Digital and Multimedia Journalism

**JOUR-109B**, Brandeis University
Spring 2017
Brown Social Science Center 316

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**Table of contents:**

- Course description
- Course objectives
- About the instructor
- Course outline
- Required readings
- Expectations
- Assignments
- Weekly schedule

  Class 1, Jan. 17: Contours of the digital world
  Class 2, Jan. 24: Basics of Digital News Publishing
  Class 3, Jan. 31: Social Hour and Photography
  Class 4, Feb. 7: Digital Storytelling Tools
  Class 5, Feb. 14: Podcasting and Audience Development
  Feb. 21: NO CLASS
  Class 6, Feb. 28: Don't Fear the Data
  Class 7, March 7: Data Visualization
  Class 8, March 14: Our First Hack
  Class 9, March 21: Mobile Video
  Class 10, March 28: Video Editing and Interactive Documentary
  Class 11, April 4: Our Second Hack
April 11 and April 18: NO CLASS
Class 12, April 25: Workshopping
Class 13, May 2: Final presentations

University Policies and Standards
  Confidentiality
  Learning Disabilities
  Academic Honesty and Student Integrity

Grading policy
Exercise Class 1

Course description

Seemingly overnight, everyone with a computer or smartphone became a self-publisher of prose and poetry, photo and video, tweets and rants. The old guard of media publishing was caught off guard and is still struggling to keep pace and remain profitable in an age of free content. Access to information, distribution channels, and digital publishing tools have been so democratized that making content is as easy as hitting Publish. Wading into this fray, what fundamentals must we learn to report, write and produce multimedia stories for the digital world? And when, if at all, is it appropriate to deploy these tools?

This is a survey course that will expose you to a suite of tools employed in contemporary media reporting, editing, design and delivery. While this course will introduce you to the emerging applications, technology and ideas of digital storytelling, its bedrock is journalism: accurate reporting and ethical storytelling in the public interest.

We will touch on many areas – human-centered design, community development, information visualization – but devote the most time to video and data, key emerging areas in the field of digital journalism, as well as have robust discussion of the problems facing and future of journalism in the 21st century. At times, we will co-manage a class blog and publish content there. Much of our in-class time will be devoted to learning particular skills as well as discussing relevant theories. We want to know the tools but we also want to know the deeper principles that can guide our thoughtful use of them. Having both a conceptual understanding and a good grasp of key vocabulary are also important to a career in digital journalism.
Course objectives

We will learn to produce compelling stories through various digital mediums, gaining experience and practice in key areas. The course is intended to give you the confidence to tell stories in any medium and that you can, in effect, “learn how to learn” any new technology or medium, should you need to use it for your journalism. Finally, we will interrogate what “digital journalism” really means: Is it distinctive from traditional, “offline” journalism? What are the enduring values? What changes? What does digitally native storytelling require, and what are its promises and perils?

Learning objectives

Upon completion of this course you will be able to:

- Tell stories through multiple digital avenues, and have the confidence to learn new techniques and skills as the digital news ecosystem continues to evolve.
- Have a critical perspective on visual and data-driven storytelling.
- Understand key concepts relating to the flow of information in the digital world.
- Use social media tools to engage and develop audiences while understanding the dynamics – including the pitfalls – of social networks for newsgathering and storytelling.

About the instructor

Aleszu Bajak is a senior writer with Undark, a new magazine from the Knight Science Journalism Program at M.I.T., where he was a fellow in 2013–14. He is also the editor of Storybench.org, a guide to the art and science of digital storytelling, and LatinAmericanScience.org, a resource for science news and opinion from Latin America. Before freelance reporting, he was a producer for the public radio show Science Friday and once upon a time worked in the gene therapy department at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. His writing has appeared in The Washington Post, MIT Technology Review, the Boston Globe Magazine, and Esquire, among other outlets.

Course outline

Jan. 17, Class 1, Contours of Digital Journalism.


Jan. 31, Class 3, Social Hour and Photography.

Feb. 7, Class 4, Digital Storytelling Tools.

Feb. 14, Class 5, Audience Development.
Feb. 21, **NO CLASS**

Feb. 28, Class 6, **Don't Fear the Data**.

March 7, Class 7, **Data Visualization**.

March 14, Class 8, **Our First Hack**.

March 21, Class 9, **Mobile Video**.

March 28, Class 10, **Video editing and Interactive Documentary**.

April 4, Class 11, **Our Second Hack**.

April 11, **NO CLASS**

April 18, **NO CLASS**

April 25, Class 12, **Workshopping**.

May 2, Class 13, **Final presentations**.

