

## CCJN 3325: TECHNOLOGY REPORTING

Sample syllabus (from Spring 2011 -- subject to change)

Class sessions: MWF 9-9:50 a.m., Umphrey Lee 278

Course blog: [techreporting.posterous.com](http://techreporting.posterous.com) Course hashtag: [#j3325](https://twitter.com/j3325)

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**Office: Umphrey Lee 282C**

**Office hours: 10-11 a.m. MWF, or by appointment**

Welcome to Technology Reporting, a new class where we will explore the present and the future of journalism. As described in the SMU course catalog, this class aims to help tomorrow's journalists – that's you! – "understand complex technologies like the World Wide Web in a way that will allow you to foresee the impact of those technologies on society, our culture and our way of life." That's a tall order, but we'll give it a shot.

The Division of Journalism's curriculum is designed to equip you with the versatile newsgathering skills you'll need to thrive in today's media world, while also grounding you in the timeless ethical canons of news judgment, accuracy, fairness and truth. As a topical studies course, this class will focus less on the skills side, and more on analyzing the changing news business through a critical lens. You'll do plenty of reporting, however. You'll produce a multi-platform story that profiles a tech-savvy journalist, contribute to a statewide project on campus crime, and delve into the business model of a startup news organization. Still, the goal of this class is not so much to report *about* technology as to examine and discuss how technology is changing the way modern reporters do their jobs – and how you can harness technology to become a more effective journalist. You should walk away from this class thinking of yourself not only as a journalist who covers the news, but also as a discriminating news consumer and critical thinker.

Ready to get started? Here are three quotes that encapsulate some of the ground we'll cover:

***"The old limitations of media have been radically reduced, with much of the power accruing to the former audience ... a story can go from local to global in a heartbeat."***

-- Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, Chapter 1

***"In an era where we have nearly unlimited amounts of information at our fingertips, one of the key issues is how to separate the good from the bad, the reliable from the unreliable, the trustworthy from the untrustworthy, the useful from the irrelevant."***

-- Dan Gillmor, *Mediactive*, Chapter 11

***"I'm looking to hire 'digital disruptors' who bring fresh eyes to the newsroom and challenge the way we've always done things."***

-- Patti Dennis, vice president of news, KUSA-TV, Denver

(Comment during "New Models of TV Convergence" panel at the AEJMC Conference in Denver, August 2010)

Learning outcomes are expected in four main areas. You will:

### **Understand the changing media landscape**

- *Define concepts including Web 2.0, crowdsourcing and news entrepreneurialism.*
- *Articulate how news has become a two-way conversation, not a one-way lecture.*
- *Describe how technological tools and social media have accelerated the news cycle.*

### **Synthesize old-school reporting with new tools**

- *Gather information through traditional methods (interviews and research) as well as newer techniques (geo-mapping and handheld video).*
- *Embrace the art of journalistic curation, in which you use your reporting skills to sort through the cacophony of the Web to find credible and relevant links for your readers.*

### **Demonstrate new media literacy and critical thinking skills**

- *Discriminate between facts, rumors, opinion, analysis and outright lies.*
- *Debate how news organizations should handle modern dilemmas in five case studies.*
- *Evaluate the iPad's performance as a news platform.*

### **Create and maintain a polished online presence**

- *Develop a personal "anchor site" to showcase your work for this class and in the future.*
- *Harness social media tools (such as Twitter) to track the news, cultivate your personal brand, distribute your work and contribute to the 21<sup>st</sup> century news ecosystem.*

### **Required texts**

***Here Comes Everybody*** by Clay Shirky (Kindle/Nook version or paperback, Feb. 2009, Penguin)

***Mediactive*** by Dan Gillmor (Kindle/Nook version or paperback, Dec. 2010, Lulu.com)

**Two-chapter eBook** from CQ Press (Collecting and Using Data, Microblogging)

**Multimedia Case Studies** from Columbia University Journalism School:

#1: [\*News or Rumor? Politico and the Edwards Affair\*](#)

#2: [\*Not for Profit? The Voice of San Diego Experiment\*](#)

Additional readings will be posted on the course blog. Follow current events by subscribing to RSS and Twitter feeds as part of your daily media diet, especially dallasnews.com, nytimes.com, cnn.com, smudailymustang.com and smudailycampus.com.

