BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING SKILLS COURSES ONLINE

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BEST PRACTICES
IN TEACHING SKILLS COURSES ONLINE

This booklet contains the winning entries of the Best Practices in Teaching Skills Courses Online 2021 competition, sponsored by the AEJMC Elected Standing Committee on Teaching.

Booklets produced for the previous competitions can be found online at:
aejmc.com/home/2010/09/best-practices-in-teaching

2021 Winning Entries:
First Place
Amy B. Simons, Missouri, for "Hold a Monthly Web Strategy Meeting"

Second Place
Rebecca Cooney, Cara Hawkins-Jedlicka and Chelsea Newman, Washington State, for "Innovations in Teaching Digital Campaigns using a Collaborative Teaching Model"

Third Place
Yanjun Zhao, Cameron University, for "Don't Get Me Fooled: Honing Critical Thinking in Data Journalism with Zoom"

Honorable Mention
Terra Tailleur, University of King's College, for "I'm Right Beside You: Accompanying Students Virtually on Reporting Assignments"

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BEST PRACTICES
IN TEACHING SKILLS COURSES ONLINE

FIRST PLACE

Hold a Monthly Web Strategy Meeting

Amy B. Simons
University of Missouri

Abstract: Creating interactive assessments in online courses presents a challenge, especially for off-campus students enrolled in asynchronous courses. The "Hold a Monthly Staff Meeting" uses VoiceThread technology to re-create a newsroom staff meeting about increasing traffic to the outlet's digital platforms. This assignment assesses a student's ability to read analytics reports, determine patterns that show growth or loss, and formulate a plan to stymie loss, and to constructively communicate to their colleagues, some of whom might not be open to the ideas presented to them.

Explanation of teaching practice or activity: Students are presented with the following prompt in our Learning Management System: *You are the most senior member of your news organization's digital team. Your management has been worried because there has been a slight drop-off in traffic to your organization's web page, which has meant a decline in advertising revenue. The parent company says that needs to stop or layoffs might be necessary. Your job is to (1) look at the last three months of audience data reports from Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, Twitter Analytics and Crowdtangle to spot patterns in audience behavior and identify ways to use the social platforms to grow traffic to the website by 5% by this time next year, (2) communicate that strategy to your newsroom peers in a way that instills trust, persuading them that it will work, while motivating them though positive, non-threatening means. You will need to develop a slide deck using PowerPoint (or other .ppt or .pptx compatible software) to serve as a visual aid during your rollout meeting. That meeting will occur via VoiceThread, since everyone works varying shifts around the clock. That means you will need to return to the meeting to answer your peers' questions at a later time. Your work will be judged by your ability to explain the historical data, how it has informed your new strategy, how clearly you present the goals and workflow of your recommended strategy, and if you're able to deliver this news to a reluctant and skeptical staff.*

This activity runs 7 days. Students receive their data from me and have four days to analyze it, devise their strategy and build out a slideshow deck to support an oral presentation. That presentation will need have between 6-15 slides, and use PowerPoint. By the end of day four they record their presentation using their laptop camera, microphone and slide deck using VoiceThread. Three other students have 24 hours to watch their presentation and ask questions – as though they are playing the role of the newsroom colleague. The next day, the student returns to the VoiceThread to answer colleagues' questions, clarify points in their presentations, assuage concerns or fears, address holes in their logic or thinking, etc.

Rationale: In creating this assignment, I wanted to provide students with an authentic activity which would meet several of our course learning objectives. As students move through each of the phases of this assignment, they will:

- Interpret data to spot patterns in audience behavior;
- Create a strategy – both short-term and long-term – for publication rooted in data;
- Compose a metrics report using sample data;
- Create an instrument to communicate strategies to a staff in constructive manner.

This assignment is designed as part of a two-week module on web and social analytics. Students have the opportunity to take on each of the six facets of understanding in turn, and develop the understanding through their own experience. Here's how:

- **Explanation:** Students explain what they want their hypothetical staff to do, why and how they will do it.
- **Interpretation:** Students must be able to interpret the provided data provided to develop their own strategy. While also slightly harder through VoiceThread, they will also need to interpret the level of support or skepticism among peers based on the questions asked of them. How they interpret – and read between the lines – and respond to those questions shows another level of understanding.
- **Application:** Students will apply knowledge obtained. The level to which they are able to successfully develop a strategy and communicate it will show how well they grasp definitions and concepts, and how well they tie together.
- **Perspective:** Students gain perspective as they move from one side of the VoiceThread to the other, going from being the person laying out the potentially painful new workflow to the person tasked with implementing it. Having the different perspectives simulates the difficulties experienced by both management and labor in this situation, which intertwines with empathy.
- **Empathy:** Not only will students be able to empathize with different people in different roles in this authentic situation, *I* can see and assess exactly how they *demonstrate* this empathy. How do they phase their responses to questions from their peers? Are they doing so with positive language, that validates concerns but states a need for action? Do they motivate or demoralize? And, when they're on the other side of the task, do they ask questions in a way that shows that they know the person making "the big ask" just has a job to do? Or are they attacking the messenger instead of the message?
- **Self-knowledge:** This performance assessment also requires students to be self-aware and adjust their message and tone to the needs of their peers. It requires a certain self-awareness as they consider how they deliver a message that might not be popular, and how they might — upon reflection later — reconsider their approach(es).