**Required readings**

[NYTimes.com](http://NYTimes.com)

[Nieman Journalism Lab](http://Nieman Journalism Lab)

**Expectations**

You should set up your WordPress site login at the [class blog](http://class blog) before our first class meeting. You should also sign up for a Twitter handle and Instagram account. Use #jour109b to share articles and engage in conversation with classmates.

You are expected to follow the news and tweet stories using #jour109b that you’d like to see discussed in class. See a great – or poor – example of digital storytelling? Tweet it!

**Assignments**

Apart from tweets and pitches, the major assignments for this course are the following:

- Due Jan. 31: A **300-word article** published on the class blog about an event, a person, or a piece of news. An interview is not required but is highly encouraged. This is more of a blogpost than a
news story. Think of it as a short response essay that will be graded on 1) attention to detail, 2) layout, 3) spelling and 4) grammar. Include a headline, at least one hyperlink, and embed one image, right-justified using CSS. (Use `<img src="http://URLhere" style="float:right;"/>). Credit your image at the bottom of the post.

- Due Feb. 7: Publish a **photo to Instagram** with a 10-sentence caption that is descriptive, concise and tells a story. In addition to tagging it #jour109b, add five hashtags that will help this photo find one or more communities. **Embed the Instagram post into a Wordpress post** on the class blog and make sure to add a headline.

- Due Feb. 14: Produce a **700-word Q&A** with the writer/producer/coder/creator of a recent piece of non-fiction digital storytelling, within or outside of journalism. The idea with this assignment is to browse various newspapers, magazines, websites and blogs in order to deepen your knowledge of the field, and familiarize yourself with the current state of the art and craft of digital storytelling. Identify a project you’d like to peek “under the hood” of, and contact the creator(s). Set up a brief phone call or, at last resort, send questions over email. What’s interesting about the resource you’ve found? What makes it striking or new? What tools or techniques were employed to create it? What advice does its creator have for journalism students? As a model, use the Storybench Q&A’s found [here](http://example.com), [here](http://example.com), [here](http://example.com) and [here](http://example.com). When you’re writing this up for the class blog, include: a brief introduction that explains and links to the piece, the name of the creator and their title, at least five questions and answers.

- Due Feb. 28: A mini **digital storytelling project** using a tool used in class that includes a headline and a three-sentence introduction. A walking tour of [pumpkin spice latte](http://example.com) locations using StoryMapJS would suffice but one meme is definitely not ambitious enough. A series of political memes illuminating a candidate’s position on climate change, though, *would* work. Publish it to the class blog.

- Due March 28. **Review** the IDFA’s “**Interactive Canon**” and **analyze** at least one documentary on which you’ll present briefly in class. No blog post required. Come to class ready to discuss what the project is, what the user is expected to do or learn, how it was built and how successful it was.

- Due April 4. Publish a **short video** to the class blog with a headline and three-sentence introduction. Your video must include at least two cuts and be published on any platform that supports video such as Instagram, Twitter, Vine, YouTube and Vimeo.

- Due May 2: A **500-word explanatory piece** (emulating [The Upshot](http://example.com) or [Vox](http://example.com)) about a topic that is near and dear to you. Your final piece must include an original visual with it: That could be a timeline, a series of slider images, short video clips, a map, an Instagram campaign, bar charts or some kind of data visualization, or some other visual complementary to your explainer. You must interview *at least* one source.

- **EXTRA CREDIT:** Interested in covering digital innovation in journalism? Pitch Aleszu a story for [Storybench.org](http://example.com), Northeastern School of Journalism’s blog that covers the art and science of digital storytelling. Browse the [tutorials](http://example.com) and [features](http://example.com) for a sense of what we publish.
Weekly schedule

Class 1, Jan. 17: Contours of the digital world

**Themes:** Introduction to the course and booting up your login to the class Wordpress blog. We will unpack case studies of digital journalism and establish the language we’ll use over the course of the semester to analyze works of modern journalism. We’ll discuss the first assignment and expectations for all subsequent ones.

**Assignments for next class:** Bring in an example of a recently published piece of digital journalism that you thought was well done. Tweet it using the hashtag #jour109b and come prepared to discuss the piece’s merits. What makes it good? What about it drew your attention?

**Readings for next class:**

Eric Newton, *“A New Age of Communication,”* Chapter One, Searchlights and Sunglasses, 2013.


Class 2, Jan. 24: Basics of Digital News Publishing

**Due this class:** Tweet a piece of digital journalism that you found well done.

**Themes:** A discussion of journalism’s charge in 2017. Intro to HTML, CSS and best practices for digital news publishing. Codepen [tutorial here](#). CSS cheat sheet [here](#). Placeholder images [here](#). Previewing the Q&A assignment and checking in on the first blogpost.