**Attendance:** Treat this class as if it is a job. You are expected to be in every class, show up on time and turn in work on time. **If you must miss class or lab, contact the instructor in advance**, just as you would your editor or boss at work.

Roll will be taken every day. Any student who misses the first day of class may be dropped. With three or more unexcused absences, you could be dropped or receive an "F." Absences also will factor into your class participation grade. **You get one "free pass" for an unexcused absence. After that, each unexcused absence will result in an automatic deduction of at least one percentage point from your class participation grade.** An absence will be considered unexcused unless you are able to provide a doctor's note or some other good reason within 24 hours of an absence. Acceptable reasons for missing class include a verifiable illness, family emergency, religious holiday or approved school trip. Again, **contacting me ahead of time will always help your case.** Those with an unexcused absence will receive a zero on that day's class activity and will not be able to make it up.

The SMU Health Center has changed its policy on giving forms for excused absences. The Health Center's new policy is found at <http://smu.edu/healthcenter/policy/absenceclass.asp>. Please note that there is a PDF file in this information that you can download and submit to me for consideration of an excused absence. This form must be filled out fully for me to consider your absence as excused. If you consult a physician for an illness and receive specific certification for a recovery time, absences will be excused if I am given a form from the physician's office.

### **Assignments:**

The following ethical guidelines apply to all written and multimedia work for this course:

- Don't cover a story on any activity in which you are involved or to which you have a close personal connection. **Don't use family members or significant others (boyfriend, sibling, parent, roommate, etc.) or friends as primary sources.**
- Rely primarily on YOUR OWN reporting and research. When citing material other than your own, **ALWAYS LINK** to the original source.
- Don't quote journalism faculty or j-students as sources unless approved in advance.
- Primary interviews should generally be conducted in person or by phone. E-mail interviews are for follow-up or to fill holes, check facts, or to set up interviews. **Main interviews should be conducted by e-mail on an emergency basis only** and should be specifically indicated as such in the story or blog item.
- Inform all sources that you are working on a story for Web publication. **You must always tell all of your sources that the story you are reporting could be published or aired on multiple platforms.** Your work could appear on news sites both on and off campus. Your stories, in other words, are for public consumption and your sources must know that.
- Do not use anonymous sources unless approved by the instructor.
- Missing deadline will be penalized harshly. Unapproved late stories will receive an automatic F. Even with advance notice, my general policy is to deduct one letter grade for each day the assignment is late, unless your absence is excused (as defined below).

**Source sheets:** Attach a list to every assignment including the name of each source, the date and time you interviewed each person and his or her contact information (both a phone number and e-mail address). Stories without source sheets will not be accepted and will not be published. The instructor reserves the right to contact sources to verify information.

**Guest speakers and field trips:** Professional journalists and other relevant speakers will be invited to class during the semester, and we also will take several field trips. You will be asked to tweet a question using the #j3325 hashtag, and a one-page summary of the speaker's presentation and/or field trip will be due at the start of the next class.

**Laptops and cell phones in the classroom:** Please follow common courtesy. Yes, this is a Technology Reporting class. But that doesn't mean it's acceptable to play games during class, or to catch up on e-mail. Laptops should be used for taking notes or in-class assignments only. Out of courtesy to your classmates and to the instructor, texting, e-mailing, Web browsing, Facebooking and Tweeting should be avoided during class unless they are germane to our class activities and discussions. Turn your phone off during class. If a cell phone rings during class, I get to answer it. Failure to adhere to these policies will result in deductions from your class participation grade.

**Grading:** Specific criteria on each of the below items will be discussed later, but here is the overall structure for how your grade will be determined in this course:

Class participation <i>(Attendance, in-class exercises, discussion, pre-class tweets, speakers, field trips)</i>	25 percent
Case studies <i>(Five cases, three percent each)</i>	10 percent
Midterm exam <i>(News coverage critique, incorporating principles from Shirky and Gillmor books)</i>	10 percent
Personal "anchor" website <i>(If you already have one, you'll mentor two fellow students as they create theirs)</i>	5 percent
Journalist profile	10 percent
iPad critique	10 percent
SABEW coverage	10 percent
Light of Day project	10 percent
Final presentation <i>(Group project profiling a startup news organization)</i>	10 percent

Semester grades:	94-100	A
	90-93	A-
	87-89	B+
	83-86	B
	80-82	B-
	77-79	C+
	73-76	C
	70-72	C-
	67-69	D+
	63-66	D
	60-62	D-
	59 and below	F

"A"s are rare and are awarded only for truly excellent work. Very good work receives a "B"; average work a "C"; below average a "D." This is in accordance with SMU regulations. I am happy to discuss your grade for any project. If you wish to protest a grade, a formal process is available.

