



Developing a Converged Journalism Capstone: Providing a Sustained Multimedia Publishing Experience Across Disciplines

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Abstract

In January 2015, Drake University's School of Journalism and Mass Communication instituted a new capstone experience for all Journalism majors, integrating all students in a singular, hands-on, news and feature multimedia publishing experience. The project was entrepreneurial, broad in scope and challenging for students and instructors. And it was trial by fire, as such a project had never been done before at this university. This paper explores the development and evolution of the product, key challenges of the experience, and possible improvements for the future.

Rationale

The development of the Drake University converged journalism capstone began long before the first section was taught. The project has been discussed among faculty since 2007.

This capstone idea grew from recognition that Magazine and News/Internet majors need more multimedia experience. Research published as early as 2005 shows that a majority of Newspaper Managers at that time felt convergence skills were important when hiring, yet few educational institutions were training students in a range of media skills (Kraeplin & Criado, 2005). These students are preparing for a changing industry that is becoming digital-driven and increasingly video-driven. According to The 2013 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates, three times as many graduates are producing video for the web as in 2006 (Becker, Vlad, Simpson, 2014). As such, they need not only experience shooting and editing video, but also experience writing for video and visualizing video stories. These students were lacking knowledge of the language and process of the discipline, which limited their ability to

work with video professionals. They lacked the ability to distinguish what is or isn't a "video story" and the understanding of the challenges and limitations in producing one.

Additionally, there is the recognition that Electronic Media majors in the Broadcast News and Radio/TV Production tracks also need expanded preparation for a changing industry, specifically skills beyond traditional broadcast television and radio. Between 2006 and 2013, there has been a more than 20 percent increase in the number of recent graduates working in TV who also write or edit for the web as part of their responsibilities (Becker et al., 2014). More cross-platform reporting, writing and storytelling experience is needed, as well as soft skills such as collaboration with print writers and project management.

Capstone experiences at the university have varied from major to major. Magazine and News/Internet capstones merged in 2007 to create a single publication. Various iterations have been produced across several platforms: print-only, print+web, print+tablet, tablet-only and web-only. For years, this capstone has attempted an immersive multimedia experience but

achieved disappointing results due to a lack of skill and ability with multimedia.

The Electronic Media capstone combined Broadcast News and Radio/TV Production students. It has produced a live, 15-minute spot news program since 1993, airing on local cable and, later, also streamed online. With declining audiences and the need to prepare Broadcast News and Radio/TV Production students for a broader range of jobs in digital media, its value has diminished. These students need to produce content for larger audiences and develop skills in storytelling beyond the broadcast realm.

A combined capstone was seen as a way to address the issues in both situations, and the development of this idea began in earnest in January 2014. This was part of a larger curricular overhaul and redesign of majors, driven by declining enrollment in news majors and changes in the industry. Faculty felt it necessary to leave behind the segregated print and television model and fully embrace a multiplatform, multimedia culture, including mobile creation and delivery, and the use of marketing, promotion and social media in finding, attracting and growing an audience.

The ideal outcomes for this capstone experience remain the same as previous capstones with a foundation in storytelling: exhaustive reporting, recognition of the best medium to tell the story, good technical and artistic execution, strong writing, and a vigorous promotional effort.

In addition, previous capstones have sought to improve students' professionalism and give them experience with "real-world" challenges and opportunities they'll soon face in the workplace. That has included:

- Managing co-workers, bosses, subordinates, other departments, technology, problems, crises and outside vendors; and managing themselves, their time, their workload, their attitude and their work habits.
- Being exposed to the standards and expectations of a professional staff, through job interviews, job contracts, performance reviews and staff meetings.
- Developing a sense of ownership of the product and the enterprise to successfully execute it.
- Acquiring skills in teamwork and collaboration by navigating different working styles, personalities, work ethics, schedules and conflict, as well as keeping the boss happy.
- Synthesizing and applying everything they've learned in previous classes, co-curricular activities

and internships.

- Expanding their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

While the entire revamped curriculum would not be in place for all students for several years, the decision was made to teach a pilot project in Spring 2015 to work through the intricacies of this capstone before it would be fully incorporated in Fall 2016.

Because of the complexity of the project, faculty successfully argued for three instructors to be allocated, considering:

- The process needed to be fully documented to guide future curriculum development.
- Simply gathering the various majors in one room and making them work together was going to be challenging in ways that couldn't be anticipated.
- Each faculty member would bring a specific expertise (writing/reporting/editing; promotion/social media/analytics and web UX; video/photography/audio and marketing), each of which were desperately needed.
- The convergence of four majors in one capstone created a savings of two teaching positions.
- Plus there would be the usual challenges of teaching a senior capstone.

Development

This course was taught for the first time in Spring 2015. Since the new journalism curriculum was in the early stages of rollout, the pilot was taught to students with a different curricular background than those who will take the course in 2017.

The first decision was the location of the class: Should it be taught in the TV studio? Traditional computer lab space? Collaborative space? All of the above?

The decision was dictated not only by the technology available in the space—video/audio/photo capture and editing would be needed in addition to text, graphic design and coding—but by the size and flexibility of the space. The class would consist of 26 students who would need to collaborate in groups of varying sizes. The initial decision was to meet in two locations: the TV/Video production studio areas and the largest collaborative computer lab, both in the same building. The primary meeting room would be the lab, with the production areas used during class when needed.

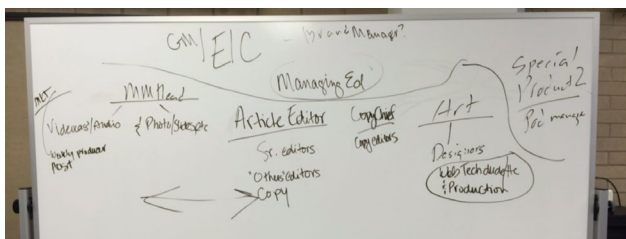
Rather than burden students with the task of creating a new publication and determining its identity

and purpose, as had been done in some earlier magazine capstones, the instructors decided to build on an existing publication. They reasoned that the publication, *Urban Plains*, which was created and re-envisioned by previous capstones, already had an established brand, audience and social media presence, freeing students from having to build those from scratch. Discontent was expected from electronic-media students, who may have preferred to start afresh with a product not already heavily tied to, and identified with, the magazine major. But the instructors reasoned that students would already have enough to handle.

