VIRTUAL REALITY JOURNALISM

Fall 2016

Course Description

How does immersive media challenge the boundaries of objectivity and empathy in reporting? In this class, we will evaluate and test different ways in which Virtual Reality might be used in journalistic contexts. We will critique exemplars of the form from the user/viewer perspective, as well as begin to develop a set of ethical guidelines for the creation and evaluation of VR Journalism. VR Journalism is a collaborative studio between BFADT and J+D.

VR, in practice, is in its infancy. We will interrogate this new medium by doing and making. We will prod these squishy questions about this new storytelling form by studying what has been made and daring ourselves to do better. Stick with this course if uncertainty appeals to you, if you’re eager to take on challenges that are both technical and theoretical, and if you want to make a piece of your own VR journalism to share with the world.

Learning Outcomes

By the successful completion of this course, students will be able to: 1. Understand virtual reality and how the different types of VR are produced 2. Assess whether a subject or story is a good candidate for VR 3. Set standards for VR journalism experiences 4. Evaluate and integrate new technologies into the journalism and storytelling process 5. Shoot, edit and publish a 360° VR video story

Course Requirements/Graded Activities

In this course you will learn primarily by doing. Half of your grade will come from two assignments: a pitch for a VR story that you must defend in questioning and a small-group 360° video project. The remainder will come from class participation — which will be assessed through contributions to class discussion, in-class reflective writing, and the constructive critique of your classmates’ work — and from mini-assignments to be completed out of class.

Final Grade Calculation

Final 360° video project 30%
Class participation in discussion, writing, and critique 30%
360° story pitch and defense 20%
Smaller assignments 20%
Course Readings and Materials

Ready Player One: A Novel by Ernest Cline
Google Cardboard VR viewer

Course Policies

Responsibility

Students are responsible for all assignments, even if they are absent. Late papers, failure to complete the readings assigned for class discussion, and lack of preparedness for in-class discussions and presentations will jeopardize your successful completion of this course.

Participation

Class participation is an essential part of class and includes: keeping up with reading, contributing meaningfully to class discussions, active participation in group work, and coming to class regularly and on time.
## Course Outline

This syllabus is subject to change. VR storytelling and its tools will have evolved even over the span of our course, and the class should be nimble to follow its own interests and these changes. Major project dates are less likely to change, but expect reading assignments for the next week to be given in class and via email the same day.

| WEEK 1 | August 31 | Introductions, Syllabus review, Discuss class goals, Assess experience with VR, VR 101 – history and basic definitions; | Assignments:  
1.) Ready Player One by Ernest Cline, chapters 1-13  
2.) Order a 2.0 Google Cardboard to have for next class  
4.) Install WSJ, Within, NYT VR Apps  
6.) Complete intro survey and VR questions, to be emailed to your newschool.edu address |
| WEEK 2 | September 7 | What is doing VR like? What are the differences between types of experiences? Demo VR experiences in HMDs, Record impressions of the medium, Discuss with class | Assignments:  
Watch Pigeons, Campaign NYT piece  
Read: https://storystudio.oculus.com/en-us/blog/the-swayze-effect/ |
| WEEK 3 | September 14 | What is the state of news VR? Review VR news experiences, Assess their effectiveness and limits, Analyze constraints of the subject, Record viewer impressions | Assignment: Listen to Nonny de la Peña on empathy, Chris Milk’s TED Talk, Voices of VR podcast on presence, Stanford study on storytelling |
| WEEK 4 | September 21 | Is VR a storytelling medium? Empathy vs. intimacy vs. presence, Discuss effects on viewers; “Swayze effect,” How to brainstorm VR story ideas | Assignment: Watch YouTube’s 360-video shooting tutorial, Begin identifying ideas for a VR story, prepare ideas for instructor review |
| WEEK 5** | September 28 | How do you make 360° video? Shooting, stitching, and editing in-class demo | Assignment: Start shooting! Film a 360° video shot that could be a building block in a story Based on instructor feedback, narrow in on story for final pitch |
| WEEK 6 | October 5 | What makes a good 360° shot? Review shots by classmates, review different cinematographic techniques and their effects on the viewer; How do editors/producers approach VR stories | Assignment: Prepare story pitch for class |
| WEEK 7 | October 19 | In-class pitches for final story ideas | Rank preferred pitches, shoot 360° shot, begin story production |
| WEEK 8 | October 26 | What narrative structures work for VR? | Reading to come, continue production |
| WEEK 9 | November 2 | Ethical questions while reporting for VR, Staging vs. documenting, Stitching and masking in post production | Assignment: Read Jessica Brillhart’s Medium series on editing, continue shooting and reporting |
| WEEK 10 | November 9 | **Editing workshop** | Continue production |
| WEEK 11 | November 16 | Review early edits, continue production | Continue production, refine edit based on early feedback |
| WEEK 12 | November 22 | **Screen rough cuts** to classmates for feedback, fine cut editing workshop, Liquid Cinema demo, How can we improve our tools? | Review classmate feedback, revise edits |
| WEEK 13 | November 30 | Screen fine edits to outside viewers, solicit feedback from user testing | Assignment: Refine edits based on classmate feedback |
| WEEK 14 | December 7 | Refine final projects, instructor and classmate review, Fill out online course ratings survey | Assignment: Finalize edit, export |
| WEEK 15 | December 14 | “Screen” final projects, Defend pieces to instructor/editor questions | Due: Final video file uploaded to TBD |