**Assignments for next class:** A 300-word article published on the class blog about an event, a person, or a piece of news. No interviews required. This is more of a blogpost than a news story. Students must pitch their story idea to Aleszu beforehand. Think of it as a short response essay that will be graded on 1) attention to detail, 2) layout, 3) spelling and 4) grammar. Include a headline, an opening line that grabs the reader, the answers to who, what, where, when, why and how, at least one hyperlink, and embed one image, right-justified using CSS. <img src="http://URLhere" style="float:right;" /> Credit your image at the bottom of the post.

Also, pitch Aleszu the Storybench-style Q&A you’ll be doing.

**Readings for next class:**

John Wihbey, *“Rethinking Viral: Why the Digital World Is Not as Democratic as We Think.”* Pacific Standard, 2014

Emily Bell, *“Facebook is Eating the World,”* Columbia Journalism Review, 2016

Aleszu will assign one of the following:
● Vice and the MIT Media Lab, “Parallel narratives,” 2016
● UVM’s Computational Story Lab, “Forecasting the onset and course of mental illness with Twitter data,” 2016. Abstract here.

Class 3, Jan. 31: Social Hour and Photography

**Due this class:** Post your **300-word story** on the class blog on an event, person, or piece of news.

**Themes:** Intro to social media strategy and basics of photography. We’ll discuss projects in data science, epidemiology and journalism that have mined social data to tell stories and gain insights. We’ll use Twxplorer and Hashtagify to find related hashtags and influencers and look at some interesting analyses of social media. Experiment with Signal for trending stories on Facebook and Bluenod for network visualization of Twitter community. We’ll discuss social media at each point along the newsmaking continuum, from idea to pitch to publish.

**Assignments for next class:** Instagram essay. Publish a photo to Instagram with a 10-sentence caption that is descriptive, concise and tells a story. In addition to tagging it #jour109b, add five hashtags that will help this photo find one or more communities. Embed the Instagram post into a Wordpress post and make sure to add a headline.

**Readings for next class:**


Read three of Neil’s Instagram posts.

Class 4, Feb. 7: Digital Storytelling Tools

**Due this class:** Instagram essays.

**Themes:** Intro to digital storytelling formats – Instagram, TimelineJS, JuxtaposeJS, memes, and more – with a focus on best practices, formats, platform, style, and tools. We’ll check in on our Q&As.

**Assignments for next class:** Your Storybench-style Q&A. Also, start brainstorming an original story using a digital storytelling tool that will include a headline and a three-sentence introduction. A walking tour of pumpkin spice latte locations using StoryMapJS would suffice but one meme is definitely not ambitious enough. A series of political memes illuminating a candidate’s position on climate change, though, would work. Pitch Aleszu your idea by the end of class on Feb. 14. Publish it on the class blog by Feb. 28.

**Readings for next class:**
Aleszu will assign one of the following:

- Jennifer Brandel, “What We Mean When We Talk About ‘Engagement,’” Medium, 2016
- ProPublica, “What’s Next For ProPublica’s Engagement Reporting Team,” 2017

Class 5, Feb. 14: Podcasting and Audience Development

**Due this class:** Your Storybench-style Q&A.

**Themes:** Introduction to podcasting and radio reporting. We’ll introduce handheld recorders, microphones and the Hindenburg editing software. We’ll discuss efforts in community engagement in journalism – like the 6,000 stories collected by ProPublica on Agent Orange – and audience development strategies. Also, what’s in a pitch and what’s an explainer? Best practices, formats, platform, style, tools. We’ll preview the digital storytelling assignment.

**Assignments for next class:** Email Aleszu a pitch for your final, 500-word explanatory piece (emulating NYT Upshot or Vox) about a topic that is near and dear to you. Your final piece must include an original visual with it: That could be a timeline, a series of slider images, short video clips, a map, an Instagram campaign, or some other visual complementary to your explainer. You must include at least one interviewed source.

Feb. 21: NO CLASS

Class 6, Feb. 28: Don’t Fear the Data

**Due this class:** Your original digital story.

**Themes:** Intro to data and spreadsheets. Exercise: Interrogate this Titanic passengers list with the guiding question: Which gender and class had the highest survival percentage? What are the limitations of the dataset? Exercise 2: Find and pitch the class an interesting, BuzzFeed-like story using this box office data. We’ll also learn some textual analysis using DataBasic.io’s Wordcounter function using SOTU transcripts.

