

GIFT ENTRY #38: Go Mobile, Go Remote : Reporting During a Global Pandemic, Darren Sweeney, Associate Professor, Central Connecticut State University

As a professor of broadcast journalism students, I found myself suddenly faced with a university suddenly shutdown due to COVID-19. It was a sudden closure due to a suspected case on campus. Students and faculty were rushed off campus. Many students left without camera equipment, tripods, or microphones.

With half of the semester left, we got creative and went fully mobile, fully remote from the student's homes – using the limited equipment they had, most would just use their smartphones. With CDC, state, and university protocols, I came up with a set of standard operating procedures to follow. *This can be a backup plan for not only this pandemic but for any future emergency that keeps the university/studio operations closed.*

How does the assignment work?

- Students were assigned roles just as they would in the classroom. Anchors (2), Producer (1), Assistant Producer (1 – assists producer) and reporters.
- Producer oversees holding virtual newsroom meeting to discuss story ideas. Producer assigns story ideas.
- Producer puts together scripts written by reporters. Reporters either wrote anchor intros for the anchors or produced them remotely. Producer decides the rundown with professor guidance.
- Anchors would record their reads using either computer camera's or smartphones.
- Producer/assistant producer would edit the pieces together (reporter packages, VO's, anchor reads)
- Students were given extended time (two weeks) to complete the assignment and send the professor a file of the newscast. This deadline can be fluid based on the situation. Due to the unknown of never having done this before, I allowed students more time.

Student Outcomes:

- Students learn that the story goes on, no matter what is going on in the world.
- They learn to get creative in storytelling (interviewing via skype, using smartphones/apps to edit, using their homes as studios.)
- They learn to work remotely as a team.
- Added skills to their resume. Ability to work alone/meet deadlines, tell stories with various technology/apps.
- *"Having the opportunity to produce the newscast for Central was the ultimate test of my abilities. It taught me how to dig deep and ask tough questions in search of the truth, as well as communicate effectively with my peers. I truly believe I wouldn't be the persistent journalist I am today without the invaluable skills I learned while producing the newscast." - Samantha Bender/Student*
- *"I can't say I would be as comfortable in a newsroom without having produced student newscasts in the way we did. It definitely tested our abilities as our professor let us be very independent in producing the newscast, when things went wrong we had to make due and change things accordingly and when things went smoothly we celebrated and we're proud of our work as a team." – Ivy Milne/Student*