The format needed to evolve to accommodate a variety of content in breaking news and “deep dive” content; much consideration was given to an outlet for on-deadline, timed portfolio pieces that certain electronic media students would need for their reels. Ultimately, the decision was made to let the students drive this evolution, based on their professional goals. This would also provide a sense of ownership for the students, especially those in electronic media. The content would take on a variety of formats — text, video, photos, audio, slideshows, etc.

Students would be expected to pitch their stories, as they would in a traditional newsroom. The option for a studio component was maintained via newscasts viewable on both the university’s local cable channel and the website or other content, as proposed by the students.

The instructors began official planning meetings after the end of the fall semester, when they could focus on the exact outcomes and structure of the course. Goals for the students were relatively clear, but the design of the staff organization and hierarchy that would lead to such accomplishments was less so. Even among the instructors, clarity was lacking on the needed job positions, descriptions and responsibilities, as demonstrated by the white board notations from our first meeting:

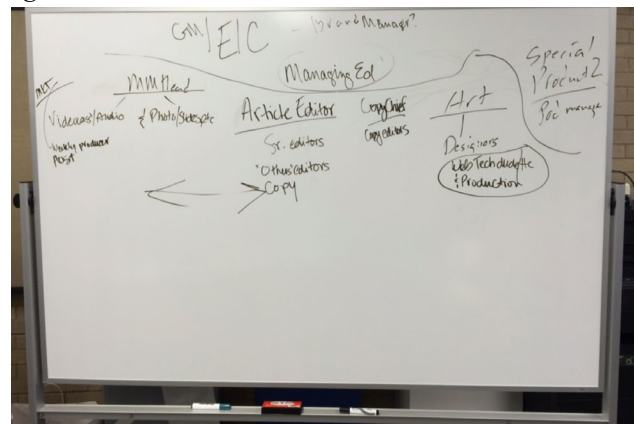


The structure remained in flux until the third week of class, when students were selected for their positions and staff organization was announced. The professors began second guessing titles and structure

almost immediately. Titles needed to be flexible, so they would give students appropriate credibility on their resumes (electronic-media titles can differ from print-based titles); departments needed to be structured to promote collaboration rather than silos; and, the structure needed to be lean to allow for that kind of fluidity. The guiding thought through all of this was integration—every discipline needed to touch every story to ensure that the stories were told in the most effective way. To this day, the debate continues about proper staff structure.

The interdisciplinary fluidity also created questions about function. How would a traditional print-copy department come into play for a video story? How does technology find its way into a print story? To best serve multimedia storytelling, interdisciplinary workflow would have to be encouraged by the structure; story teams would be created to overcome this.

The final structure was relatively clear, except for the copy department, which seemed to exist on the z-axis, touching everyone without holding any managerial control:



The executive team consisted of the Editor-in-Chief (General Manager, if an Electronic Media student), Executive Producer (Managing Editor if a Magazine student), Art Director, Senior Web Producer, Articles Editor, Marketing Director, and the three publishers/professors (who became known as the Triad). The remainder of the students would fill staff positions within the departments.

Job descriptions for many positions already existed from the magazine capstone. Some required editing to emphasize the interdisciplinary collaboration that would have to take place. Electronic-media job descriptions didn’t exist and had to be written from scratch; in their previous electronic-media capstone model, students rotated positions and didn’t inter-

view/audition, except for anchor. As mentioned, job titles were “either/or” in some cases, to allow for flexibility in disciplines. (Appendix A)

Students would be required to sign job contracts once the needs and responsibilities of departments were discussed. The contracts, written by each student, were to be customized to each position and include pledges to fulfill the duties specific to the job, to create content and to commit to the standards of performance as determined by the professors. (Appendix B)

Process And Evolution

Communication with the students began two weeks prior to the beginning of the semester, when a private Facebook group was created; this easily accessible platform proved to be the best way to bring the students together in one place at this time. One of the professors periodically posted questions about a variety of topics: vision for project, audience, staff organization, story ideas, personal goals, etc. The purpose was three-fold:

- Getting the students interacting with each other and thinking about what would need to be done.
- Gathering information about their thought processes and the early decisions the professors would need to make.
- Laying the foundation to hit the ground running on the first day of class.

Before that first day of class, the organizational chart and job descriptions were posted to Facebook, allowing students to consider which positions they would seek.

During the first class meeting, the Triad attempted to clarify for the students why the capstones were combined and what was expected to take place. Emphasis was placed on the unusual opportunity they were being given to innovate and make big decisions about what this project would be ... the entrepreneurial spirit. Students asked a lot of questions, particularly about the organization and job descriptions, and expressed a lot of uncertainty. As expected, they sat with fellow students in their own majors.

What wasn't expected was the amount of anxiety expressed and lack of enthusiasm. Faculty expected students to jump at this opportunity. After class, one student expressed her stress in a Facebook post: “Holy Capstone!” Others liked or replied to the post, agreeing with the sentiment. This wasn't posted to the private group, but the student forgot that professors could see her personal account. (Tarnowski, 2015)

To allow the students to get to know each other better and alleviate stress, a mixer was devised for the second class meeting. The professors orchestrated groups of five that would be a blend of majors. These groups were asked to brainstorm audience, topics and voice for the site. Both within the smaller groups and as they shared their discussions with the entire class, familiarity developed. They embraced the opportunity to work together and came up with many solid ideas. With the content, audience and channels of the site determined, the students were tasked with bringing a large list of viable story ideas to the next class meeting.

Plans were also set in motion at this time for job interviews. Professionals from the community reviewed their resumes, cover letters and portfolios, and interviewed them. Students were placed in positions largely based on the professionals' recommendations, an attempt to distance the professors from the selection process and combat any notions of favoritism or bias.

The interviews were conducted during class time in faculty offices and other locations in the building. Meanwhile, a discussion of story ideas took place in the classroom, so students came and went when needed.

