JCM 491-002: Special Topics: Social Media Storytelling
T/TH 3:30-4:45 PM
Reese Phifer Hall 341

Instructor: Dr. Jessica Maddox
Office: 430C Reese Phifer Hall
Office Hours: 2:00-3:00 T/TH and by appointment
Email: JLMaddox@ua.edu

Required Readings:

- *You Are The Brand: The 8-Step Blueprint to Showcase Your Unique Expertise and Build a Highly Profitable, Personally Fulfilling Business*
- Other readings to be found on Blackboard

Required Equipment (no exceptions; no substitutions!)

Available at the Supe Store or on Amazon

- ACNCTOP 64 LED Rechargeable Selfie Light
- Fantaseal 2in1 Ergonomic Portable Action Camera
- PGDLOF Wireless Lavalier Microphone (**make sure you buy the one that is compatible with your phone's ports!**)

Course Description

Social media not only help us connect with others, but they have become invaluable entertainment and information sources in our daily lives. There are more than 500 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute, and TikTok boasts more than 150 million active monthly users in the United States alone. Instagram users watch 17.6 million hours of Reels per day, and the global live video streaming market cap was $1.49 billion in 2023. The numbers make it clear – social media must be taken seriously, not just in business and marketing, but as sources of entertainment and information. Social media influencers and content creators, as well as streamers, video editors, and digital specialists are now viable career paths for any communication major. Contrary to popular belief, however, internet careers are not easy or meritocratic – it takes hard work, knowledge, and skill to build a viable and successful online content creation career.

This course provides students with the introductory knowledge and basic fundamental skills of social media production and storytelling, while considering the issues and ethics at stake in our digital world. The work we do in this course is distinct from influencer marketing, though we address the subject at times because of the convergence of strategic communication and the digital culture industries.

Social media change rapidly, and while necessity dictates we must work with the platforms available to us (Instagram, YouTube, and for the time being, TikTok), it is important for any

smart worker in social media storytelling to pay more attention to broader trends and skills than any one particular app. Therefore, this course empowers students with universally useful and applicable skills related to social media and beyond. This framework will prepare students for working in online content creation, streaming, or influencer careers, both on screen and off, by instilling in them the flexibility to master a changing social media world.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Applying storytelling with new media technologies for fiction, non-fiction, and news content.
- Understand the histories of storytelling and their relationship with technologies.
- Distinguish between fiction, non-fiction, history, and reporting as storytelling on social media
- Analyze shifts in the entertainment and news industries and the role social media play.
- Create basic content for Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, livestreaming, and the web.

Course Requirements and Grading

Syllabus Quiz……...20 points
Brand Summary and Identity Board…….25 points
Equipment Test Day……10 points
Class TikTok/Reels Account……..10 points
A Day in My Life TikTok/Reel……50 points
Creator Rate/Pitch Sheet…….25 points
Non-fiction TikTok/Reel……..50 points
Class YouTube Channel…….10 points
YouTube Video Essay……...100 points

Biography & Landing Page……..25 points
Resume……25 points
Livestream……150 points
Final Portfolios……300 points
Attendance and Participation……200 points

Total possible points: 1000
Your final grade will be calculated on the percentage of total points earned.

Workload

This class has a heavy workload, both in terms of reading and assignments. Essentially, this class is a theoretically-driven video production class, meaning we read a lot, and we produce a lot. This is the case, because you are expected to make work *smartly*. As such, several of our assigned readings are scholarly inquiries into various aspects of social media storytelling. Understanding *why* something works is just as important as how. I'm aware some of these readings may be dense and difficult at times, but this is not an excuse for being unprepared to discuss in class.

If the instructor feels students are not coming prepared to discuss at-home materials, quizzes may be given.

Course Topics and Readings

All course topics have been deemed by the instructor to be relevant and essential for a foundational knowledge of social media content creation, media industries, and the labor of online video production. All course readings have been chosen by their ability to present multi-faceted and nuanced takes on complex issues and do not necessarily represent the personal beliefs of the instructor.

Late Assignments

LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE GIVEN 10% OFF LATE PER DAY. It is unprofessional and disrespectful to turn work in late. If you do not attend class, you are still responsible for turning in the assignment that is due that day.