Outcomes: Because of the nature of this assignment, it would be impossible to share examples of the student work without identifying information being shared as well. The students first and last names, their voices and their faces appear in each of the VoiceThread files submitted for my review. In the supporting documents, you will find the rubric used to assess their work and the feedback provided to each student.

What I found was that the students were able to *report* what was in the data. They pro-

duced strong slide decks explaining past audience behaviors and were able to use the correct terminology when describing it orally in and writing. The outcomes varied, though, when it came to how well the students had to *interpret* the data to develop a strategy to grow audience. The strongest students did so with little trouble. They laid out a plan for colleagues to execute. The students who struggled made vague recommendations and struggled to answer questions specificity.

Supporting Materials:
- Rubric
- Sample feedback to students

Monthly Metrics Meeting					
Criteria	**Ratings**				**Pts**
Use of Historic Data	**10 pts** **Full Marks** Historic data is used to support and justify every recommendation made in the plan.	**5 pts** **Partial Credit** Historic data is used to support and justify some recommendations in the plan, but not every single one.		**0 pts** **No Marks** There is no use of historic data to support or justify any of the recommendations in the plan.	10 pts
Evidence of Posting Schedule	**10 pts** **Full Marks** It is clear to the viewer what the new posting schedule looks like for all platforms included in the plan.	**5 pts** **Partial Credit** There is an outline for a posting schedule for some platforms, but it's unclear which ones OR it's unclear when.		**0 pts** **No Marks** It is unclear on which platforms to post when.	10 pts
Evidence of Rationale	**10 pts** **Full Marks** It is very clear as to why the organization is doing this now, what the stakes are, what the goals are, and why we need the support of the entire organization to achieve it.	**5 pts** **Partial Credit** It is somewhat clear as to why the organization is doing this now, what the stakes are, what the goals are, and why we need the support of the entire organization to achieve it.		**0 pts** **No Marks** It is unclear as to why this turn in strategy is needed, why it's needed now, or why employees need to participate.	10 pts
Slide Deck	**20 pts** **Full Marks** Slide deck contains between 6-15 slides that use color, font and imagery that is easy to read and comprehend at a glance. Strike a balance between too many words so that the audience is listening more than it's reading. Cites the source of analytics reports appropriately to provide proof and source of the data.	**15 pts** **Partial Credit** Slide deck contains fewer than 6 or more than 15 slides. Slides may be too hard to read on the screen or have too many words, making them a distraction from the words being said OR, does not cite the source of analytics reports appropriately to provide proof and source of the data.		**0 pts** **No Marks** Slide deck can't be read AND doesn't cite the source of analytics reports appropriately to provide proof and source of the data.	20 pts
VoiceThread Presentation	**20 pts** **Full Marks** Presentation is recorded using VoiceThread, with the user on camera with slides visible and their voice clearly audible. The presentation runs no more than 10 minutes. The presenter is confident and poised in their delivery and uses language that is appropriate to maintain a positive work environment.	**10 pts** **Partial Credit** The presentation is recorded using VoiceThread, with the user on camera with slides visible and their voice clearly audible. Presentation runs fewer than five minutes or than 10 minutes OR the presenter's delivery and uses of language is inappropriate to maintain a positive work environment.		**0 pts** **No Marks** Presentation is not able to accessed through VoiceThread.	20 pts
VoiceThread Q&A	**15 pts** **Full Marks** Effectively answered all classmates, addressing concerns, comments, and questions using language and gestures that motivate and empower others.	**10 pts** **Partial Credit** Effectively answered some classmates, addressing concerns, comments, and questions using language and gestures that motivate and empower others.	**5 pts** **Partial Credit** Was not effective in answering classmates' questions. Either concerns were dismissed, questions were evaded, OR the language or gestures used might be seen as threatening.	**0 pts** **No Marks** No attempt was made to answer classmates' questions.	15 pts
Participation in Other Voice Threads	**15 pts** **Full Marks** Student commented on the VoiceThreads of three classmates, assuming the role of a concerned newsroom employee.	**10 pts** **Partial Credit** Student commented on the VoiceThreads of two classmates, assuming the role of a concerned newsroom employee.	**5 pts** **Partial Credit** Student commented on the VoiceThread of one classmate, assuming the role of a concerned newsroom employee.	**0 pts** **No Marks** Student did not comment the VoiceThread of any classmates.	15 pts
					Total Points: 100