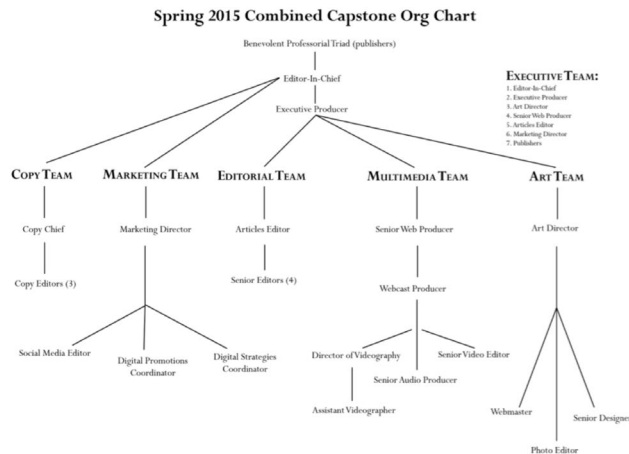
Interviewers not only evaluated students in regard to the positions for which they were interviewing, but also critiqued their application materials, portfolios and interviewing skills, providing feedback wherever they chose. Recommendations for job placement were provided within 24 hours.

Each student was allowed to apply for three positions; some of the positions were grouped together for interviewing purposes (for example, Director of Video and Senior Video Editor were interviewed by the same person). Interviewers considered interviewees for additional positions, without necessarily mentioning this to the students; it was apparent some people would be placed in roles for which they didn't apply, either because of too many applicants for a given position, or too few. Most interviewers saw four students.

In the final decision-making process, deliberate efforts were made to represent several disciplines in all departments. For example, the marketing team included a digital producer as well as magazine majors; the two key managerial roles were filled by a Magazine major and a Radio/TV Production major; the photo editor, part of the art department, was also a Radio/TV major.

The final organizational chart follows; some po-

sitions were adjusted based on the interests and skills of the students. The second in command was given the option to use “Managing Editor” (appropriate for a Magazines or News/Internet major) or “Executive Producer” (appropriate for a Broadcast News or Radio/TV Production major), as each would provide a different connotation on a resume.



The staff was in place after the second week of class; the Triad stepped back and allowed the students to assume control. Prior to each class session, the Triad identified any issues that needed to be addressed. However, they waited to see if the Editor-in-Chief planned to raise them first, as they didn't want to undermine her authority with her new staff. If she didn't, the Triad requested the floor for a short period of time at the beginning of class (this became common practice).

The executive team began by vetting and refining the story ideas collected. About this same time, the students decided that a video webcast and an audio podcast would be produced on a revolving basis. The structure would be similar to a news magazine program, rather than spot coverage.

The executive team presented descriptions of the refined story ideas to the rest of the staff. A process determined by the students initially required students to choose five stories of interest to them, with information about why they were interested, what media would be used and why, connections or sources they could use, and why they were the best person for the assignment.

The first querying process was rather chaotic, partially because it was new to the electronic media majors and partially because none of the students knew how to deal with the multimedia aspect of querying. Ultimately, almost all of these decisions and assignments would come to be made by conversation (al-

though sometimes they were communicated via email or text); given the scope of some of the stories, it was simply the most efficient way to handle them.

At the end of the third week of class, a hard launch date was set for early March, with a soft launch planned to occur the week prior. The mission statement was also written by the EIC—based on classroom discussion—and distributed for feedback.

To assist students in capturing good audio, the Senior Audio Producer compiled a document of audio and podcast tips and gave a demonstration during class. This allowed reporters to capture audio not just for transcription, but also for possible inclusion on the site as part of a story or audio podcast. Similar informal mentoring activities continued throughout the semester.

Creation of the website began with the art team researching templates for a WordPress installation. The selected template was customized, with the art department determining a logo, colors, typeface, etc. Story elements, such as infographics and pull quotes, were created as original artwork in the art department. A design style guide and a text style guide were created and shared with the class. These style guides not only provided information about how stories should be written and structured, but also allowed the staff to visualize the finished appearance of the site and how the multimedia elements would appear.

As often happens in a capstone, the students panicked as the first deadline approached. Fearing the staff had produced too little content, the Articles Editor requested additional story ideas, and the EIC requested “freelance” content from talented undergrads.

To facilitate this, a copy editor was designated as “Freelance Wrangler.” This person was responsible for contacting resources (JMC faculty, English faculty, student publications), selecting stories, and working with content creators to produce quality pieces using appropriate media. Several freelance stories were used initially, but the number dropped off as the semester progressed. Additionally, some stories completed by capstone members in the previous semester were revised and published.

To quell panic and foster teamwork, an in-class pizza party was planned. This working lunch proved valuable. The EIC addressed story issues, the Webmaster gave a demonstration of a mock-up of the site, and the entire staff participated in a literal walk through of the workflow; the students carried pieces

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The demonstration of site pages and multimedia work at the beginning of class sessions became a regular occurrence.

During the fifth week of class, the webcast team was brought into executive-team meetings to help determine which stories would be used for the webcast. Early on, the Triad tried to impress on them the need to determine which story was best told in each medi-

um, but this didn't hit home until the first stories were completed.

Likewise, the second querying process was vastly simplified: three story choices, with the format and potential sources or connections, if any. It was much smoother than the first round of story selection. In all, over the course of 11 weeks, 72 stories of varying complexity and media, with accompanying promotional content on the site and on social media, were completed.

Infrastructure

Throughout these early processes, the students struggled with a preferred method of communication. This was another piece of the infrastructure that the students were allowed to develop. The Facebook group was used, but email, texting, Google groups and personal social media communication also took place. It was extraordinarily difficult to track and understand the progress of the work.

The Triad encouraged students to use email threads for both simplicity and documentation. They were resistant at first, but they were using email effectively and efficiently to communicate by the beginning of April. The result was a huge amount of email, as "reply all" was used to ensure all stakeholders had key information about a given topic. But even with the massive quantity of messages, the communication was more reliable.

