

Due: A5

Assigned: A6

Return: A3, A4

Week 6: February 23

Topic: Narcissism & Blogging

Readings: Emailed readings

Due: A6

Assigned: A7

Return: A5

Week 7: March 2

Topic: Podcasting I & Audio Editing I

Readings: Colligan

Due: None

Assigned: A8

Return: A6, A7

Week 8: March 9

Topic: Blogs II & Audio Editing II

Readings: Soukup

Due: A8

Assigned: A9

Return: None

Week 9: March 16

Spring Break: No Class

Week 10: March 23

Topic: Podcasting II

Readings: Emailed articles

Due: A9

Assigned: A10

Return: A8

Week 11: March 30

Topic: Social Media I

Readings: Schaefer

Due: A10

Assigned: A11, A12

Return: A9

Week 12: April 6

Topic: Social Media II

Readings: Emailed articles

Due: A11, A12

Assigned: A13

Return: A10

Week 13: April 13

Topic: Video I
Readings: Stockman
Due: A13
Assigned: A14
Return: A11, A12

Week 14: April 20

Topic: Video II
Due: A14
Assigned: A15
Return: A13

Week 15: April 27

Topic:
Due: A15
Assigned: None
Return: A13

Week 16: May 4

Final Project Presentations