Syllabus for Social and Mobile Media Journalism | Spring 2014
Northeast Normal University | School of Media Sciences

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Office: Room 202 in the School of Media Sciences Building
Class meeting time: Tuesdays, 3:30-5:00 p.m.
Class website: http://wp.vcu.edu/nenumobile

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Alan Mutter, a longtime newspaper and digital-media executive, writes a blog for journalists. In a recent posting, he stated:

“The good news is that you only have to worry about one tech trend in 2014. But it’s a doozy. The trend is the dramatic shift to mobile computing, a communications revolution rivaling the arrival of the Internet itself. The fast-moving swing to mobile from desktop computing is changing everything from interpersonal communications to news consumption to commerce.”

In our course on Social and Mobile Media Journalism, we will examine this trend. Many people have stopped reading newspapers, watching television news and listening to news on the radio. Instead, they get their news primarily on cellphones, tablets and computers. Moreover, many people are getting their news first from social networks, such as micro-blogs, instead of going directly to a news outlet’s home page. This trend is especially true in the United States and Europe and is growing in China as well.

In this course, we will explore what this trend means for news organizations. We will compare social media in the United States and China and look at how journalists are using social and mobile media to produce, distribute and promote news content. We also will examine the rise of citizen journalism: how everyday citizens are using social and mobile media devices to report the news.

In addition, we will apply these theories and concepts. Individually and working together, you will use social and mobile media tools to report news and attract and engage an online audience. In doing so, you each will develop a professional social media portfolio that will help establish your brand as a journalist in the digital age.
COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Be able to articulate how social and mobile media are affecting news organizations internationally and in China.
- Understand how forward-thinking news organizations, as well as citizen journalists, are taking advantage of social and mobile media tools.
- Be able to develop news content (micro-blog messages, text stories, photos and video) for social and mobile media audiences.
- Have a portfolio with a professional presence on several social media platforms.

TEXTBOOK

Our textbook for this course will be *Journalism Next* (second edition), by Mark Briggs. It would be good for you to have your own copy. But if you don’t, I hope to provide copies of the book for you to share.

In addition, we will have short online readings about social and mobile media and other technological trends in journalism. Some of these articles will come from journalism magazines such as Nieman Reports. And we will monitor the postings at websites such as:

http://www.chinainternetwatch.com/

I will expect you to find articles (in English-language and Chinese media) relevant to this course so that we can discuss them. We will develop a system to share these links.

I have created a website for our course at:

http://wp.vcu.edu/nenumobile

On that website, I will link to our readings and other course materials.

If you don’t understand everything in the textbook and other readings I have assigned, don’t worry. Do your best, and we will highlight the most important points each week in class.

OUR WEEKLY LECTURES

We will meet every Tuesday from 3:30 to 5 p.m. for a lecture. During this time, we will discuss the assigned readings, and you will make group presentations about topics concerning social and mobile media. In addition, we will discuss our class assignments. In those assignments, you will establish or improve your presence on social media platforms and publish and promote news content.

Also at our lectures, I hope to have social media editors from news organizations in both China and the United States talk to our class. (Perhaps we could use Skype for guest speakers who cannot come to Changchun.)

In addition to our lectures every Tuesday, I will be available for several hours every week (my “office hours”) to work with you on social and mobile media journalism skills.
TECHNOLOGY FOR OUR CLASS
We will discuss the kinds of technological tools used by social and mobile media journalists, such as smartphones, tablets and laptops. If you have some of those devices, that would be helpful in our course. But if you don’t, that’s not a problem. I hope to have some cameras that you can use, and we will make sure that all students have the opportunity to complete their assignments on the computers in the NENU computer room.

MEETINGS FOR TEA AND SNACKS
I plan to host a weekly meeting, for about five students at a time, for English conversation about journalism and life. I’ll need your help organizing a sign-up list and making restaurant reservations.