All in-class exercises can be found here: bit.ly/NUdataviz

**Assignments for next class:** Bring in a data visualization project you particularly enjoyed and be prepared to discuss what it communicates and what data was needed to create it. Tweet it using #jour109b.

**Readings/viewings for next class:**


Ross Crooks, “16 Captivating Data Visualization Examples,” HubSpot, 2015

Mike Ananny and Kate Crawford, “Designer or journalist: Who shapes the news you read in your favorite apps?” Nieman Lab, 2014

Class 7, March 7: Data Visualization

**Due this class:** Tweet a dataviz piece and be prepared to critique it. Read some Kaiser Fung for critiquing tips.

**Themes:** Using Google maps, we’ll explore digital cartography and discuss best practices of information design. We’ll also be using Raw for more ambitious, less mainstream visualizations. We’ll look at examples of maps and other visualizations in the wild. We’ll focus on best practices, formats, platform, style, and tools.

**Readings for next class:**

Jeremy Singer-Vine’s curated dataset collection: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1wZhPLMCHKJvwOkP4juelhjFgqIY8fQFMemwKL2c64vk/htmlview?pli=1


Class 8, March 14: Our First Hack

**Themes:** Come prepared to dig into data and find some stories. First, we’ll explore the basics of geospatial design and look at why we’ve been mapping data for centuries. Then we'll break into groups, build some maps and present our projects to the class.

**Assignments for next class:** Bring in an idea for what you might want to do a short, mobile video on that occurs on-campus on Tuesday afternoons. Tweet a short news video you enjoyed – or disliked – with jour109b.

Hackathon worksheet here.

**Readings/viewings for next class:**

Class 9, March 21: Mobile Video

**Due this class:** Bring in an idea for a 2 to 3-minute video and tweet a short news video you found compelling. Be prepared to present it and explain its production.

**Themes:** We’ll discuss trends in mobile videojournalism and best practices in videography and cinematography. We’ll start shooting a mobile video in groups. Students will gain an appreciation for best practices like framing interviews with the rule of thirds, getting good audio and good lighting. We’ll discuss tools for photography and reporting: TinEye reverse image search to assess authenticity of images, EXIFdata to find embedded image data. We’ll complete an editing exercise using Adobe Premiere Pro.

**Assignment for next class:**
Watch and take notes on one or two of the interactive documentaries aggregated on the IDFA’s “Documentary Canon.” Be prepared to explain to the class what the documentary is about, what the user is expected to do, and how it might have been made.

**Readings/viewings for next class:**
IDFA DocLab, 95 projects from the “Documentary Canon.”

Class 10, March 28: Video Editing and Interactive Documentary

**Themes:** Video editing with Premiere Pro. Exploring interactive documentary and newsrooms experimenting with the medium. We’ll plan out and build a 360 photograph using Google’s Cardboard app.

**Assignments for Nov. 21:** Finish your mobile video. Publish it to the class blog with a headline and three-sentence introduction. Your video must include at least two cuts and be published on any platform that supports video such as Instagram, Vine, YouTube and Vimeo.

Class 11, April 4: Our Second Hack

**Due this class:** Your mobile video published to the class blog with a headline and three-sentence introduction. Pitch Aleszu your final explainer story idea via email before class.

**Themes:** 360 video hackday. After a brief introduction to human-centered design – borrowing from lessons here, here and here – we’ll conceptualize and wireframe a design, then draft a pitch and present it. More resources for 360 video here.
Assignments for next class: One page outline of your final story project. Include: who you’ll interview, your story’s working title, a brief summary of your visual element and where you’ll get the data or assets.

April 11 and April 18: NO CLASS

Class 12, April 25: Workshopping

Due this class: Outline of your final story project.

Assignments for next class: Final presentations.

Class 13, May 2: Final presentations

Due this class: Final presentations and pizza!

University Policies and Standards

Confidentiality

- We should respect our fellow classmates and work under the assumption that what is discussed here stays within the confines of the classroom.
- For your awareness, members of the University's technical staff have access to all course sites to aid in course setup and technical troubleshooting. Students enrolled in online courses can expect that individuals other than their fellow classmates and the course instructor(s) may visit their course for various purposes. Their intentions are to aid in technical troubleshooting and to ensure that quality course delivery standards are met. Strict confidentiality of student information is maintained.