**Academic dishonesty:** Plagiarism, fabrication and resubmission or double submission of work performed for any reason other than this class all are considered to be acts of academic dishonesty and violations of the SMU Honor Code and Student Code of Conduct. Any of the above violations will result in a failing grade on the assignment and a referral to the SMU Honor Council and Dean of Student Life. For complete details: [http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL\\_01\\_ToC.asp](http://www.smu.edu/studentlife/PCL_01_ToC.asp)

**The Division of Journalism has adopted the following policies. By enrolling in this class you are agreeing to the following terms and conditions:**

**Reporting standards for all media projects**

Your story will be graded on content: is it fair, is it newsworthy, is it well sourced? Is the story organized, are all questions answered, and is all information properly attributed? Are direct quotes preceded by strong transitions in print stories? At least 5 points may be taken off for problems like these. For errors of fact, expect 10 or more points off.

**How to earn an "F" on any media project**

Miss a deadline. Misquote or misrepresent someone. Rewrite or submit a story or package that was produced for any reason other than this class. Fabricate or plagiarize.

**Plagiarism and Fabrication**

Plagiarism is stealing someone's words or ideas and passing them off as your own. Fabrication is making stuff up. Both strike at the heart of the journalistic process, where proper attribution and fact checking are paramount. As mentioned above, plagiarism and fabrication in this course will be addressed in the harshest manner possible, including referral to the honors council.

**Excused absences for extracurricular activities**

If you are participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled university extracurricular activity, you will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments. It is your responsibility to make arrangements with your teacher prior to any missed assignment. (See University Undergraduate Catalogue.)

**Religious accommodations**

If you are a religiously observant student who will be absent on holidays, you must notify your teacher in writing at the beginning of the semester. You should also discuss in advance acceptable ways of making up any missed worked. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

**Disability accommodations**

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4; an attachment describes the DASS procedures and relocated office.)

## PRELIMINARY CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly readings from the required texts, including additional online readings, will be listed on the [course blog](#). Use the blog as the most up-to-date guide, because it will include timely readings as the semester unfolds. With that caveat, here's a preliminary schedule:

### **Week One: Jan. 19-21**

Introduction/class structure. Web 2.0 and the 21<sup>st</sup> century news ecosystem.

#### Readings

Shirky Ch. 1: It Takes a Village to Find a Phone

#### Assignments

Get started on Twitter if you're not already. Here's my handy [tutorial](#).

### **Week Two: Jan. 24-28**

More Web 2.0: News as conversation, online communities. iPads as a news platform.

#### Readings

Shirky Ch. 2: Sharing Anchors Community

Malcolm Gladwell, "[Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted](#)," The New Yorker

Maria Popova, "[Malcolm Gladwell is #Wrong](#)," Change Observer

Marc Ramirez on "[slacktivism](#)" in The Dallas Morning News

#### Assignments

iPad rotation begins on Friday, Jan. 28.

### **Week Three: Jan. 31-Feb. 4**

Bloggers and their impact on the news; Navigating and contributing to the news ecosystem.

#### Readings

Shirky Ch. 3: Everyone is a Media Outlet

David Carr, "[Outspoken Is Great, Till It's Not](#)," New York Times

Gillmor foreword, intro and Ch. 1: Darwin's Media

Guest speaker: **Eric Celeste**, news entrepreneur and former D Magazine editor

### **Week Four: Feb. 7-11**

Breaking news and real-time reporting. Social media as a reporting tool. Filtering and evaluating the constant stream of news.

#### Readings

Digital Deadline case study on Monday, Feb. 7.

Gillmor Ch. 2: Becoming an Active User

Gillmor Ch. 3: Tools & Techniques for the Mediactive Consumer.

Ian Shapira, "[A Facebook Story: A Mother's Joy and a Family's Sorrow](#)," The Washington Post

M.J. Tenore, "[Why The Washington Post Used Facebook Updates to Tell A Mother's Story](#)," Poynter

### **Week Five: Feb. 14-18**

More on filtering/evaluating. Establishing your personal brand and anchor site.