ATTENDANCE POLICY
Professional journalists show up for work every day; so you must show up for every class. Your success in this course depends on active class participation. Attend every class meeting so you can learn from and contribute to our discussions and other activities. You are expected to participate regularly in class. Excessive absences will hurt your participation grade. Class will start promptly. Please be on time.

During our class meetings, you should show respect to your classmates and your instructor by turning off your cellphone, by paying attention and by participating in our discussions.

LATE WORK
All assignments in our Social and Mobile Media Journalism course are due by the start of class. If you have an emergency (a serious illness or family crisis), contact me to discuss the situation; I might allow you to turn in your work late with a penalty. Otherwise, late work will not be accepted.

ETHICS AND ACADEMIC HONESTY
Fabricating material or using another’s work without attribution is an extremely serious offense. In this course, as in the journalism profession, plagiarism is not tolerated. This means you must not use direct quotes or verbatim material from a newspaper or other publication without giving credit. And you must not make up sources, quotes or facts.

Intentional and flagrant acts of academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course. Accidental acts of academic dishonesty will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis; at a minimum, they will result in failure on the assignment. Talk to me if you have any questions about whether something might constitute academic dishonesty.

ASSIGNMENTS, TESTS AND CALCULATION OF FINAL COURSE GRADES
Here are my ideas about the kind of work you will do in this class. I will modify this list after we have met and discussed which social media platforms would be most appropriate to use in this course.
Group presentation #1 – We will divide the class into groups of five or six students. Each group will select a social media tool, such as Renren or QQ. The group then will make a 10-minute presentation to the entire class about that tool.

Midterm exam – On April 22, you will take an exam covering weeks 1-8.

Group presentation #2 – We will divide the class into groups of five or six students. Each group will select a Chinese news organization (a newspaper, television station or news service). The group then will make a 10-minute presentation to the entire class about how that news organization uses or could use social and mobile media tools.

“A Day in the Life of Changchun” project (Story #2) – Together, we will document one day in the life of our city, using text, photos, videos and audio. Working in teams, you will show life through the eyes of different types of people, such as workers, elderly residents and children. We will create a website to showcase all of your reporting.

Social media portfolio assignment – You will create a social media portfolio consisting of your blog, micro-blog, online photos and videos and other elements. (We might use the service LinkedIn for this.)

Final exam – During NENU’s final exam period, you will take an exam covering important content from the entire semester.

This chart show how much each gradebook item will be worth. This grading system will be modified if we change the number or types of assignments during the semester. Changes will be announced in class and on our course website.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gradebook item</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group presentations on Chinese social media platforms [3/11-3/25]</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam [April 22]</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group presentations on how Chinese news organizations use social/mobile media [5/6-5/20]</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Day in the Life of Changchun” project (text, photos, videos and audio documenting a typical day in our city) [by 5/20]</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media portfolio (showcasing your Weibo postings, blog and other platforms) [by 6/10]</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class attendance / participation / other assignments</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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Here is how I will calculate your final grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weighted total</th>
<th>Final grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90% or more</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89%</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 60%</td>
<td>F</td>
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**Launching Your Journalism Careers**

Niall Harbison, a blogger and media executive in Ireland, wrote a blog post titled, “Why Good Journalists Simply Can’t Live Without Social Media.”

“Journalism is changing in front of our very eyes, and social media is responsible for a large part of that change,” Harbison said. He wrote that social media skills will make you a more valuable journalist:

“If two journalists walked in to my office today applying for a job, I would of course primarily look at their writing skills. But the second thing I would be looking at would be their networks and social media presence – their personal brand.

“If one had 100 followers on Twitter with little interaction and the second had 5,000 and used the medium constantly, it would be a simple choice in the favor of the later. The network of a journalist will bring you new readers, stories and add kudos to the brand. Journalists are becoming mini brands, and without a strong social media presence, they will earn less money. There could be no greater incentive to use social media than making yourself more valuable.”