The executive team, particularly the Executive Producer, developed spreadsheets to improve communication and track workflow, hoping all students would update the documents regularly. But this didn't happen, so the EIC used class time as full staff meetings, discussing the progress of every story in the pipeline. This proved to be much more efficient than the many ways communication was taking place (including spreadsheets). A Google calendar was created and referenced during these meetings, with deadlines and statuses updated in real time.

Similarly, the infrastructure of the class had to provide for submission of drafts, revisions and multimedia prior to the posting of content. Students were allowed to experiment with finding a process that worked for them; ultimately, a Google Drive folder structure, dictated by the website map, was the least cumbersome, most organized method.

However, video needed massive, sharable storage, and Google Drive was slow with uploads. The students developed an effective workflow for the review

and approval of video assets incorporating YouTube. A private channel, requiring the forwarding of a link, was used for rough edits; the link was shared via group email to the key stakeholders and feedback was given via "reply all," to reduce redundancies. Once the final edit was approved, the video was uploaded to a public YouTube channel and embedded in the website.

A similar process was used for audio clips, although their smaller size allowed for uploading to Google Drive.

Owner and administrator passwords for all sites, channels and cloud storage were distributed to the Triad and a select few students, in case of emergency.

Particularly tricky was working the Triad into the approval process. At least one instructor needed to sign off on everything, but the Triad quickly learned that each member of the group looked for different things and identified different flaws and strengths. Not unlike the students and email, the Triad landed on a workable process in April, when two of them were traveling to conferences. They simply looked at the calendar of posting dates and determined who would approve what, self-selecting to areas of expertise. This divided the workload evenly among the instructors, who often sought second opinions from each other while in the review process.

Early on, the Webmaster and Triad determined that the workload would be too much for her to handle alone. Quite literally, she would touch every story that was posted on the site. Plus, she had ambitious ideas but too little experience in coding to accomplish some of the things she wished to do. A promising student in Computer Science was identified, for whom an independent study for credit was arranged. He was also paid a small stipend. Not only did he ease some of the Webmaster's load, but he also added nice features to the site that would not have been possible otherwise.

The Webmaster made her own checklist to keep track of deadlines and story elements. She began to request wireframes well in advance of the stories, so she could build the shell. Pull quotes and photo captions were put in the same document as the text story, so they were easy for her to locate and track. Social media information was included, as well. The students found that it was easier to have everything in one document, rather than specific documents for each use. The only elements that weren't put in the final text document were high-resolution photos, video and audio clips; links were provided instead.

Like the Webmaster, the photo editor also touched every story and initially struggled to handle the workload. But as she developed her workflow and built an informal team of trusted helpers, her situation became manageable. Spreadsheets were effective for her, perhaps because she was in control of the documents. All information came to her for entering, but the spreadsheets were available for all to see and track progress.

Promotion of the site was the primary responsibility of the marketing department, but the workload necessitated all students play a role. As students settled into the process, they saw the impact of writing for the audience and began to actively promote stories and the site. Initially, they relied on their own personal social-media activities, but very quickly they began producing specific promotional content to post for the webcast, for specific stories and for team members. The metrics encouraged them to do more, revealing that promotion from the people behind the stories—both the subjects and the reporters—was driving views.

The communication necessary for this process to evolve was initially overwhelming, but necessary for the students to determine their best practices. There was much trial and error, but by mid-April most of the email between staffers and the Triad was about getting work done rather than about creating a sufficient workflow. Even toward the end of the semester, when the executive team and staff members were occasionally unable to fulfill their duties because of job interviews, the workflow was so thoroughly understood that it continued without interruption. Additionally, by that time many people had developed the skills to cover tasks for others. For example, the EIC stepped in as Webmaster for two days, and staffers from all departments helped the copy squad handle the load during finals week.

Assessment

The Triad required students to submit weekly reports beginning the third week of class. These reports did not have a specific format, but required the following information:

- Updates: What you've worked on in the last week.
- Action Items: What you plan to do this week?
- Shout-Outs: Students who have been rocking this week.
- Smackdowns: Students who have been slacking.
- Concerns: About the overall project.

These reports allowed the Triad to monitor the activities and performance of the students in the class from the student perspective. They also helped identify any problems and allowed for intervention, if necessary. This also allowed the instructors to publicly recognize students who, in the eyes of their peers, were going above and beyond expectations. Because the reports were confidential, students were relatively honest in their writing. (Appendix C)

At the same time that the requirement of the weekly reports was introduced, the Triad also explained the requirements spelled out in students' job contracts. Specific deliverables and expectations of the students varied, based on the responsibilities of each position. The students were allowed to make additions or deletions to the job responsibilities prior to signing, but every position was required to include the phrase "other tasks as needed and assigned." It also contained a statement confirming that the student had read letters left for them by their predecessors. The Triad emphasized that based on these job contracts, students could be fired if they failed to fulfill them.

At midterm and at the end of the semester, students were assigned to fill out an evaluation of every student with whom they had contact to that point (including themselves). The work of each student was evaluated in regard to preparation, outgoing and incoming communication, team support, participation, dependability, commitment and quality. Each category on the evaluation asked for a letter grade, with a brief description for each grade provided. Written comments were strongly recommended (and were usually provided). (Appendix D)

After the midterm evaluations were submitted, every student met one-on-one with a member of the Triad. At these meetings, the instructors summarized, anonymously, the feedback from the student's peer evaluations and also offered feedback based on the instructor's observations. The meetings were similar to an evaluation in the workplace, in an effort to improve the student and the overall publication.

This practice was a carryover from previous magazine capstones, in which alumni have reported that this was one of the most valuable experiences of the capstone. Often in respect to group behaviors, alumni said, they had no idea they were projecting a certain persona to others. They have said there isn't any other situation where one can learn about how others perceive them, make behavioral changes, and then learn if the changes worked.

Similarly, students had a one-on-one meeting with the Triad at the end of the semester, where students received feedback and could talk about their strengths and weaknesses (which could affect their final grade—for example, if a student with a borderline grade seemed to disengage at a certain point, they could explain and perhaps redeem themselves). The Triad also asked specific questions about what the student liked and didn't like about the experience. This was valuable research since this was a first-of-its-kind course.