#### Readings

Gillmor Ch. 4: Journalism's Evolving Ecosystem

Gillmor Ch. 5: Principles of Trustworthy Media Creation

Gillmor Ch. 7: Owning Your Online Presence

Guest speaker: **Matt Stiles**, computer-assisted reporting specialist for The Texas Tribune

**Week Six: Feb. 21-25**

New tools for investigative journalism.

*Readings*

Gillmor Ch. 6: Tools and Tactics for Trusted Creators (skip the first part of the chapter, start with "Mashups, APIs, Tagging and More")

Vadim Lavrusik, "[How Investigative Journalism Is Prospering in the Age of Social Media](#)," Mashable

**Week Seven: Feb. 28-March 4**

News judgment in a Web 2.0 world; Using journalistic skills to convene a community.

*Readings*

Case study: Politico and the Edwards Affair.

Shirky Ch. 4: Publish, Then Filter

Shirky Ch. 8: Solving Social Dilemmas

Rebecca Aguilar, "Forming Your Own Social Networking Site," Quill Magazine

Guest speaker: To be announced

**PERSONAL WEBSITES ARE DUE BY 11:59 P.M. FRIDAY, MARCH 4.**

**Week Eight: March 7-11**

Using the Web to bring context to the news. Wikipedia, topics pages, the long tail.

*Readings*

Shirky Ch. 5: Personal Motivation Meets Collaborative Production

Gillmor Ch. 8: Second half (start with "If I Ran a News Organization, Part 1")

Steve Myers, "[Liveblogging SXSW: The Future of Context in Journalism](#)," Poynter

Elise Hu, "[Contextualizing Context](#)," personal blog entry.

**JOURNALIST PROFILES ARE DUE BY 11:59 P.M. FRIDAY, MARCH 11.**

**SPRING BREAK: MARCH 14-18**

**Week Nine: March 21-25**

How Social Media Accelerates the News Cycle.

*Readings*

Shirky Ch. 6: Collective Action and Institutional Challenges

Shirky Ch. 7: Faster and Faster

Joseph Plambeck, "[Washington Post Suspends Columnist for Twitter Hoax](#)," New York Times.

Howard Kurtz, "[Mike Wise Plays Defense](#)," Washington Post / CNN.

**MIDTERM EXAM** on Friday, March 25

**Week Ten: March 28-30 (NO CLASS ON FRIDAY, APRIL 1)**

Entrepreneurialism, nonprofits and new business models.

*Readings*

Case study: Not For Profit? The Voice of San Diego Experiment

Gillmor Ch. 8: Entrepreneurs Will Save Journalism, and You Could Be One of Them

Jake Batsell, "[Lone Star Trailblazer](#)," Columbia Journalism Review

Field trip: Location to be announced.

**Week Eleven: April 4-8**

Mobile news platforms; paying for online news.

*Readings*

Shirky epilogue.

TBA analyses of New York Times and Dallas Morning News paywall experiments.

The **SOCIETY OF AMERICAN BUSINESS EDITORS AND WRITERS** meets at SMU from April 7-9, and SMU journalism students will be producing multi-platform coverage of the conference. You will cover an assignment on immediate deadline at some point during this three-day window.

**Week Twelve: April 11-15**

Crowdsourcing and citizen journalism.

*Readings*

Crowdsourcing case studies (2 parts)

**Week Thirteen: April 18-20 (NO CLASS ON GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 22)**

News algorithms, aggregation and SEO.

*Readings*

Jeremy W. Peters, "[At Yahoo, Using Searches to Steer News Coverage](#)," New York Times

David Segal, "[A Bully Finds a Pulpit on the Web](#)," New York Times

Field trip: Location to be announced.

**Week Fourteen: April 25-29**

Today's journalism job market. Readings and guest speaker(s) to be announced.

**iPAD CRITIQUES MUST BE POSTED NO LATER THAN 11:59 P.M. FRIDAY, APRIL 29**

**Week Fifteen: May 2-7 (CLASS ON MONDAY AND TUESDAY; FINAL ON SATURDAY)**

Course review; group presentations.

Tuesday, May 3, follows a Friday course schedule, so we will meet at 9 a.m.

**FINAL GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS** will occur during our scheduled final exam period on Saturday, May 7, from 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. in ULee 278.