In the event of an emergency of unforeseen problem on assignment due dates, please let me know as soon as possible. **I will not provide any grade deduction leniency for issues**

that are brought to my attention after an assignment due date. Issues brought to my attention before an assignment due date are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Equipment

As stated above, you must use the required equipment for this course. If you have equipment of your own, you may use it, but if you are starting from scratch, you must purchase the required tools. This is done so I can troubleshoot and ensure class exercises make sense.

If is your responsibility to make sure you have your equipment with you and charged on days we will work with it in class. These days are noted on the syllabus. Not having your equipment or having it but it not being charged will result in a zero for attendance and participation for that day.

The purpose of course equipment is to be used to improve the quality of your videos. This equipment must be used in the videos you make for this class. You are graded heavily on audio quality, lighting quality, and stability/range of shots.

Production Guidelines

All content you post for this class must include the following in the caption:

> *This video is made purely for educational purposes at the University of Alabama. All thoughts are my own and do not represent the university.*

If your video contains brands, such as the livestream assignment, you must add:

> *This video is not sponsored by [brand] and I am not affiliated with them*.

Failure to add either disclaimer will result in -10 on the assignment.

All content produced in this course must adhere to the University of Alabama's production guidelines. Students must also adhere to specific guidelines set by the instructor. As such, the following are prohibited in this course and will result in an automatic zero on an assignment:

- Weapons, even prop weapons (guns, knives, axes, bows and arrows, etc.)
- Fire or open flames (including candles and barbecuing)
- Nudity or sexually explicit content
- Violence, aggression, fighting (including play/simulated fighting). Video game fighting for livestreaming is acceptable.
- Identity-based slurs.
- Excessive cursing
- Alcohol, drugs, or drug-related paraphernalia
- True crime

- Filming while driving

"Doing it for the 'gram" is not an acceptable reason to do unsafe, unethical, or harmful things for content. Be smart, don't be stupid. If you have a question about whether or not something would be in violation of these guidelines, do not hesitate to ask.

Attendance and Participation

Students are allowed three (3) absences this semester. These are yours to do with what you wish. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused. These are your three absences to manage and do with what you wish. After three absences, five (5) points will be deducted from your attendance and participation grade. Two tardies = 1 absence, or two leaving early instances without clearing it with me = 1 absence.

THE ONLY EXCEPTION:

- If you are traveling or participating in a university-sponsored event, please bring me a note with the information.

If you show up to class but not participate in discussion, you will earn an 80 (B-) for simply showing up. Creativity requires groupthink and discussion, so do not expect to earn fully participation points if you do not actively participate.

Course Email Policy

I consider emails sent to be professional communication documents. That being said, think as your craft and before you send an email. If you wouldn't send an email to a hiring manager that way, I would strongly recommend rewording your email. Proper email etiquette is a skill, and therefore all emails to me must be crafted with professionalism. This include a proper greeting, full sentences, no grammatical errors, not text or chat speak, and a proper sin-off. If I receive a message that violates this protocol, I will respond with some variant of "try again," and not address your questions.

Lastly, hey is for horses, and your friends. I am not a horse, and I am not your friend. Do not start an email to me with, "Hey Dr. Maddox." The proper way to address me is Dr. Maddox or Professor Maddox, and I will not respond to emails that begin with, "Miss, Mrs., or Ms. Maddox."

The best way to contact me is through email at JLMaddox @ua.edu. However, please be advised that I do not check my email constantly. I try to guarantee a timely response during business hours (8 AM – 5 PM, Monday-Friday). I cannot guarantee a timely response after 5 PM, on weekends, or on holidays.

Generative AI

We do engage with generative AI in this course in order to understand its helpfulness and drawbacks for online content creation. You are welcome to use generative AI on your assignments **once we have discussed it in class on 2/20**. After 2/20, you are welcome to use generative AI tools on your assignment, but you must provide a disclosure that this work was made with generative AI, and you must attach a one page, double spaced explainer and reflection on how you used AI, how it benefited you, and any drawbacks you encountered. If you **do not** provide such a disclosure and written explainer, your grade on the assignment will be dropped one full letter grade (i.e., B+ to a C+). This explainer **CANNOT** be written with AI.

Policies Regarding Academic Integrity

Cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process (including phony documentation for absences/late work, or passing others' work off as your own) will not be tolerated. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate these rules on academic integrity are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of immediate failure of the course or dismissal from the university. If you are ever unsure whether something qualifies as a violation of the rules on academic integrity, please ask us about it.

