Mass Communication Seminar:
Content Strategy for Web Communication
(3 semester hours)

Spring 2015 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 located here.)

Ways to Connect With Me

- **319-541-0038 (cell/txt)** – Text is best for most immediate response.
- **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**
- **Twitter: @angietoomsen**

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 or Iowa City.
Course Overview

Everything is Content

Welcome to the University of Iowa’s *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 the things 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 structure a database, 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 has been highly informed by my professional life as a content strategist and design director for one a leading healthcare digital strategy firm, 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 flow of storytelling 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.
Course Objectives
This course benefits anyone who creates and/or manages content in any industry. By the end of the semester, you will know how to:

- Explain the importance of content strategy to your team
- Build a business case for content strategy and content governance
- Learn practical approaches to manage and evaluate online content
- Create rich user personas and integrate into your content processes
- Adapt and optimize content for web
- Create online guidelines for writers
- Support and apply mobile content and design strategies
- Understand the importance of accessibility for web content
- Create and execute content marketing strategies
- Evaluate the success of your content
- Assess how effectively a design (website, app, mobile site, etc.) supports effective content delivery (usability)

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

*Content Strategy for Web* by Kristina Halvorson, *2nd Edition*
Follow Kristina on Twitter: @halvorson

*Elements of Content Strategy* by Erin Kissane
Follow Erin on Twitter: @kissane

*Don’t Make Me Think, Revisited: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability* by Steve Krug (*3rd Edition*)
Follow Steve on Twitter: @skrug

*Epic Content Marketing: How to Tell a Different Story, Break through the Clutter, and Win More Customers by Marketing Less* by Joe Pulizzi
Purchase Kindle, paperback or audio here: [http://www.amazon.com/Epic-Content-Marketing-Different-Customers/dp/0071819894/ref=tmm_hrd_title_0](http://www.amazon.com/Epic-Content-Marketing-Different-Customers/dp/0071819894/ref=tmm_hrd_title_0)
Follow Joe on Twitter: @JoePulizzi
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 project:

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: 30%
WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS AND READING RESPONSES: 30%
MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT: 15%
FINAL PROJECT AND ESSAY EXAM: 25%

Weekly assignments will typically be posted to ICON by Tuesday at noon, if not sooner. All writing assignments are due in the ICON dropbox by the beginning of the next class. Those late to post (unless there is an approved exception) will be docked a full letter grade per day. (A “A” paper due Monday will receive a “B” if I don’t get it until Tuesday, etc.)

Plus and minus grades will be used. The A+ grade will only be given in cases of outstanding academic achievement.
Course Schedule

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

Assignments will be created in response to readings and class discussion and, therefore, will be posted after class, typically by Tuesdays at noon. Additional articles and media will be assigned on a weekly basis.

Week One: UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS
January, 20

Week Two: INTRO/SYLLABUS. Course expectations. About me. About you. 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.
January 26

Week Three: Why Content Strategy?
February 2
Reading due: Halvorson - Intro/Fwd + Chapters 1-4, 11-12; Kissane - Intro/Fwd + Chapters 1-2.

Week Four: Tools of the Trade
February 9
Reading due: Halvorson - Chapters 5-9, 11-12; Kissane - Chapters 3 + Conclusion

Week Five: Writing for Web
February 16
Reading due: Krug - Forward/Intro + Chapters 1-5; Handley - Foreword/Intro + Chapters 4-8, 10, 12, 20-21, 25, 29-41 (skim chapters in between not listed here)
Midterm Assigned in Class

Week Six: Content Management and Governance
February 23
Reading due: Articles/Videos TBD

Week Seven: Design and User Experience for Content Strategists
March 2
Reading due: Krug - Chapters 6, 7, 10-12
Week Eight: Content Marketing: What and Why
March 9
Reading due: Pulizzi - Foreword/Intro Chapters 1, 3, 5, 6 -13
Midterm Assignment Due Before Class

Week Nine: SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS
March 16

Week Ten: Storytelling and Brand Journalism
March 23
Reading due: Handley – Chapters 41-52, 56-59

Week Eleven: Content Marketing Plans
March 30
Reading due: Pulizzi – Chapters 14-20

Week Twelve: Content Marketing Channels
April 6
Reading due: Handley – Chapters Part V and VI

Week Thirteen: Measurement and Evolution
April 13
Reading due: Pulizzi – Chapters 21-15

Week Fourteen: Discussion Topic TBD/Your Choice
April 20
Reading due: Articles/Research TBD

Week Fifteen: Discussion Topic TBD/Your Choice
April 27
Reading due: Articles/Research TBD

Week Sixteen: FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATION IN CLASS (8-10 minute overviews)
May 4
Reading due: Articles/Research TBD

Week Sixteen: FINALS WEEK - NO MEETING
May 11
Final Project Due before Class. Presented in Class.
Final Take-Home Essay Exam Due by 5/14 11:59 p.m.
Expectations

Workload
The CLAS student workload guidelines advise 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.