Learning Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please contact me immediately.
Academic Honesty and Student Integrity

Academic honesty and student integrity are of fundamental importance at Brandeis University and we want students to understand this clearly at the start of the term. As stated in the Brandeis Rights and Responsibilities handbook, “Every member of the University Community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. A student shall not receive credit for work that is not the product of the student’s own effort. A student's name on any written exercise constitutes a statement that the work is the result of the student's own thought and study, stated in the student’s own words, and produced without the assistance of others, except in quotes, footnotes or references with appropriate acknowledgement of the source.” In particular, students must be aware that material (including ideas, phrases, sentences, etc.) taken from the Internet and other sources MUST be appropriately cited if quoted, and footnoted in any written work turned in for this, or any, Brandeis class. Also, students will not be allowed to collaborate on work except by the specific permission of the instructor. Failure to cite resources properly may result in a referral being made to the Office of Student Development and Judicial Education. The outcome of this action may involve academic and disciplinary sanctions, which could include (but are not limited to) such penalties as receiving no credit for the assignment in question, receiving no credit for the related course, or suspension or dismissal from the University. University Caveat: The above schedule, content, and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.

Grading policy

A (90-100) – Excellent work that met or exceeded the requirements. Writing reflects solid research, interviewing, accuracy, attribution, conforms to AP style; multimedia elements (video, photos, audio, interactive) are sharp, focused, clear, appropriately selected, properly captioned, tagged, credited and functional. Could run as is, or with very minor edits.

B (80-89) – Good work with a few errors. May contain minor problem with focus, spelling/grammar, style, balance, organization; several multimedia elements are sub-par (out of focus, poor sound quality, etc.) or exhibit one or two technical glitches. Could run with some editing.

C (65-79) – Average work. Failed to meet most of the requirements of the assignment. Shows lack of news judgment, accuracy, balance, etc., significant technical errors, sub-par multimedia elements, poor selection of interactive elements. Could only run with significant editing or a complete overhaul.

F – Work that shows no understanding of the requirements of the assignment.

Class attendance
You are expected to be in class each week, on time. Roll will be taken. If you are ill or must miss a class for another reason, please alert me as soon as possible BEFORE class via email. If you have an illness or emergency which can be documented, your absence will be excused. However, you will be expected to complete any assignments that you missed during your excused absence.

**Late assignments**

Deadlines drive journalism. You need to meet them. If you need an extension, check in with me well ahead of time.

**Grade breakdown**

Students will submit a final explainer story, worth 20 percent of their grade. All other assignments will together be worth 60 percent of the grade. Class participation and attendance will be worth 20 percent. The overall grades will be calculated as follows:

- Assignments – 60%
- Final Explainer – 20%
- Class participation (in class and online), attendance – 20%

**How to get an “A” in this course**

- Be here each week, on time, ready to engage. Complete all reading and assignments on time with attention to detail. Exceed expectations. Assignments deserving of an “A” are those that could conceivably be published in an outlet like *The Boston Globe* with minimal editing.
- Participate in class and online discussions. Stay up to date about issues and news related to online journalism and share that knowledge.
- Think ahead. Anticipate upcoming requirements such as the final project and structure your time so that you can do your best work. Get drafts to Aleszu early and often.

**A few commandments of digital journalism**

- Always provide links to material cited – quotations, ideas, etc. – and attribute. Link back, be kind (and above all honest.)
- Use photos, music and images from other sources only when they are **clearly designated** as public domain materials (appropriated from Creative Commons or public sites, such as .gov domains) and always clearly attribute. Get to know what the legal doctrine of “**Fair Use**” means for journalists.
- Follow AP Style. Quick refresher: [http://journalistsresource.org/skills/style/apstyle-basics](http://journalistsresource.org/skills/style/apstyle-basics)
Exercise Class 1

1. Open JuxtaposeJS from Northwestern’s Knight Lab https://juxtapose.knightlab.com

2. Open before and after photos

**Great Barrier Reef**  
*Before* [http://storybench.org/digiNU/coral1.jpg](http://storybench.org/digiNU/coral1.jpg)  
*After* [http://storybench.org/digiNU/coral2.jpg](http://storybench.org/digiNU/coral2.jpg)

**Umayyad mosque, Aleppo, Syria**  
*Before (2012)* [http://storybench.org/digiNU/syria1.jpg](http://storybench.org/digiNU/syria1.jpg)  
*After (2013)* [http://storybench.org/digiNU/syria2.jpg](http://storybench.org/digiNU/syria2.jpg)

3. Copy and Paste links into Juxtapose

4. Add Labels

5. Click **Update Preview**

6. Here’s an [example](http://storybench.org/digiNU/coral1.jpg) of this on Twitter.

7. Next, fill out this [questionnaire](http://storybench.org/digiNU/coral2.jpg).