Reflection

Reviewing the intended outcomes of this course reveals a successful pilot project, which can be viewed at <http://www.2015.urban-plains.com>. Particularly in regard to teamwork and management, the students developed skills that will serve them well in their careers. It was also evident the students applied skills obtained throughout their course work in an integrated, intentional way.

The students also expanded their knowledge by experimenting with different tools of the trade and different media, and observing those from other disciplines performing their craft. The latter was perhaps the most surprising outcome to observe. Students, by learning how much they didn't know about the other disciplines, developed a strong respect for all of the skills brought to the table by their colleagues.

Unsurprisingly from the viewpoint of the Triad, students learning much by completing this pilot, and several changes will be made.

The product was unable to launch as quickly as desired because of issues with infrastructure, logistics and communication. In hindsight, the Triad needs to establish the procedures and tools in advance, rather than allow the students to choose the method that works best for them. They simply couldn't come to an agreement in a timely manner.

Even though faculty of the school revamped the journalism curriculum at the start of this project, more changes need to be made. The overall outcomes of the preceding courses are probably suitable, but some of

the content may need to change, including querying in electronic media classes, bridging terminology used within various disciplines; encouraging project management and interdisciplinary collaboration; and demanding more video work for the traditional wordsmiths.

This is true for students and instructors. It was not until deep in the planning process and beyond that the Triad realized how different their approaches were at the outset. A shared vision of underlying philosophy and purpose of the capstone needs to be developed not only by the instructors, but by the faculty as a whole. General concepts were understood, but many devils rose from the details.

Sadly, some of this is inherent in the structure of the school and most of academia: professors are identified by their area of expertise, and they teach in those areas. As a result, cross-curricular deficiencies exist, no matter how much faculty work with different media. The structure of the school and of academia needs to become more integrated so we may better prepare our students for the workplace.

Sandra Henry and Jill Van Wyke are associate professors at Drake University.

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Appendix A: Job Descriptions

CAPSTONE Job Descriptions

Important! Please note that everybody will be expected to contribute content for the product. (Those folks often end up writing as well.) Most of you will also be drafted to assist with tasks that fall outside your “official” responsibilities.

Editor-in-Chief or General Manager

- Responsible for the overall content, look and feel of the products.
- Finalizes the editorial philosophy and formula developed by the class as a whole, in consultation with other editorial, design and production staff members.
- Advocate for the audience and its needs.
- Ensures that the product follows the editorial philosophy.
- Sees the big picture; leaves micro-managing to others.
- Manages staff relations: creates a positive work environment to avoid problems; deals with staff problems as they arise, in consultation with the Publisher.
- Final decision-maker for editorial, design and production.
- Approves all ideas for articles, designs and multimedia.
- In consultation with the Executive Team, determines content, presentation, distribution and marketing.
- In consultation with the Executive Team, works to ensure continuity across platforms.
- Reports to the Publisher.
- Basically does everything. Always.
- Managing Editor or Executive Producer

Chief organizing force for the brand.

- Responsible for getting the product completed efficiently and on budget.
- Creates calendar and content budgets, and sets workflow and deadlines for editorial, multimedia, photography, design and webcast production, in consultation with heads of specific areas.
- Helps develop budget of stories (list, writer, description, due dates, etc.)
- Works with Copy Chief to organize a system for turning in content, macro and micro editing, final approval, posting, etc.
- Works with Webcast Producer and Senior Web Producer to organize weekly webcast rundown.
- Communicates with staff regularly (weekly, at least) about upcoming deadlines.
- Involved with editing or approving articles, designs, multimedia, webcast content.
- Works with publisher to maintain budget and oversee spending.
- Serves as the major problem-solver for issues that

arise.

- Sees the big picture but also works with the micro process. Knows where every part is and where it is in the process.
- Ensures content is appropriate for our mission and audience.
- Communicates with the Executive Team and Senior Editors, Producers and Directors about deadlines and story issues.
- Reports to the Editor-in-Chief.

Art Director

- Responsible for overall look of the brand, in consultation with Editor-in-Chief.
- Manages the design staff; creates a positive work environment for team.
- Creates a Design Style Guide, which will include uniform and consistent design rules for the brand; to be distributed to all designers at the first design meeting.
- With the Marketing Director, Webmaster, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief, chooses any outside providers.
- Approves key design and production decisions such as platform, templates, interactivity, usability/navigation.
- Works with Executive Team and Webmaster to establish site architecture
- Responsible for overall user experience of website
- Designs marquee materials such as banners, webcast graphics, logos, infographics, etc.
- Assigns and monitors all design, working closely with design team. Ensures a cohesive visual flow across the brand.
- Ensures the brand design reflects mission and audience.
- Assigns all illustrations and approves all photo ideas before they are sent to the Photo Editor for assignment.
- Works closely with editors, photographers, designers and multimedia producers to ensure the creation of a unified brand.
- Works with the Managing Editor to create a calendar of deadlines.
- Manages workflow between multimedia team and writers/editors.
- Reports to the Managing Editor.

Senior Web Producer

- Works with Executive Team to ensure all members of the staff are involved and informed.
- Responsible for the look and feel of all multimedia and webcast content.
- Works with Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Articles Editor and Art Director to ensure continuity and cohesion across platforms.
- Helps finalize the editorial philosophy, formula and

- purpose. Enforces it.
- Leads multimedia and webcast team.
- With Managing Editor, Webmaster, Webcast Producer, Articles Editor and Copy Chief, devises a plan and schedule for posting content that includes who can post, what they can post, and when.
- Advocate for target audience.
- Provides weekly (at least) updates to staff.
- Sees the big picture; leaves micro-managing to others.
- Manages staff relations: creates a positive work environment to avoid problems; deals with staff problems as they arise, in consultation with the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief.
- With Executive Team, approves all ideas for articles, multimedia, designs and photographs.
- Works with editorial team to develop content.
- Coordinates editor deadlines with Managing Editor, Articles Editor and Copy Chief, makes editorial decisions with Editor-in-Chief
- Works closely with Art Director and Multimedia Team to plan multimedia production and develop assignments, implementing the most up-to-date technology where appropriate.
- Develops a tracking system to ensure videos, audio and animations are assigned, taken, turned in, edited and properly prepared for posting.
- Enforces Multimedia Team website deadlines.
- Gives final approval for all multimedia content, including the structure and content of all webcasts
- Works with Webcast Producer to select stories and develop additional content for all webcasts
- Oversees collaboration with other journalism students and freelancers, including any outside content from JMC100 or JMC173
- Works with Director of Videography, Senior Video Editor and Senior Audio Producer to develop content and ensure quality of finished product
- Works with Marketing Director to develop multimedia promotions and include promotions in multimedia content