Student 1

Sarah, this presentation does a solid job of providing your pretend colleagues with an understanding of what has been in terms of traffic to Facebook, Twitter and the website. What's missing, though, is the bigger picture as to what the goals are that you're looking for them to reach -- specifically on the online platforms -- and how to reach that. For instance, you recommended that people create a tailored app. Is that something that your newsroom staff is likely to be able to do? Not really. They probably don't have those skills. But, they could write better headlines that focus on getting the most interesting information out in front, in optimizing those headlines for search or promo paragraphs/readouts/teasers in such a way that it makes people want to click on them, share them or react to them. They could also be writing content that can be read in a few minutes -- consistent with the average time spent on site... things that can be read while in a waiting room, or while on public transit or standing in line at the grocery store. Brittany asked you about how to best strategically place the live Q&A -- and whether it was best for "our" Facebook or Twitter. The answer didn't offer insight into the strategy of which would be better, using the data at hand. The answer suggested to put it everywhere. I liked your answer to Christian, in which you provided the strategy of tailoring content to meet the interests of Jennifer, an illustration of your target audience. What would have been even better was if you included her in the presentation -- and instead of put in the info that Jennifer is most interested in you, you put in a personality sketch of how Jennifer uses the internet. What devices does she use? When is she online? How does she use the internet? Finally -- keep in mind that the property that you're creating this strategy for is a public radio station, not a commercial television station. The business model is different, and thus including website subscriptions to a listener-supported, donation-based business model is not likely to be the best option when talking about building web traffic. I like the idea of premium content -- and there are lots of public media outlets that have premium content for members (PBS has special streaming access for donors, protected by password, for instance).

Student 2

Jennifer, I like and appreciate that you were working within the spirit of the role play for this assignment... only you broke it in your answers when you talked about the reading! Some ways you can do that differently is to just move ahead with the knowledge and share it.... that establishes your authority as an expert in this strategy you're asking people to put to work for your organization. Ryan was throwing you a bone in question about the 5% growth -- because you were supposed to be communicating a strategy to do that, and to lay out how you'd want your staff to carry that out. It never really became clear to your "colleagues" where you wanted them to build audience. The first long stretch of your presentation could have used another slide or two to show the numbers that you were presenting so that people could be tracking with the numbers as you were reading them out. That helps punctuate the point you're making. I like that you brought up the importance of good headlines for SEO and that you mentioned the need to maintain a local focus in those headlines to increase interest. I think the intentional posting of high-engagement content is a great idea -- but even better for Facebook than Google. Hopefully, this week's material on SEO will help explain and reinforce why.

The conversation that you had with Danny and Tara was interesting about clickbait -- and your answer made sense. One of the things that's tricky about clickbait is how it can be used in different settings to achieve different things -- none of which are good from the journalistic point of view.

Student 3

Danny, it's clear that you were able to take a lot of what you learned in ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ as an undergrad and put it into use here. The idea, though was for you to be running this meeting as if you were the person in charge at ▓▓▓. I was a little disheartened to hear you say "the outlet" over and over, as if you were interpreting the data as an outsider. One of the things that you mentioned in response to Brittany's question about cross-posting is that it's worth trying, and adjusting strategy. If you're the one setting the strategy, how much time do you want to give your team to try that play around with it before you have data to support doing it or not? Boosting is always an option... when should you boost? When it is not worth the money? Your presentation offers a lot of data and a lot of "this org could do this or that" as opposed to "here's what we're going to do, and here's why I'd like you to buy into to ideas and my plan."

Student 4

Hanna, this meeting does a nice job of explaining the overall goal of building overall site traffic by 5% in a given time period, and you tell people that you think that it's doable... which is good! You tell them to post more to Twitter during a certain period (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday), but don't give them any specifics on what to post. You were asked by a member of your staff what types of stories seems to resonate, and what to post, and your answer was "whatever is interesting to you will be interesting to our audience, I just want to see more of it." That doesn't take into account any of the demographic data that you had available to you that tells you about the audience. Some of the language used might have also caught the ear of a skeptical colleague, and shut down their motivation to engage or help carry out your plan. When you said "what's the point even?" and appeared to be shrugging off the current approach to Twitter, that sends a message that you don't believe what's being done now is being done with any sense of direction -- as opposed to taking the message and turning it into a more positive and empowering message "if we're able to achieve this with no real strategy or effort, think about what we can do when we start to think more strategically, and put the thought into our our posts -- to time them for when we know people are open to receiving them!" -- it's a different message.

Much of your strategy for growing web traffic is through Twitter. Is the idea to get the 5% more page views? Visits? Visitors? And, if Twitter is the main goal, is it to get people to click through? Or is there a need to increase Twitter followers, too, to get the additional traffic through Twitter referrals? What percent of the traffic is coming to the site now through Twitter? How does that number need to change to meet the demands of your goal/strategy?

Bio: Amy Simons teaches news literacy, multimedia journalism, and advanced social media strategies. She is nationally recognized as an outstanding instructor who has reached excellence in innovative teaching, mentoring, leadership, and service. She has created an inclusive online learning environment designed to engage students' critical thought processes through experiential learning. Her commitment to positive and effective learning communities coupled with engaging activities attracts students to enroll in her course in growing numbers each semester. She is devoted to service at all levels, from advising graduate students, to advising student organizations, to assessing and developing curriculum for online and face-to-face delivery. Simons holds a master's of science degree from the University of Missouri's College of Education and a bachelor's of journalism from the Missouri School of Journalism.

Innovations in Teaching Digital Campaigns using a Collaborative Teaching Model

Rebecca Cooney, Cara Hawkins-Jedlicka, and Chelsea Newman
Washington State University

Abstract: Digital Content Promotion has been offered for more than 10 years. Students complete the course with new vocabulary and base knowledge in the conceptualization, delivery, and measurement of digital campaigns. Students create digital assets for two promotional campaigns, including brand visual identity, message strategy, website, social media, advertising, and email marketing. The course is set up in a collaborative teaching model where ideas, interactive activities, and assignments are regularly shared and vetted. Assignments are designed so students become familiar with useful tools that help them develop and employ practical promotional strategies. They learn valuable skills in group dynamics and gain proficiencies in content creation for blogs, social media, and websites.

Explanation of the teaching practice or activity: COMSTRAT 310 Digital Content Promotion is designed to teach students key principles, and tactics for creating and executing two integrated digital campaigns, emphasizing core concepts in the development, implementation, tracking, and measuring the effectiveness of digital communications. Students work in teams on a semester-long project to generate original social media marketing and advertising campaign elements for a single initiative centered around advocacy areas such as mental health, travel, hospitality, fashion, sustainability, or social justice. Students are trained in over 10 web-based tools, including Google Drive, Canva, Adobe Creative Cloud, and Weebly. Students create digital assets for two promotional campaigns, including brand visual identity, message strategy, website, social media channels, online advertising, and email marketing. Students also present three group status reports and work independently to create supplemental digital assets and complete the Google Analytics Individual Qualification (GAIQ) beginners and advanced courses as they work toward earning their Google Analytics certification.

The course is set up in a collaborative teaching model where ideas, interactive activities, and assignments are regularly shared and vetted. Versions of the course are offered in-person, asynchronously online, and virtual/synchronous via Zoom.

Rationale: The Students of 310: Digital Content Promotion has been offered for more than 10 years. As emerging technology and trends have evolved, so has the curriculum. This is a required course where three to six sections are offered in fall and spring semesters on the main campus in Pullman, Everett campus, and online. It is also offered online each summer. Twenty to 40 upper-level students majoring in communication are enrolled in each section. Students initially complete a "forming teams survey" that is designed to help the instructor better understand personal interests, strengths, and passions. Answers are reviewed and compiled to create groups containing 4-6 team members with compatible interests and complementary strengths.

<u>Value of the Course:</u> For emerging communication professionals, this course is integral in preparing them to play a role in strategy, creativity, delivery, and evaluation of digital campaigns for their organization or clients. They learn how to use essential web-based tools and are introduced to key concepts, jargon, processes, and methodologies that are vital in the industry. According to a recent study conducted by Burning Glass Technologies, "more than 8 in 10 middle-skill jobs (82%) require digital skills." They also found that "in the middle-skill job market, the world is increasingly divided between the jobs that demand digital skills and the ones that don't—and the ones that don't are falling behind."

<u>Experiential Learning Environment:</u> This course is highly interactive and engaging. Each session includes a mix of lectures, demonstrations, interactive activities in teams, and practical applications of concepts introduced. The course simulates an industry environment, therefore professional conduct is required at all times. This means that students demonstrate respect, candor, engagement, and maturity when responding to peer student posts and interactive discussions, and participating in group discussions. The classroom climate is designed to be relaxed yet organized, fun yet professional. The focus is on teaching students how to collaborate, be productive, and problem-solve. As noted by the Cornell Center for Teaching Innovation, "research shows that educational experiences that are active, social, contextual, engaging, and student-owned lead to deeper learning."

<u>Transferable Skills:</u> The course is rooted in professional preparedness - giving students the insight, tools, and confidence needed to be successful at an entry-level position. The curriculum is designed to help students translate theory into practice. They gain practical experience in a low-stakes setting while being exposed to the industry standards and best practices. Assignments are designed so students become familiar with useful tools that help them develop and employ practical promotional strategies. This approach equips them with the knowledge needed to produce portfolio-worthy, practical, pertinent industry-products. According to a research study conducted by Hart Research Associates in 2018, employers are concerned that future employees will be able to adapt to a changing workplace than that they come in with knowledge of all the skills required to do the job. They also note that 87% of hiring managers and 77% of business executives rate working effectively in teams as a very important skill when hiring recent college graduates.

Outcomes: In this course there are five key learning outcomes, including 1) develop and manage online content promotion and branded digital campaigns; 2) master the skill of resourcefulness – demonstrating the ability to critically think, research, draft, and ultimately craft clear messages and digital materials that are organized, properly cited and apply correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling; 3) gain confidence in the ability to execute social media engagement and user-oriented content strategies; 4) evaluate campaign success through implementation key performance indicators (KPIs) and online tools for web development, email, metrics, and multimedia management; and 5) practice, make mistakes, correct, and learn valuable, transferable skills.

Students complete the course with new vocabulary and base knowledge in the

conceptualization, delivery, and measurement of digital campaigns. They learn valuable skills in group dynamics and gain proficiencies in content creation for blogs, social media channels, and websites. They acquire critical skills in measuring campaign effectiveness and presenting ideas and results in front of large groups. Most students enter into the course with limited knowledge of digital marketing tools and exit with a suite of portfolio materials and foundations they can easily translate into the workplace. Success is evidenced by course evaluations, personal testimonials, marketability of students, and professional positions held by alumni.

Works Cited:

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Cornell Center for Teaching (n.d.). Collaborative learning. Retrieved on 2021, Mar 7 from https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/engaging-students/collaborative-learning

Hart Research Associates (2018, July). Fulfilling the American dream: Liberal education and the future of work. *NACADA.* Retrieved from https://nacada.ksu.edu/Portals/0/Resources/Clearinghouse/2018EmployerResearchReport.pdf

Supplemental Materials

Overview of the project
(https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1X5dk4IWihPfq7q2RrhfLcJ_WNZld_cQvSjuBsQkZFAQ/edit#slide=id.p1) with samples from Fall 2020 teams

Featured alumni now working in digital:
- Kelly Berschauer ('07) - VP of Digital Marketing at Truveta
- Abigael Dalziel ('20) - Digital Content Associate at Industry West
- Genevieve Duddy ('19) - Digital Associate at Ann Lewis Strategies, an Infogroup Company
- Sylvia Pritchard ('19) - Merchandise Specialist, Digital Operations at Nordstrom
- Anthony Shelts ('17) - Digital Marketing Specialist at RPS Marketing

Successful Team Example

FUTURE VOTERS

Future Voters is an organization founded with the goal of guiding new voters and ensuring they are registered and ready to vote. Future Voters is an organization that prides itself on being founded and run entirely by women. As our organization is composed entirely of women we know all too well how it feels to have our voices ignored and we want to help mitigate that feeling for new voters.

The team that made up Future Voters fully embraced the challenge of this class and saw the opportunity in creating and sharing content around the election. The team pivoted well post-election with their content. While their engagement did not see viral levels of engagement, they did see high click-through rates and longer sessions on their website. Their Google Ad campaign resulted in a large number of impressions with a click-through rate of 1.59 %.

Student Testimonials

"Class was very informative and I learned skills that I am confident I will use once I enter the workforce. The class was formatted very well and taught skills I thought would be challenging in a very clear way that made them seem less challenging."

"This course was amazing and so beneficial to my learning and future career path. The whole class was hands-on, and we got to experience the programs and tasks that we will be faced within the workplace. I learned so many skills in this class that I will take with me from here on."

"Easily most useful course I have taken in terms of what is expected to create a successful online campaign for a new/old business. Also, there was a lot about the back end of content creation that I learned throughout the course."

"The way the course is designed it is a great course. I had never taken a course that gave me so many applicable skills and hands on experience. More courses should be designed like this one."

-Spring 2021 - list of 310 Twitter accounts

Palouse Dining and Voyage	Slow Vouge	Significant Minds
Palouse Students for Small Business	Guiding the Globe	Home Grown Adventures
Women Worldwide	Food is Fuel	Recycled Riches

Palouse Dining and Voyage — https://twitter.com/PDandVoyage
Slow Vouge — https://twitter.com/SlowVogue
Significant Minds — https://twitter.com/Signif_Minds
Palouse Students for Small Business — https://twitter.com/PalouseStudents
Guiding the Glove — https://twitter.com/guidetheglobe
Home Grown Adventures — https://twitter.com/homegrownadven1
Women Worldwide — https://twitter.com/worldwidesister
Food is Fuel — https://twitter.com/foodisfuel2
Recycled Riches — https://twitter.com/clothing_riches

Example Final Reports from Teams using Padlet

https://padlet.com/310team2/ol3t9c7b8kzmzki5

https://padlet.com/com310retail/lrbvllrjhads5ius

Bios: Cara Hawkins-Jedlicka is an assistant scholarly professor with more than a decade's worth of experience as a content producer and strategic communicator specializing in digital advertising strategy, with an emphasis on social media and online communities. Throughout her career, Hawkins-Jedlicka has developed and paired social media strategies to broader marketing campaigns and used social media to identify and connect diverse publics as well as to promote organizational brands. She teaches courses in which students learn about integrated communications, writing for public relations, digital marketing campaigns, brand and consumer insights, employee communications, and advertising. Her research interests include the intersection of women's sport, social media, and branding. c.hawkins-jedlicka@wsu.edu

Rebecca Cooney is a scholarly associate professor with over 26 years of experience in professional communication. She teaches courses in integrated campaigns, message strategy, and digital marketing. In addition to teaching, she is the director of Murrow Online Programs and a research associate for the Center of Excellence in Natural Product-Drug Interaction Research. Outside of her work at WSU, she serves as a consultant in learning experience design and effective communication in the virtual space. She was a recipient of the 2021 President's Distinguished Teaching Award for Career-Track Faculty (2021), Provost Featured Faculty member in 2019, and recipient of the Oaks Award for innovation in teaching (2019), Scripps Howard Visiting Professor in Social Media (2015), and Plank Center Educator Fellow awards (2014). rebecca.cooney@wsu.edu

Chelsea Newman is a scholarly assistant professor of strategic communication and a seasoned communication strategist with over 15 years of combined industry and academic experience. She has extensive background and expertise in various facets of strategic campaign planning and teaches digital campaign development and implementation, marketing, public relations, and social media management courses. In addition to teaching, she is the college's faculty adviser for both the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and The Bateman Competition, working with students to access, retain and apply strategic campaign initiatives on a national level. In the industry-arena, Chelsea collaborates with local, regional, national, and international organizations to craft strategic, digitally-optimized communication campaigns in various subject areas, including healthcare, tourism, social advocacy, and consumer electronics. newman6@wsu.edu

<h1 style="text-align:center">THIRD PLACE</h1>

Don't Get Me Fooled: Honing Critical Thinking in Data Journalism with Zoom

Yanjun Zhao
Cameron University

Abstract: This activity sharpens student's eyes in interpreting data relationships. Specifically, it helps students to tell the difference between correlation and causation. The activity starts with a suspension and challenges students to find the real factors for some hilarious correlations. Students will stay active with guessing, taking a poll, having a small group meeting, and presenting their final thoughts in the whole class. This activity also takes advantage of features on Zoom to do anonymous polling, get students show their answers at the same time, and send private messages on chat board.

Explanations: In a data journalism class taught over Zoom, I used a few bizarre examples to help students distinguish correlation from causation. Students need to decide whether one caused the other, or there is a factor for both behind the stage. The first one is the correlation between chocolate consumption and Nobel Laureate winners. The graph is the first one in the appendix.

Step 1. Students take a poll on "Chocolate consumption is causing Nobel winners" by choosing true or false. The poll is prepared before class on Zoom.

Step 2. After the voting, students are asked to explain their votes. Students will write a private message to me on the chat board with their explanations on their choices. If they believe it is a causation relationship, they need to explain why chocolate causes Nobel winners. If not, they need to write an alternative explanation.

Step 3. I give students a hint that a factor might cause both, and they got into breakout rooms in Zoom to discuss and exchange their ideas. They are asked to work as detectives for truth.

Step 4. Students write their conclusion on the relationship between chocolate and Nobel winners in the Zoom chat board, but they shall not click the "enter" key until I count "1, 2, 3, go!" This way all people reveal their thoughts simultaneously.

Step 5. Now each group is invited to present their conclusion, and they also have the option to show the resources they used with Zoom screen share. After all group presentations, I will conclude with a discussion "what if chocolate really causes Nobel winners?"

Step 6. The next example of surprising correlation is presented, for example, the correlation between ice-cream consumption and murder case. And the process starts again from step 1. More examples are in the index page.

Rationale: Teaching over Zoom brings challenges as well as opportunities. A big chal-

lenge is to get students engaged. In a Zoom class, students could be easily distracted. Contrast to face-to-face classes, we don't know what is around students or even in their computer screens. It is important and hard to keep them active. On the other hand, Zoom also brings opportunities to achieve something hard to do in a face-to-face class like polling, and chat board, and screen share.

To keep students engaged, I challenge them to try not to be fooled by superficial relationships between variables. Looking from a bigger context, the burgeoning of data journalism requires students to conduct data analysis and interpretation. It is important for them to get critical thinking skills to avoid misleading interpretation/presentation of relationships. To get students interested, a suspension is raised at the beginning of the class: "what is really going on between chocolate and Nobel Prize winners?" Then after their thinking, discussing and group work, they identify the factor behind the stage—the nation's level of richness. For the relationship between ice cream and murder, the real factor for both is the extended daylight time.

Various features by Zoom add excitement and efficiency to this class activities. First, polling over Zoon is efficient, and it provides an overview of students' level on critical thinking. For students, the polling is anonymous and public, so each student knows the majority idea of the whole class. They might begin to wonder what others are thinking. Second, the private message on chat board helps to take care of students' concern of embarrassment. Because no other classmates can see their messages, no one will "look bad" in the whole class. Another benefit of private message is to force each student to get his/her own idea, as there is no answer to copy. Third, the students can use screenshare to show their computer screen to the class. In fact, some students google the correlation and share the website they found.

In sum, this class activity sets an environment where students find the difference between correlation and causation by themselves. The class on composed of examples, and each example starts with a suspense, then truth finding, and ends with hilarious discussions like "what if ice cream causes murder?" Students get a happy memory that correlation is not necessarily causation. This activity hones their critical thinking skills in a very active way.

Outcome: With respect to students' evaluation, I got the best evaluation in my teaching career, with all of 5s for "excellent teacher", "excellent course", and "relevant objectives". Below are from students' evaluation.
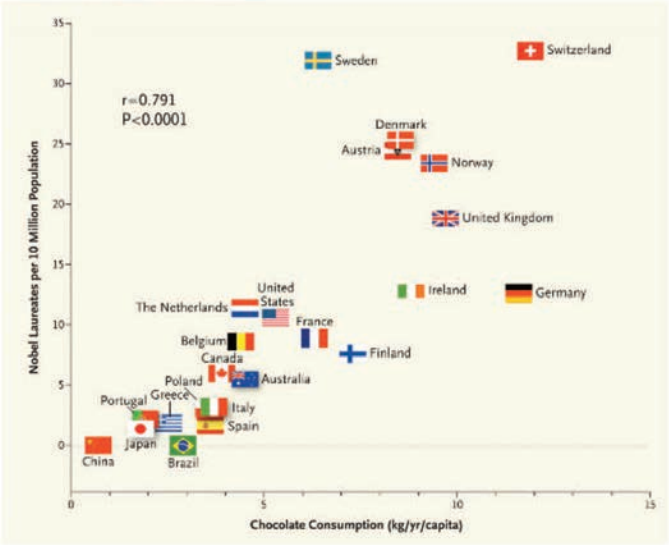
• I can see this class being super useful. The class is actually pretty cool. It's a shame that it's only a semester class because there's some pretty solid information in it.
• This class taught me a lot about how to ethically display data, which will help me do my best in my desired career field.
• Excellent course that takes people like me out of their comfort zone and into the world of numerical data. Overall, I think this is an important class for all students in Communications/journalism.

The memory of the class is more enjoyable. Students become better detectives in a fast

speed. Towards the end of the class, no one blames ice cream for forest fires. For each correlation case, the final discussion on "what if A causes B" are really entertaining. For example, in our discussion about "what if ice cream causes murder", a student mentioned that his finance is an ice cream addict and he was risking his life staying with her. It is nice to teach in a happy way.
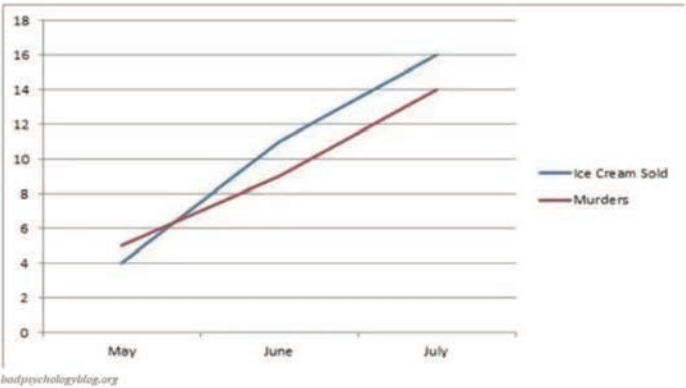
Appendix: Examples of Correlation Without Causation
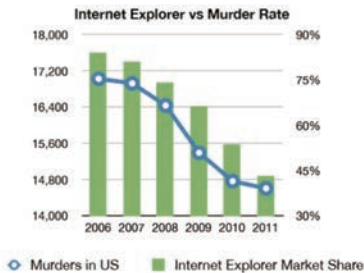
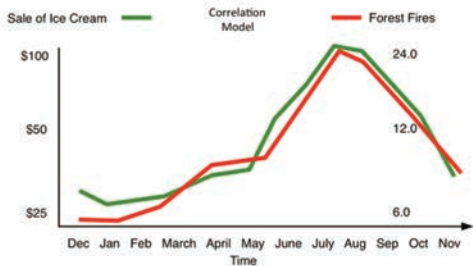1. Chocolate and Nobel Prize

2. Ice Cream and Murder

1. Ice cream consumption leads to murder.

3. Browser IE and Murder

Internet Explorer vs Murder Rate

O Murders in US ■ Internet Explorer Market Share

4. Ice Cream and Forest Fire

Sale of Ice Cream ——   Correlation Model   —— Forest Fires

5. Organic Food and Autism

The real cause of increasing autism prevalence?

Sources: Organic Trade Association, 2011 Organic Industry Survey; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS), OMB# 1820-0043: "Children with Disabilities Receiving Special Education Under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
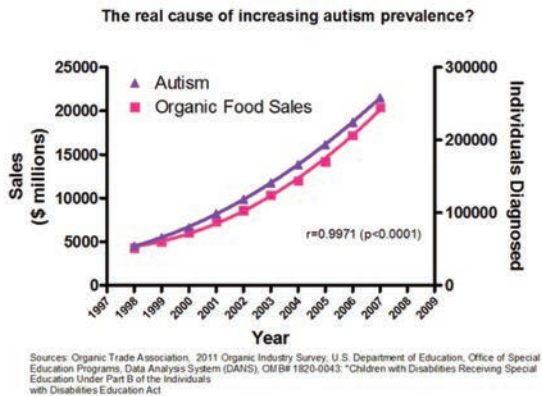
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I'm Right Beside You: Accompanying Students Virtually on Reporting Assignments

Terra Tailleur
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Abstract: Running a newsroom for students involves guiding these emerging journalists through the reporting process, including public affairs assignments. Before COVID-19 forced us online and at home, we could tour students through the institutions they would cover, including the local city hall, court and legislature. We could also accompany students on reporting assignments, standing by to answer questions, offer suggestions and ease jitters. When you can't physically be there, you need to go virtual. This doesn't just mean relying on digital tools like Slack and Zoom; it means developing a workflow to ensure anxious students know they aren't alone.

Explanation of teaching practice or activity: In this six-week news reporting workshop, students produce news reports and stories for the school's local news site. Public affairs reporting (i.e. covering public institutions) is a big part of that. The course is run like a newsroom, with instructors as editors and students as reporters. Reporters rotate through various public affairs assignments to give everyone an opportunity to experience this kind of reporting. In the time of COVID-19, provincial officials held twice-weekly briefings to update journalists on the latest changes. As teaching staff we shuffled duties as needed so the same editor could oversee every briefing to ensure editorial continuity. We honed our workflow with these briefings and adapted the process for other public affairs assignments, including city hall. This workflow, using the COVID-19 media briefing as a template, breaks down into three main categories:

1. **Preparing**: An editor explains the assignment and describes the reporting scenario, including how to access the briefing and what to expect. The reporter is asked to read previous news stories, any related documents or reports, and watch a previous media briefing online. The reporter is given as much time as possible to prepare, but in some cases that may be only 24 hours. The reporter is instructed to prepare a list of potential questions for officials, and that list is reviewed by the editor.
2. **Gathering**: Before the assignment, the editor checks in with the reporter to answer questions, troubleshoot any technical problems and settle jitters. As the reporter phones in to the briefing, the editor launches the live stream on YouTube. During the briefing, the reporter and editor use Slack to discuss what's happening and to drop or add new questions as needed. For the Q&A after the provincial cabinet meeting, an editor phones in too but tells the communications official they're only there to listen.
3. **Debriefing**: Soon after the media briefing, the editor and reporter meet on Zoom to discuss what happened, a potential story line or two, as well as story structure and necessary elements. Together we set a deadline. This can be anything from 24 hours to a couple of hours after the end of the briefing, depending on how far along we are in the workshop. Above all, this is a time to ask the student their immediate impression of the experience: What did you think of that experience?

What did you learn? What did you think worked well? What would you do differently next time?

Rationale: The workflow was developed to meet key goals: continue to meet learning outcomes around reporting; ease the anxiety of students; and ensure our published work was editorially sound, timely and of a high quality.

It was important to continue practice-based learning, an accepted valuable approach to journalism education (Valencia-Forrester, 2020). This meant ensuring that students were given real-world journalism assignments with publication as the goal. Having an instructor who is an experienced journalist alongside a student — even virtually — would help those who struggle with their professional identity (Bowen, 2018).

Since students were working from home and didn't get to venture into the legislature and other public institutions, we needed to keep in close contact with them to offer support. We expected many students would feel more isolated or disengaged because of remote learning (Abdous, 2019). We wanted to capitalize on the digital tools we were using, primarily Slack for text discussions and Zoom for video chat.

It was also important to assert ourselves as professional journalists, to both the people we cover and the larger community. Having the same editor shadow every reporter who called in to the briefing ensured we were asking relevant and timely questions and producing timely and informative stories for our local community.

Outcomes: Our approach allowed us to meet our goals. Between the fall 2020 and winter 2021 workshops, 19 students got to experience the COVID-19 media briefing. A number of those reporters pursued other angles based on their questions or what they heard and produced additional enterprise pieces. We published dozens of COVID-related stories for our community, from the latest on restaurant closures to the projected arrival of vaccines. We also used this workflow for city council, which resulted in a number of municipal-related stories.

Students appreciated the support. Many reported feeling more confident and said the experience taught them to be better listeners and to identify the necessary elements for their stories (e.g. quotations, facts). Not every reporter was called on to ask a question during the COVID-19 media briefing, but they learned how to prepare for it. Overall, their drafts were stronger and they were able to turn their stories around faster.

Testimonials from students from their self-reflection notes (fall 2020, winter 2021):
- Journalism can be a pretty lonely career, especially in a pandemic. I didn't realize how much I would rely on my fellow teammates when I started this. Or how much I'd lean on the support of my editors. I think it helps when we all share a common goal of wanting to make something great. There was no "figure it out for yourself attitude," just nudges in the right direction. Aside from all the practical knowledge I gained, I learned that the news doesn't sleep, but you can as long as you have the right team to back you up.

- I do think this has forced me to become more efficient at reporting. I'm thinking on the fly. I'm being more direct with my questions. I'm listening and making note of the answers, immediately noting (and) marking down which ones I'll use in my story.

- Something I believe I'm becoming stronger with is turning over stories quickly. Covering council, cabinet, and court in this workshop, I got to experience filing stories fast, while still making sure the reporting was both accurate and bringing something new to the table.

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Bio: Terra Tailleur is an educator, editor and media adviser, drawing on her extensive experience as a multi-platform journalist. She spent nearly 20 years in newsrooms across Canada, starting with community newspapers in Alberta. In her five years with CBC Radio, from bases in Edmonton to Cambridge Bay above the Arctic Circle, she produced news reports and documentaries for local and national audiences. She spent 10 years in Nova Scotia on the CBC online desk as a senior writer and multimedia producer. She earned a master's degree in entrepreneurial journalism before leaving the newsroom to teach full time at the University of King's College. She's a member of the Canadian Association of Journalists' ethics advisory committee and a regular adviser to journalists and communicators at large.