



SYMPOSIUM:

When iPad Meets J101: Can Video and Basic Newswriting Co-exist in the Classroom?

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It was the second week of class and I was getting worried.

Students in JRN 101, one of the newswriting and reporting classes, would be using iPads to shoot video, tweet, and write short pieces in the field as part of a pilot program funded through the Stonehill College technology department. It would be a great experiment in mobile journalism, in which students would use this single, simple device to learn the basic skills local editors were calling for.

Or would it?

As we spent one class signing out the iPads and another on how to use iMovie, I began to wonder if I was sacrificing valuable time needed to hone the students' still very green writing and reporting skills for technology. Would shooting video become a distraction in a course where students were still getting comfortable interviewing strangers, asking those hard questions, and writing concisely? Which writing assignments would have to be discarded? Was this too great a shift from the course core: writing and reporting?

Students in JRN101, labeled the Advanced Newswriting and Reporting course, had taken just one newswriting course, JRN 100, Basic Newswriting and Reporting. There is no requirement in our small program, where journalism is a minor, that students take the "advanced" course immediately after JRN 100. That meant some of the 14 student writers sitting in this pilot class could be seniors who took JRN100

freshman year and forgot many newswriting basics, including AP style. They would be required, by the end of the semester, to write breaking news stories as well as complex articles to be published in local news outlets. Now, I was adding multiple video and mobile assignments to the mix.

Shooting video for the classes wasn't new. In earlier JRN 100 and JRN 101 classes, students were required to shoot a short video to go with stories posted on a class blog hosted through Blogger. Those videos were shot with cell phones, laptop cameras or personal point-and-shoot cameras, then uploaded to a class YouTube account. While those videos helped students see the importance of linking video with stories, they weren't very good. Most of the students didn't know how to edit video, were shooting with a wide range of cameras, hadn't taken our television production course, and/or were intimidated by editing software. As a result, the video quality ranged from adequate to horrible.

With the help of the Technology Department's Faculty Initiatives Technology (FIT) program, we were hoping the iPad2 would help change that and bring consistent multi-media and mobile reporting elements to the course. Students signed out the iPads for the semester and used the tablets both in and out of class. They were required to download iMovie (\$4.99), use Twitter and were encouraged to use any note-taking apps. iMovie was picked because it was simple and required the least amount of training.

Students did not use any add-ons to the iPad for the course: no keyboards, tripods or external microphones (this was by design: I wanted to see what could be done with the single device). I also knew from the start many of the students didn't have a clue what to do. In a short survey at the start of the semester, only one student had regularly shot video, and on a scale of 1 to 10, eight of the 12 students who responded listed five or lower on the comfort level of editing video (two students didn't respond to the survey). In contrast, the students appeared to have more experience with social media, a plus since they were required to tweet six times a week. Nine of the students already had a Twitter account (Boyle, 2012).

The iPad dovetailed nicely with what was going on with media in our area: two community newspapers were already starting to use iPads for newsgathering and would be expecting interns to do the same. At *The Sun Chronicle* in Attleboro, Mass., reporters can use iPads to write and post stories directly from the field to the website through the paper's Web-based management system, said Mike Kirby, *Sun Chronicle* editor, and Jessica M. Kosowski, assistant managing editor. At *The Standard-Times* of New Bedford, Mass., sports and features editor Jonathan Comey used the iPad for Superbowl 2012 coverage and later when he walked about 120 miles during a fundraising stunt for the paper's holiday charity fund, blogging and shooting video and photos with an iPad and iPod Touch.

So how did our experiment work out? Pretty good. The bulk of the video work was done as homework while writing remained the main focus in class. An exception was for video "sudden death" assignments—where students were given a topic, went out and interviewed four to six people, then returned to class to edit and upload the project all within the 75-minute class period. These were in addition to similar written "sudden death" assignments given at other times.

A couple of older writing assignments were tossed to make way for iPad-related assignments, including using the FaceTime feature in class for mock "stand-ups" and in-class interviews so students could get a quick view of how someone will appear for live

field shots. But additional writing projects were added—with video elements. These included sports Q & A profiles used by local weekly papers and coverage of an inner-city parent workshop. The student midterm and final stories, posted to separate Blogger and WordPress blogs, were as good, if not better, than those done in previous years.

Were the student iMovie videos of broadcast quality? Probably not. Were they comparable to videos on some newspaper and radio station websites? Definitely. Did the students believe the iPads helped them in the course? The overwhelming majority said yes. In an end-of-the-year survey, 12 of the 13 students who responded (one did not respond) said the iPad was effective for the course (Harrison, 2012).

Students juggled complex writing assignments and video editing with relative—and surprising—ease. It wasn't an "either-or" for the students, but a matter of learning how to report news in different ways. It turned out all the worrying at the start of the semester was for nothing.

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