Articles Editor

- Works with Executive Team to ensure all members of the staff are involved and informed.
- Responsible for the look and feel of all article content.
- Works with Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Senior Web Producer and Art Director to ensure continuity and cohesion across platforms.
- Helps finalize the editorial philosophy, formula and purpose. Enforces it.
- Leads editorial team including all Senior Editors.
- With Managing Editor, Senior Web Producer, Website Producer and Copy Chief, devises a plan and schedule for posting content that includes who can post, what they can post, and when.

- Advocate for target audience.
- Provides weekly (at least) updates to staff.
- Sees the big picture; leaves micro-managing to others.
- Manages staff relations: creates a positive work environment to avoid problems; deals with staff problems as they arise, in consultation with the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief.
- With Executive Team, approves all ideas for articles, multimedia, designs and photographs.
- Approves all outside content for posting and linking.
- Works with multimedia team to develop content.
- Gives final approval for article content/packaging to “go live.”
- Works with multimedia team to include the most up-to-date technology in stories.
- Oversees collaboration with other journalism students, freelancers and classes.
- Watches SEO.
- Coordinates editor deadlines with Managing Editor, Senior Web Producer and Copy Chief, makes editorial decisions with Editor-in-Chief

Marketing Director

- Sees the big picture. Makes sure the products abide by their philosophy and purpose and are serving their audience.
- Oversees marketing team, including Social Media Editor and Digital Promotions Coordinator. Delegates implementation of promotion and marketing plan.
- Devises advertising plan. Contacts advertisers and provides ad specs and pricing. Works to determine ad placement and size.
- Coordinates promotional events such as previews or a launch party.
- With the Marketing Team, responsible for getting the word out about the brand and its content.
- Work closely with staff to incorporate content into the brand’s overall marketing strategy.
- Promotes the product using traditional and new media channels.
- Writes press releases for local media.
- Coordinates other promotional activities such as t-shirts, posters, etc.
- Reports to Editor-In-Chief.

Copy Chief

- Assists Editor-in-Chief in ensuring that overall brand is guided by the editorial philosophy and the audience statement: variety of content, tone, etc.
- With Managing Editor, compiles a workflow and schedule for copy editors and senior editors.
- With Senior Editors, Webcast Producer, and Copy Editors, writes headlines/titles, subheads, cutlines, etc.
- Micro-edit all copy, including titles, subheads, photo cutlines and webcast graphics.

- Create a comprehensive Editorial Style Guide, in consultation with the Editor-in-Chief, Articles Editor, Senior Web Producer and Senior Editors.
- Check material after it has gone through macro-editing, but before it has been micro-edited, for any foreseeable problems.
- Micro-edit all copy for spelling, punctuation, grammar and style.
- Create fact-checking guidelines to ensure that all material is accurate.
- Ensure that all material is ethical, fair and free of libel.
- Reports to Editor-In-Chief.

Senior Editor (multiple)

- Oversees a stable of writers, from idea origination to final draft. Assists them with research, source-finding, story approach, etc.
- Helps with story idea generation.
- Writes thorough, detailed content assignments to writers.
- Holds regular story conferences with writers to coach them through their reporting and writing.
- Assists Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor and Articles Editor in ensuring that content is guided by the editorial philosophy and the audience statement: variety of stories, tone, topic, etc.
- Works with Multimedia Team to create cross-platform content.
- Critiques and macro-edits all drafts of article content.
- Fact-checks articles. Micro-edits as appropriate.
- Coordinates editorial and design, in consultation with appropriate staff members. Provides adequate information about story to designers and photographers so they can plan visual presentation.
- With Managing Editor and Articles Editor establishes and maintains consistent and manageable deadlines for writers.
- Page edits: Selects titles, cutlines, pull quotes, captions and subheads (if necessary) for each department or channel piece, in consultation with Copy Chief and others.
- Write content.
- May be responsible for soliciting outside freelance content.
- Reports to the Articles Editor.

Copy Editor (multiple)

- Assist Copy Chief in ensuring that brand is guided by the editorial philosophy and the audience statement: variety of content, tone, etc.
- With Senior Editors, Senior Web Producer and copy editors, write headlines/titles, subheads, cutlines, intro graphs, social media posts, webcast graphics, infographics, etc.
- Micro-edit all copy, including titles, subheads, social

media posts, webcast graphics, infographics and photo cutlines.

- Check material after it has gone through macro-editing, but before it has been micro-edited, for any foreseeable problems.
- Micro-edit all copy for spelling, punctuation, grammar and style.
- Implement all fact checking, including creating a schedule for additional staff members.
- Ensure that all material is ethical, fair and free of libel.
- Reports to Copy Chief.

Webcast Producer

- Works with Sr. Web Producer to select stories and develop additional content for weekly webcast
- Stacks the webcast for impact and flow
- Writes or approves all anchor copy and on-set questions for each webcast
- Serves as show-runner during production, or appoints an appropriate person to do so
- Collaborates with other journalism students and freelancers, including any outside content from JMC100 or JMC173
- Works with Digital Promotions Coordinator to produce multimedia promotions and include promotions in multimedia content and webcast
- Conceptualizes and assigns multimedia treatments with designers and editors in all sections of the website.
- With Multimedia Team, coordinates, organizes and edits all multimedia.
- May shoot photos and video, as well as record audio, as needed.
- Develops a tracking system to ensure videos, audio and animations are assigned, taken, turned in, edited and properly prepared for posting.
- Enforces Multimedia Team website deadlines.
- Gathers needed materials and subjects.
- With Managing Editor, Articles Editor and Senior Web Producer, devises a plan and schedule for producing multimedia content for website.
- Ensure that captions are correct for all videos, audio and animations and proper credit is given.
- Produces both written and multimedia content

Director of Videography

- Oversees all videography to maintain quality and the visual appearance of the brand
- Helps others develop a visual narrative for stories.
- Holds regular coaching sessions with videographers; offers training sessions in areas of need or interest
- Assists Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor and Articles Editor in ensuring that content is guided by the editorial philosophy and the audience statement: variety of stories, tone, topic, etc.

