University of Iowa: School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Content Strategy for Web Communication

019:279:EXW (3 semester hours)

Spring 2014 Syllabus

Mondays 5:30-8 p.m., Online Distance Learning Course

Professor: Angie Toomsen

Office: #110, John and Mary Pappajohn Center, 1200 Grand, Des Moines (Note: This is our departmental office but I am not regularly here.)

Ways to Connect With Me

- 319-541-0038 (cell/txt) - Feel free to text me any time day or night.
- Skype: angie.toomsen/ Google Hangout: angietoomsen - I am online much of that day and evenings and available to IM at most times.
- Email: angela-toomsen@uiowa.edu

Office Hours

Monday 4:30-5:30 (online); Tuesday—Friday 9:30-10:30 a.m. (online). These are times I will definitely be online, though I am actually online almost all the time so ping me with quick questions as they arise, or I am happy to set up additional appointments with you online, in Iowa City or in Des Moines if I happen to be there.

Course Overview

Content is Everything and Everywhere

Welcome to the University of Iowa’s first-ever Content Strategy for Web Communication course! The purpose of this course is to provide a deep introduction to the discipline of digital content strategy. At the end of this course you will possess new perspectives and
tools to take back to your current jobs, future careers, and all endeavors that involve the management of message and meaning in the online world.

Over the past decade the discipline of content strategy has become a “must have” in any organization that produces content. Be it internal or public-facing, effective content – including video, podcasts, copy, social media posts, press releases, email marketing, imagery, forms, transactions, intranets, blogs and more – requires a strategic plan for creation and ongoing governance. This class will cover everything you need to know to effectively plan for, produce, govern, test and report on your content.

In addition to working with content itself, content strategy is also deeply tied to the discipline of User Experience (UX). Some might even say it’s a subset of that discipline. I will also cover some of the other closely-related subject matter areas that, as a content strategist, you will work with and sometimes even dive into yourself. We won’t learn to design websites or build databases, but we will learn how to speak to usability and user experience as it relates to the goals of content strategy.

My approach to content strategy is highly informed by my professional life as a Content and Experience Strategist for one of the top healthcare strategy firms in the country, as well as my creative background as a theater director and practitioner (Surprisingly, theater direction and content strategy inform one another in rather illuminating ways). The core of what I teach is about making content for human beings, planning for content with empathy and specificity, and directing the storytelling flow through multiple content mediums.

My goal is to give you practical skills you can take with you into your career, as well as inspiring perspectives that will help you clarify your values in all forms of strategic communication. I can’t promise Bob Dylan (that’s a nod to Don’s course), but I will introduce you to a whole set of “rock stars” you might not have known existed. :-)

Course Objectives
This course benefits anyone who creates or manages content in any industry. By the end of the semester, you will know how to:

- Explain the important of content strategy to your team
- Build a business case for content strategy to your managers and C-Suite
- Conduct a content inventory and audit
- Employ solid information architecture practices
- Create a user persona and integrate the persona into your content processes
- Write and optimize content for web
- Create guidelines for writers
- Employ mobile content and design strategies
- Understand the important of accessibility for web content
- Create and execute content marketing strategies
• Apply Search Engine Optimization and Search Engine Marketing practices
• Use analytics and testing to evaluate the success of your content
• Build a content governance plan
• Assess how effectively a design (website, app, mobile site, etc.) supports effective content delivery (Usability)
• Plan for the ways underlying data taxonomies can deliver dynamic content

Course Materials to Purchase
Course materials include the texts below, you your preferred format (paperback, Kindle, e-book, etc.) Additional articles, videos, recordings and so forth may be assigned each week as relevant to our discussions.

*Content Strategy for Web* by Kristina Halvorson, 2nd Edition
http://contentstrategy.com/
Follow Kristina on Twitter: @halvorson

*Elements of Content Strategy* by Erin Kissane
http://www.abookapart.com/products/the-elements-of-content-strategy
Follow Erin on Twitter: @halvorson

*Content Strategy for Mobile* by Karen McGrane
http://www.abookapart.com/products/content-strategy-for-mobile
Follow Erin on Twitter: @karenmcgrane

*The Digital Crown: Winning at Content on the Web* by Ahava Leibtag
http://ahamediagroup.com/thedigitalcrown/
Follow Ahava on Twitter: @ahaval

http://www.sensible.com/dmmt.html
Follow Steve on Twitter: @skrug

Grading and Assignments
You will be graded on class participation, weekly (typically) written assignments in response to reading and discussion, a mid-term written assignment and a final web content project:

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: 40%
WEEKLY WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND RESPONSES: 20%
MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT: 10%
FINAL WRITTEN PROJECT AND ESSAY EXAM: 30%
All writing assignments are due in the ICON dropbox at the beginning of class on the due date. Those late will be docked a letter grade per day. (A paper due Monday that deserves an A will receive a B if I don’t get it until Tuesday, etc.)

Course Schedule

*Reading response assignments to be given weekly and are due to ICON before the next class meeting. Most weeks you will be assigned case studies and articles and videos in addition to the assignments listed here.*

**Week One:** UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS
January, 20

**Week Two:** INTRO/SYLLABUS. What is content strategy? How has the discipline emerged and why? What is its future? Let’s get to know you and your relationship to this subject. Introduce the final project.
January 27

**Week Three**
February 3
Reading due: Halvorson (Fwd, Chapters 1 – 3); Kissane (Intro, 1)

**Week Four**
February 10
Reading due: Leibtag (Fwd, Intro); Kissane (2); Halvorson (4-6)

**Week Five**
February 17
Reading due: Halvorson (7-9); Krug (Intro, 1-4)

**Week Six**
February 24
Reading due: Leibtag (Chapter 1); Kissane (3, Conclusion/Bonus)

**Week Seven**
March 3
Reading due: Leibtag (Chapter 2); Halvorson (10-12)

**Week Eight**
March 10
Reading due: Leibtag (Chapter 3)
Midterm Assignment Due Before Class

Week Nine: SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS
March 17

Week Ten
March 24
Reading due: Leibtag (Chapter 4, Conclusion)

Week Eleven
March 31
Reading due: Krug (6-7); McGrane (1)

Week Twelve
April 7
Reading due: Krug (8-9); McGrane (2-3)

Week Thirteen
April 14
Reading due: Krug (10-11); McGrane (4-5)

Week Fourteen
April 21
Reading due: Krug (12-13); McGrane (6-7)

Week Fifteen
April 28
Reading due: TBD

Week Sixteen: FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATION
May 5
Final Project Due in Class

Week Sixteen: FINALS WEEK - NO MEETING
May 12
Final Take-Home Essay Exam Due by 5/12 11:59 p.m.
Expectations

Workload
The CLAS student workload guidelines advise that each semester hour of class should entail around two hours each week of outside preparation for the average student. This means that for a three semester hour course like this one, students should expect 6 hours of outside work per week on average. The bulk of your outside work will be reading and written responses to the reading, as well as your midterm and final projects.

Attendance and Tardiness
Attendance (whether in the classroom or online) is MANDATORY, as the course is very interactive. If you can’t attend and have a good reason, please let me know as soon as you can (before the class you miss rather than after).

In-Class Behavior
Full attention is not only common courtesy, it will help you get the most out of this class. Class time and class equipment should be devoted to class activity (not surfing the web, unless assigned research requires it, or checking your email). You are, however, welcome and encouraged to “Tweet” class-related thoughts during the class as long as the act doesn’t tempt you away from the topic of discussion.

Quality Written Work
This is a course about content so it should go without saying that spelling, grammar, clarity and style, and punctuation are absolutely part of your paper and assignment grades.

THE IOWA DOZEN

The Iowa Dozen is our commitment to our majors that they will receive a quality educational experience. Twelve key areas have been identified in the Iowa Dozen. The knowledge base in these areas will be covered by required and elective courses in the Journalism and Mass Communication curriculum.

We learn:

- to write correctly and clearly
- to conduct research and gather information responsibly
• to edit and evaluate carefully
• to use media technologies thoughtfully
• to apply statistical concepts appropriately

We value:
• First Amendment principles for all individuals and groups
• a diverse global community
• creativity and independence
• truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity

We explore:
• mass communication theories and concepts
• media institutions and practices
• the role of media in shaping cultures

Student Resources

The Writing Center
Students will find the Writing Center and the Speaking Center very useful for this course; the Tutor Iowa site is also very valuable for students seeking extra help:

Writing Center: http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/
Speaking Center: http://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/for-students/speaking-center
Tutor Iowa: http://tutor.uiowa.edu/

Administrative Home
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Electronic Communication
University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).

Accommodations for Disabilities
A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

**Academic Honesty**
All CLAS students have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

**CLAS Final Examination Policies**
The final examination schedule for each class is announced around the fifth week of the semester by the Registrar. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the dates and times of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site.

**Making a Suggestion or a Complaint**
Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

**Understanding Sexual Harassment**
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

**Reacting Safely to Severe Weather**
In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.

These CLAS policy and procedural statements have been summarized from the web pages of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and The University of Iowa Operations Manual.