Lab Classroom Setup

This class takes place in a computer lab to accommodate our media production needs on workdays. Computers must be down during class instruction and discussion, or you will receive a zero on attendance and participation for the day.

Letters of Recommendation and Assistance with Creative Works

I only complete letters of recommendation for students who have *completed* at least one semester of one of my courses. Even still, especially in a class this size, you must have made an attempt to make yourself known and speak with me.

I also will only provide feedback on any creative endeavors you may be pursuing (scripts, short films, music videos, etc.) after you have *completed* one course with me. However, I am happy to talk with you about your projects while you are in my course. I will not provide feedback on any work for other JCM classes.

Disability Statement

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you

have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call (205) 348-4285 (Voice) or (205) 348-3081 (TTY) or visit 133-B Martha Parham Hall East to register for services. Students who may need course adaptations because of a disability are welcome to make an appointment to see me during office hours. Please take care of this by the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services, 133-B Martha Parham Hall East, before receiving academic adjustments.

Drop/Add/Withdrawal Policy

Once you are registered in this course, it is your responsibility to attend the course, drop the course, or withdraw from the course. Dropping and withdrawing are distinct actions that affect your course enrollment status. In either case, a form from the Registrar's Office, with signatures, is required to change course enrollment status. There are billing, financial aid, and academic record effects for changes to your enrollment status in this course; therefore, you must attend to the proper procedure when dropping or withdrawing from a course. Please refer to the University's drop/add/withdrawal policies and timelines on the Registrar's website or contact your academic advisor.

Emergency Preparedness

Hopefully, this is information we will never have to use. However, if an emergency arises, here are the types we could possibly encounter and our necessary actions:

- Fire: we will evacuate the building and meet in the parking lot in front of Bryant-Denny Stadium. I will take attendance to make sure everyone has safely left the building.
- Tornado: We will move to the first floor of Reese Phifer and remain there until an all-clear is issued.
- Active shooter: In the event of an active shooter or threat situation on campus, the classroom doors will be locked and I will ask for volunteers to help me barricade the doors. We will move to a corner of the room to avoid all windows. Please silence your cell phones.
- Medical emergency: In the event of a medical emergency during class, we will first and foremost care for the individual. I will ask someone to call 911 and for volunteers to meet the paramedics outside of the building to direct them to the classroom.

Severe Weather

The guiding principle at The University of Alabama is to promote the personal safety of our students, faculty and staff during severe weather events. It is impossible to develop policies which anticipate every weather-related emergency. These guidelines are intended to provide additional assistance for responding to severe weather on campus.

When West Alabama is under a severe weather advisory, conditions can change rapidly. It is imperative to get to where you can receive information from the National Weather Service and to follow the instructions provided. Personal safety should dictate the actions that faculty, staff and students take.

<u>Please make sure you are signed up to receive UA alerts. You can do so via the instructions on this page: https://ready.ua.edu/ua-alerts-instructions-students/</u>

<u>Class Schedule</u>

This is a general plan for the course. Deviations are at the instructor's discretion and may be necessary.

Thursday, January 9
Introduction to the course and icebreakers

Tuesday, January 14
What is social media storytelling? + TikTok Ban
Watch:
- The Art of Storytelling and View Retention

Read:
- How YouTube Became One of the Planet's Most Influential Media Businesses (listening option available)
- What in the World is Going on with TikTok?
- The TikTok Ban Paradox: How Platform Restrictions Create What They Aim to Prevent

Wednesday, January 15
Last day of Add/Drop

Thursday, January 16
<u>Due: Syllabus Quiz by 11:59 PM CST</u>
Creator and influencer culture
Read:
- "You May Know Me from YouTube": (Micro-)Celebrity on Social Media
- Influencer Creep: How Artists Strategically Navigate the Platformisation of Art Worlds
- *Teachable's* 2023 Content Creators Report
- 25 Most Influential Creators of 2024

Tuesday, January 21
Building your personal brand
Read:
- *You are the Brand,* pp. 1-38

Thursday, January 23
Guest speaker #1

Tuesday, January 28 (EQ NEEDED)
Due: Brand summary and identity board by 11:59 PM CST
Equipment and Editing + JCM 102 Review
Read:

- The Production & Distribution of Influencer Content

Watch:

- How to Make YouTube Videos – Plan, Shoot, Edit, Post, Grow

Thursday, January 30
Storyboarding, scripting, and idea generation + A Day In My Life
Read:

- "You Need At Least One Picture To Daily to Prove You're Not Dead"

Watch:

- How to Film Yourself Pt. 1 – Planning, Idea, Script, & Shot List

Tuesday, February 4
Algorithms and Platforms
Read:

- Brooke Duffy, Constructing the Platform-specific Brand: The Labor of Social Media Promotion
- Jess Rauchberg, #Shadowbanned: Queer, Trans, and Disabled Creator Responses to Algorithmic Oppression on TikTok

Thursday, February 6
Due by 11:59 PM CST: A Day In My Life vlog
Making money + Canva
Read:

- Robyn Caplan and Tarleton Gillespie (2021). Tiered Governance and Demonetization: The Shifting Terms of Labor Compensation in the Platform Economy
- Zoe Glatt (2022). "We're Told Not to Put Our Eggs in One Basket": Uncertainty, Precarity, and Cross-Platform Labor in the Online Video Influencer Industry.

Tuesday, February 11
Due by 11:50 PM CST: Creator Rate Sheet
Research, fact-checking, and ethics
Introduce non-fiction Storytime assignment
Read:

- *You are the Brand*, pp. 41-54
- Mariah Wellman (2020). The Ethics of Authenticity: Social Media Influencers and the Production of Sponsored Content.
- Wesley E. Stevens (2021). Blackfishing on Instagram: Influencing and the Commodification of Black Urban Aesthetics.

Thursday, February 13

In-class work on non-fiction Storytime assignment

Tuesday, February 18
In-class work on non-fiction Storytime assignment

Thursday, February 20
Due by 11:59 PM CST: Non-fiction Storytime assignment
We get by with a little help from AI
Read:
- Microsoft Research New England. Generative AI and the Creator Economy: A Research Agenda.

Tuesday, February 25
The YouTube Video Essay
Read:
- *You Are The Brand,* pp. 55-65
- Terry Ngyuyen (2022): *The Video Essay Boom*.

Watch:
- *Transfomers* and Film Studies: The Whole Plate Episode 1
- I Read *Fourth Wing*. It's Worse Than You Think (And So Much Better)
- Why Do Brands Keep Doing These Crazy Influencer Trips?

Thursday, February 27
Guest Speaker #2

Tuesday, March 4
In-class workday on storyboarding and research for your YouTube video essay

Thursday, March 6
Due by 11:59 PM CST: YouTube Video Essay
No class

Tuesday, March 11
No class – Spring Break

Thursday, March 13
No class – Spring Break

Tuesday, March 18
Due at the end of class: Draft of your biography and landing page
Portfolio introduction: Professional vs. Personal Social Media
Read:
- *You Are the Brand*, pp. 67-84

Watch:
- I Wish Every Job Seeker Would Watch This

- How To Make a Portfolio Website For Your Art

Thursday, March 20
Managing Fan/Follower Relationships
Read:
- Jess Rauchberg and Jessica Maddox (2024): "She's my bitch eating crackers": Influencer Snark and Digital Gossip Economies.
- YouTube Culture & Trends Report 2024: Fandom
- "It's Common and Part of Being a Content Creator": Understanding How Creators Experience and Cope with Hate and Harassment Online"

Tuesday, March 25
Due: Resume
Accountability, Cancel Culture, and Drama
- Meredith Clark (2020). DRAG THEM: A Brief Etymology of So-Called Cancel Culture.
- Lewis & Christin (2022). Platform Drama: "Cancel Culture," Celebrity, and the Struggle for Accountability on YouTube.

Thursday, March 27
Guest Speaker #3

Tuesday, April 1
Livestreaming, Twitch, and OBS
Read:
- Twitch Founder: We turned a 'terrible idea' into a billion-dollar company.

Watch:
- The History of Twitch, Livestreaming, and Gaming
- How to LIVE STREAM on YouTube – UPDATED Beginners Guide

Thursday, April 3
No class

Tuesday, April 8
Due by 11:59 PM CST: Livestream
No class – work on livestreams

Thursday, April 10
Guest speaker #4

Tuesday, April 15
Introduce final portfolio assignment

Thursday, April 17
In-class work on final portfolios

Tuesday, April 22
No class – work on final portfolios

Thursday, April 24
No class – work on final portfolios

Monday, April 28
Final portfolios due to Blackboard by 11:59 PM CST.