- Works with Multimedia Team on creating cross-platform content.
- Works with Webcast Producer to produce stories and develop additional content for all webcasts
- Works with Senior Video Editor, Senior Audio Producer and Senior Designers to develop content and ensure quality of finished product
- Works with Digital Promotions Coordinator to produce multimedia promotions and include promotions in multimedia content

Senior Video Editor

- Oversees all video editing to maintain quality and the visual appearance of the brand
- Works closely with Art Director, Photo Editor, Multimedia Team and writers to develop a visual narrative for stories.
- Holds regular coaching sessions with editors; offers training sessions in areas of need or interest
- Assists Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor and Articles Editor in ensuring that content is guided by the editorial philosophy and the audience statement
- Works with Multimedia Team on creating cross-platform content.
- Works with Webcast Producer to produce stories and develop additional content for all webcasts
- Works with Director of Videography, Senior Audio Producer and Senior Designers to develop content and ensure quality of finished product
- Works with Digital Promotions Coordinator to produce multimedia promotions and include promotions in multimedia content

Senior Audio Producer

- Oversees all audio to maintain quality of the brand
- Works closely with Art Director, Photo Editor, Multimedia Team and writers to develop an aural narrative for stories.
- Holds regular coaching sessions with writers and producers; offers training sessions in areas of need or interest
- Assists Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor and Articles Editor in ensuring that content is guided by the editorial philosophy and the audience statement
- Works with Multimedia Team on creating cross-platform content.
- Works with Webcast Producer to produce stories and develop additional content for all webcasts
- Works with Director of Videography, Senior Video Editor, Photo Editor and Senior Designers to develop content and ensure quality of finished product
- Works with Digital Promotions Coordinator to produce multimedia promotions and include promotions in multimedia content

Digital Promotions Coordinator

- Works closely with Marketing Director to develop a plan to promote the website and the content within the site.
- Explores and chooses appropriate vehicles for promotions, including intra-site promotions such as video pre-roll, website ads, etc.
- Works closely with Marketing Director, Art Director, Photo Editor, Multimedia Team and writers to develop promotions for the site and for individual stories.
- Works with managerial team to ensure that promotional content fits the brand
- Works with Multimedia Team on creating cross-platform content.
- Works with Director of Videography, Senior Video Editor, Senior Audio Producer and Senior Designers to produce promotional content and ensure quality of finished product

Photo Editor

- Conceptualizes photo treatments with designers and editors to illustrate content across the brand.
- May shoot photos and video, as well as record audio, as needed.
- Works closely with Art Director, Multimedia Team and writers to plan visual representation of stories.
- Gathers needed materials and subjects.
- Coordinates with Art Director to select and purchase stock material. Ensures rights to material.
- Edits and retouches photographs, at the discretion of the Art Director.
- Photoshop skills needed to edit images and prepare photos for distribution.
- Ensure that captions are correct for all photos and credit is given to the proper photographer for all photos.
- Produces both written and multimedia content
- Creates slideshows
- Reports to the Art Director

Social Media Editor

- Manages all social media accounts for the brand.
- Responsible for writing all social media posts for the brand.
- Develop an audience growth strategy based on specific metric goals
- Analyze social media metrics to enhance audience engagement and growth.
- Maintains a detailed daily schedule of postings on various social platforms, including one for staff members, so that the brand and its staff can coordinate its marketing ability.
- Works with Marketing Director to build a comprehensive marketing strategy for the brand, both virtual and physical, including targeted promotions and contests.

- Works with Digital Promotions Coordinator to create designed social content to promote the brand.
- Work with staff to create content that responds to reader interest and aligns with audience growth strategies.
- Write content.
- Help create exclusive social content designed to help drive traffic and market the brand.
- Reports to Marketing Director.

Webmaster

- Technical architect of the site. Responsible for implementation of design (in cooperation with Art Director) and construction of the site, using a content-management system.
- Coordinates design of site that is highly usable and navigable, dynamic, well-organized, content driven and highly interactive.
- Works closely with Art Director to create a unified and highly professional site that abides by the editorial philosophy, purpose and intended audience.
- With Copy Chief and Executive Team, devises a plan and schedule for posting content that includes who can post, what they can post, and when.
- Customizes template to suit site's specific needs and overall purpose.
- Works closely with Senior Web Producer to integrate video, audio, slideshows, etc., onto site.
- With Social Media Editor, Marketing Director, Senior Web Producer and Articles Editor, plans use of interactivity, external links, social media, community input, SEO, syndication and other tools to drive traffic to site.
- Troubleshoots technical issues.
- Reports to Art Director.

Senior Designer (multiple)

- Creates aesthetically appealing cross-platform designs appropriate for the brand and its audience.
- Collaborates with Art Director to unify the brand's look.
- Work closely with editorial and multimedia teams to conceive and plan visual presentation for stories.
- Creates illustrations, infographics and other graphic elements for webcast and website.
- Works with Marketing Team on creating promotional materials and social media visuals.
- Follows style guide and workflow schedule as determined by Art Director.

Appendix B: Job Contracts

Spring capstone contracts 2015

Due: Feb. 17, 2015

Everyone on the staff will submit a contract to the publishers, detailing responsibilities, duties, expectations and deadlines. You will be held accountable to your contract as part of your two evaluations. Your contract shouldn't be more than one page.

- Start with the job description of your position. The first part of your contract should be a pledge to accomplish those responsibilities. You can tailor this to you, specifically. If you have tweaked the responsibilities or duties in consultation with your colleagues, make that clear. Add or delete responsibilities as applicable.
- Add your responsibilities as a content creator. If they have already been assigned, include a list of your stories and their deadlines—and a pledge to fulfill them. If you have not received any or all of your assignments, pledge to fulfill any content creation asked of you.
- Add the "standards of performance" from the evaluation form we'll use at the semester's midpoint and semester's end. Pledge to fulfill them.
- Add a line that confirms you have read the letters from your predecessors. *If you haven't read them yet, do it now.*
- These responsibilities are a starting point and are not intended to be all-inclusive. As tasks arise throughout the semester, different staff members will be asked to jump in and help out. Add a final line that reads: "... and other tasks as needed and assigned."

Sign it and date it. Turn it in to the publishers. Keep a copy for your records.

UP 2015 Staff Contract—EXAMPLE

[Name] [Senior Editor]

I understand and commit myself to the following:

As a senior editor, I am responsible for the website's content. Creating, defining, and managing the articles that comprise Urban-Plains.com are my primary duties. From these duties stems the role of guide to associate editors, writers, and other staff members. I accept the responsibilities listed and any and all that arise as a result.

I will produce a four-page story on the geography of waste. The article will explore the effect human waste has had on Earth's landscapes and how authorities are working to ameliorate or remove those effects. My deadlines are February 23 (1st), March 4 (2nd), March 23 (3rd) and April 1 (final). I pledge not only to complete this story, but to make it interesting, informative and compelling. I will comply with the Urban-Plains.com

style guide.

I commit to fulfilling assigned and necessary writing, editing, photographic, and miscellaneous assignments for Urban-Plains.com, to the deadlines prescribed to those assignments.

I will maintain the standards of performance. I will also hold my writers and associate editors to the same standards. I will communicate promptly, clearly and respectfully; act only in ways that advance the website and foster collaboration; actively participate in all meetings, in and out of class; submit work on time, to the right person, in the proper format; will follow through with all tasks; be wholly committed to the success of Urban-Plains.com; meet my deadlines; act ethically in my dealings with sources and co-workers; and contribute to a working environment that is pleasant and productive. I will never sit back and hope or assume that “someone else will take care of it.” At the end of the semester, my work will have been essential to our success.

I have read my predecessors’ letters and the letters representing the staffers I will work most closely with.

I commit to fulfilling other tasks and duties assigned or as needed for the completion and production of a superb Urban-Plains.com.

Signed _____

Date _____

Publisher _____

Date _____

Appendix C: Weekly Reports

Spring 2015 Journalism Capstone

Weekly Report

Beginning Feb. 8 and continuing for each Sunday throughout the semester, each student will e-mail a comprehensive weekly report by 10 p.m. to The Triad. The report will outline, in bullet points, your activities, plans, problems and concerns for that week. These are intended to keep the publishers in tune with each student’s individual progress and to correct any small problems before they have a chance to grow. The reports should be detailed and should include:

- A precise list of accomplishments the previous week
- A precise list of activities for the coming week
- A list of any issues or concerns that need to be addressed.
- Praise for co-workers who are going above and beyond to advance the project (“shout-outs”) and complaints about those who aren’t (“smackdowns”).

Appendix D: Midterm Peer Evaluations

Spring 2015 Journalism Capstone

Peer Evaluation

Your Name:

Name of Student Being Evaluated:

Circle one for each category below. Please provide comments to support your choice.

1. Preparation

The student was always prepared for assignments, meetings and class discussion, with contributions demonstrating planning and thought as well as a clear understanding of the website.

- A. The student was always prepared.
- B. The student was usually prepared.
- C. The student was occasionally prepared.
- D. “What are we working on again?”

Comments:

2. Communication: Outgoing

The student communicated clearly, consistently and respectfully with staff members.

- A. The student always communicated well.
- B. The student usually communicated well.
- C. The student inhabited a world all his/her own, accepting few visitors.
- D. “Remember when that guy did that thing? That was cool.”

Comments:

3. Communication: Incoming

The student listened carefully and respectfully when given instructions, comments or assignments. The student was an active listener, writing down dates and other essential information.

A. The student always listened well.

B. The student usually listened well.

C. The student pretended to listen, and then forgot all about it.

D. "Oh, I'm sorry, were you saying something?"

Comments:

4. Team Support

The student always considered the validity of the opinions of others. The student's actions were based on an understanding and appreciation of the needs of others on staff. The student was helpful and cooperative rather than judgmental. The student did not bicker, did not complain about other staff members, and did not allow others to complain. The student's criticisms were never personal and could never be construed as negatively aimed at another staff member.

A. The student always supported others.

B. The student usually supported others.

C. The student thinks other staffers are (choose one): flakey/anal retentive/ know-it-alls/all of the above

D. The student seceded from the Urban Plains union and is flying his/her own flag.

Comments:

5. Participation

The student attended and participated in all small group and class discussions and showed a generally high and well-considered interest in the website. If the student disagreed with material being discussed, the student spoke up, basing the critique on the needs of the site, rather than on personal preference.

A. The student always participated effectively.

B. The student usually participated effectively.

C. The student participated when things were interesting and people agreed with him/her.

D. The student slept through meetings.

Comments:

6. Dependability

The student's assignments were in on time, to the correct person, and in the proper format.

A. The student was always dependable.

B. The student was usually dependable.

C. The student believed the deadlines were unreasonable and acted accordingly.

D. "Is commencement on Saturday or Sunday?"

Comments:

7. Commitment

The student demonstrated a high commitment to the website by going beyond his/her job description, participating in activities beyond those of the student's group, and showing an interest in and enthusiasm for all aspects of the endeavor.

A. The student was highly committed.

B. The student was generally committed.

C. "Oh, why do I have to do that?"

D. "Sorry, my sources were all sick."

Comments:

8. Quality

The student's work was of a level suited to the professional website we planned.

A. The student's work was essential to the quality of the site.

B. The student's work was somewhat important to the quality of the site.

C. The student's work had minimal effect on the quality of the site.

D. The student's work had no effect on the quality of the magazine.

F. The student's work, if left as it was, would have hurt the quality of the site.

Comments: