MCOM 220.01 – DIGITAL STORYTELLING
SUNY Oneonta, Department of Communication & Media
Spring 2020

Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 10:00-10:50 AM, Fitzelle 203

Instructor: Dr. Andrew Bottomley
Office Location: IRC B-9
Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 12:00–12:45 PM and 2:00–3:00 PM, or by appointment
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Course Description

This course seeks to examine digital storytelling as a means for self-expression and social and political empowerment, in addition to some of its recent commercial applications. (Indeed, while "digital storytelling" has become a buzzword in the advertising and mainstream media industries, the practice's roots lie in social justice activism and grassroots movements that aim to empower underrepresented, marginalized, and oppressed people to make their voices heard by teaching them to "be the media.") Merging critical analysis and practice, you will be invited to explore examples of successful digital storytelling alongside the perspectives of media producers, while also applying those lessons and models to create your own original works. The first part of the semester explores the basic form and function of stories, emphasizing nonfiction personal narratives. The second part of the semester introduces web video/television and some of the more common forms of digital storytelling encountered today. The final part of the semester closely examines podcasts and other "audio-first" forms of digital storytelling.

Think of this class as creative writing for the internet era. Although you will be making media in this course, it is important to realize that this is not a media production class and you are not expected to have any previous audio or video production experience. Digital storytelling is about enabling ordinary people to use everyday media tools (smartphones, cheap cameras, social media accounts and blogging software, etc.) to create short stories about their own lives and experiences. Energy, enthusiasm, and a little creativity are all you need to succeed.

From the 2019-2020 Undergraduate Catalog: This class explores the interactive and narrative qualities of digital media by analyzing visual novels, motion pictures, video games and other interactive texts as creative tools and as practice for seeing, exploring, and expressing social critique. Offered Fall and Spring. LA.

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

o   Research the current "new media" landscape to learn about emerging digital technologies and trends within popular culture and the media industries

o   Understand key theories and concepts related to the internet and digital culture, including the new narrative possibilities of online multimedia storytelling

o   Apply this knowledge in a structured, organized way towards a creative solution

- o   Learn how to work collaboratively and manage time and resources in a group setting

- o   Identify project challenges and critically analyze project goals, including planning and producing your own audio-video content

- o   Communicate project material via a variety of mediums/formats/platforms, using modern design tools, components, and techniques

Required Materials

There is one required textbook for this course. It can be purchased on campus at Damascene Book Cellar or online through Amazon for approximately $15 brand new.

Jack Hart, *Story Craft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

All other readings are available online through the course *my*Oneonta Blackboard site. Please bring the assigned readings with you to class whenever they are listed on the schedule.

Online Materials

The *my*Oneonta Blackboard site contains the course page that you will use to access assigned readings, check class news, take quizzes and upload digital assignments, and track your grades. As much as possible, this is a paperless course; most assignments are to be submitted electronically using Blackboard or OneDrive (additional instructions to follow). Some multimedia materials will be created and shared using the Office 365 apps accessible through your SUNY Oneonta student account (such as Stream, Sway, OneDrive).

Attendance & Class Preparation

It is expected that you will attend all class meetings. Your attendance and participation are integral to the success of this course, as well as your own individual achievement in it. A good grade is impossible to achieve without regular attendance, since much of the assessment is based on your understanding of materials covered in the classroom. Nevertheless, stuff happens, so if you need to miss class then reach out to me – the sooner, the better. For illnesses, doctor appointments, field trips, and other non-emergencies, you must always notify me in writing beforehand (via email); do not miss class and expect that your absence will be excused retroactively. Maintaining clear communication about your (non-)attendance is key.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is not graded of itself; that is, there are no dedicated points for attendance alone. However, being in this class means being in the classroom, and participation in classroom activities significantly impacts your Class Engagement assignment grade (see below). Acceptable attendance in this course means three (3) or fewer unexcused absences and three (3) or fewer tardies. Anything over five (5) unexcused absences and tardies is deemed excessive absence, and will greatly reduce your chances of success in this course.

Tardiness: A tardy is anything that pulls you away from active engagement in the entire class period: arriving late; departing early; leaving the classroom any time during the period without instructor permission; and displaying distracted or disruptive behavior such as talking to

neighbors out of turn, using your smartphone, and sleeping. Coming to class any time after attendance is taken or leaving before the class is dismissed is considered tardiness.

Excused Absences: Of course, excused absences are exempt from the above policies. As per the College Handbook, religious holidays, official university activities (field trips, intercollegiate athletics, etc.), serious illness or injury, jury duty, and military leave are all considered legitimate excused absences. Other excusable absences are exceptional or unpredictable events that significantly impact your ability to complete work. Realize that giving me an excuse does not automatically mean the absence is counted as "excused." Absences are only excused with my consent, meaning you must talk with me directly if you encounter hardships affecting your attendance. Face-to-face chats about attendance are welcome, though I request that you communicate the reason for your absence to me in writing (via email) – that way we both have a searchable record of it for later reference. If you experience a prolonged absence of multiple classes, please visit me during office hours or schedule an appointment so we can have a conversation to ensure that you do not fall behind in the course. You will never be excused for work, including media production or schoolwork for another course.

Late or Missed Work: If you are absent, get in touch with a trusted classmate to help you get caught up. Lecture slides are posted to Blackboard, and you are encouraged to obtain related lecture notes from a classmate. You are personally responsible for everything that happens in class, including any announcements and exam or assignment overviews presented in the classroom. Ignorance of announced examination, assignment, and/or schedule instructions or changes will not be accepted as an excuse for missing or incomplete work in this course. Nevertheless, life happens. You are therefore allowed one 48-hour extension on written assignments/projects, no questions asked. To take advantage of this opportunity, you must inform me ahead of time via email; only when you get written approval from me may you submit your assignment late. Late work submitted without prior approval will be graded at a penalty of 10-points per day late. There is no extension or make-up permitted on exams and quizzes.

Participation: Your primary homework throughout the semester will be to watch and listen to all the assigned media materials in their entirety (web videos, podcasts, et al), as well as read the matching book chapters or articles. Class Engagement is a central aspect of MCOM 220 (also worth 10% of the final course grade; see below), and attendance means coming to class alert and staying that way. This is a seminar/discussion-based course, and therefore class time requires the total attention and involvement of all participants. Always bring your book or readings to class along with notes you have taken. **You must complete the assigned reading/screening/listening <u>before</u> the scheduled date and come to class ready to participate in an interactive discussion about the material.**

Grading

Grades in this course are calculated on a 1,000-point scale. The breakdown is as follows:

Grade Letter	Points	Percentage
A	930-1,000	93-100%
A-	900-929	90-92%
B+	870-899	87-89%
B	830-869	83-86%
B-	800-829	80-82%
C+	770-799	77-79%
C	730-769	73-76%
C-	700-729	70-72%
D+	670-699	67-69%
D	630-669	63-66%
D-	600-629	60-62%
E	0-599	59% and below

Your final grade in this course will be determined according to the following scale:

Assignment	Possible Points	Percentage of Final Grade
Class Engagement	100	10%
True Story	50	5%
Living Portrait	150	15%
Web Series Review Essay	100	10%
Soundslide Story	200	20%
Analysis Final Project	200	20%
Quizzes	200	20%

Each assignment will be evaluated based on the specific criteria outlined below and in the individual assignment sheets. Generally speaking, the letter grades translate as follows:

A/A-	Outstanding, thoughtful, and enthusiastic work
B+/B	Above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	Needs improvement on ideas, argument, and follow-through
C & below	Fulfills the bare minimum requirements and shows only a rudimentary understanding of the material

Assignments

Class Engagement (10%): Frequently throughout the semester, you will be called upon to participate in a variety of classroom activities. Sometimes these will be quick writing activities that'll prompt you to reflect on the day's lesson. Other times these will be cooperative learning exercises that'll invite you to work in teams to analyze a media clip or reading. Often these will be more traditional whole-class discussions seeking your opinions on assigned materials. Your participation in these activities will be factored in to your Class Engagement grade for the semester. It is important to recognize that simply being physically present in the classroom is not active engagement. Come to class having done the work and be ready to share your take

on it. Don't be a wallflower. Yet don't worry: if you're uncomfortable speaking in front of the entire class, there'll be plenty of other opportunities to contribute to the classroom community beyond just public speaking (small group discussions, in-class writing, attentive listening, et al).

Grading for this assignment is holistic, meaning not every in-class writing assignment or exercise will be marked individually. Rather, I will track your contributions over the span of the semester and assess the whole of your activity at the very end. If you have a clean attendance record (i.e. no more than 3 unexcused absences) and you make a meaningful contribution to every class session (e.g. active and thoughtful speaking, writing, listening), then you are guaranteed at least a "B" grade on the Class Engagement assignment. If you are excessively absent, show up to class unprepared, or do not participate constructively, then you will earn a Class Engagement grade of "C" or lower. This assignment grade is very much in your hands.

True Story (5%): Recount a true story that actually happened to you in real life. This should be a short, first-person, slice-of-life narrative (i.e., not an autobiography): a funny, sad, strange, surprising, embarrassing, or otherwise remarkable moment that, if spoken out loud, would only take a minute to a minute-and-a-half (1:00-1:30) to tell. Use live storytelling events/podcasts like *The Moth*, *Mortified*, *Risk!*, et al, as models and inspiration. Be creative with how you craft your simple tale, paying special attention to the basic elements of scene, action, and character. It is up to you how you deliver the finished story: you may (hand)write it as a standard narrative essay (approx. 125-150 words) or you may choose to format it as a storyboard, hand-drawn comic, or some other non-digital visual narrative form. In addition to the physical document submitted for grading, everyone will stand-up and deliver their story to the rest of the class in a *Moth*-like "story slam" presentation.

Living Portrait (15%): Create a short audio-video portrait of a stranger, in the vein of Humans of New York (http://www.humansofnewyork.com/) and Profiles:NYC (http://profiles.nyc/). This requires you to go out into the community and find a person to talk to, then record a 5-10 minute conversation with them. You have two options for how to record and present the project: (1) an iPhone/smartphone video or (2) an audio recording accompanied by a single photograph. Apart from familiarizing yourself with using a smartphone to create good-quality photo/video and audio recordings, your main objective with this assignment is to listen and find the story. That is, everybody has a story but that story needs to be nurtured. You will demonstrate your ability to ask empathetic questions, then search through a longer recorded conversation and pull out only the most compelling part(s). This will require some light audio-video editing. There should be no music and no narration – only the voice of the portrait subject. Your finished "living portrait" must be exactly one-minute (1:00) long, give or take a few seconds.

Web Series Review Essay (10%): For this short paper (2-3 pages), you will write a review essay of a web video series not already viewed or discussed in class. A review essay presents an original critical discussion of the text. It follows a standard form: introduction; summary of the series; critical analysis; conclusion. Specifically, you must analyze the series' use of the storytelling fundamentals covered in Weeks 2-5, with special attention paid to the use of characters and character development. In such a short paper, you must develop a single line of argument to pursue. Support your argument with evidence from the web series, citing examples from at least 3 different episodes. Further guidelines will be provided in class.

Soundslide Story (20%): Create a multimedia photo-audio slideshow relating a nonfiction narrative based on either your personal life experience or that of a close friend or family member. It is recommended that your story focus on family history, personal relationships, or identity, though other themes are permissible pending instructor permission. Use as a model the stories shared through the StoryCenter website (http://www.storycenter.org/stories/). The visual component of the "soundslide story" should feature a variety of mixed materials: anything from family snapshots, home movies, and archival film/TV clips to letters, drawings, newspaper clippings, and other printed documents. The audio component should incorporate both narration and music. You may choose to record interviews to integrate into the story; if so, these should be done in an oral history manner similar to StoryCorps (https://storycorps.org/listen/). The length of the finished story is flexible but it should be <u>at least</u> 3-minutes long and preferably no more than 10-minutes. However, interviews are not required and the center of your story should be your audio narration. Additional instructions will be provided at a later date.

Digital Storytelling Analysis Final Project (20%): For your final project for this class, you will critically analyze a digital story <u>not</u> already covered elsewhere in the course: a web video series, a podcast series, a multimedia journalism feature, a digital history project, a data visualization project, or any other web-based narrative that fits our definition of digital storytelling. To deliver this analysis, you may choose between writing a traditional paper (5-7 pages) and making an audio or video essay (5-7 minutes long). Similar to the Web Series Review Essay, you will closely examine the producers' use of the storytelling techniques examined over the course of the semester. Your essay must interact with the assigned readings from the class, providing citations to at least 3 different course readings. A fuller explanation of the assignment will be provided closer to the deadline.

Quizzes (20%): There will be short quizzes given regularly throughout the semester that assess your understanding of key aspects from the assigned materials (the readings plus screening and listening assignments). Administered through Blackboard, these are open-book, untimed tests. **These quizzes must be completed <u>before</u> the start of each Friday (F) class period.** They will cover all the assigned materials for that week, meaning you will need to make a habit of reading/screening/listening on schedule. In total, 9 quizzes will be given and only the 8 highest scores will be counted toward the final assignment grade. In other words, the lowest quiz score will be dropped, making each of the 8 graded quizzes worth 25 points. No late quizzes will be permitted under any circumstances.

<u>Academic Dishonesty and Misconduct</u>

According to SUNY Oneonta's Code of Student Conduct: "the term 'cheating' includes, but is not limited to: (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; (2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; or (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the College faculty or staff. The term 'plagiarism' includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials."

Academic dishonesty in this course will be addressed quickly and severely. If I find you responsible for misconduct, you will receive zero (0) points (grade letter "E") on the assignment and potentially an "E" for the entire course, plus a report of the incident will be made to the Office of Community Standards and the Department of Communication & Media. For more information, refer to the College's Code of Student Conduct: http://www.oneonta.edu/communitystandards/documents/code.pdf

Classroom Accommodations / Accessibility Resources

If you have a disability or any circumstance that may impact your ability to perform in this class, you are encouraged to speak with me privately as soon as possible. Disclosure of a disability is always voluntary. However, in order to receive official academic services such as testing accommodations, you are required to provide documentation of a disability to the Office of Accessibility Resources (607-436-2137). All students with pertinent documentation will be provided the necessary accommodations as determined by Accessibility Resources.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures

If there is an emergency in Fitzelle Hall during class time, the prolonged evacuation site (ES) is the IRC Lobby. In the case of an evacuation, be sure to assist persons with disabilities, including visually impaired persons, people with hearing limitations, people using crutches/canes/walkers, or anyone else who has difficulty leaving the building on their own. Other general evacuation procedures are outlined at: http://www.oneonta.edu/security/documents/EmergencyEvacuationProcedures.pdf

Course Schedule

This schedule is a guide and it is subject to change. All assigned materials should be read/watched/listened to before the designated class meeting. Readings marked "Hart" refer to the *Story Craft* book. All other materials can be found either on the Blackboard site or online.

Week 1: Introduction
W, January 15: Welcome, Won't You Come Inside?

F, January 17: What is Digital Storytelling?

Week 2: The Fundamentals of a Good Story, Part 1
M, January 20: Participatory Culture
      Read: Henry Jenkins, "From Participatory Culture to Participatory Democracy"
            Parts 1 & 2 (2007), https://goo.gl/GD4mJx & https://goo.gl/ms2R3a

W, January 22: Story and Narrative
      Read: Hart, Chapter 1 "Story";
            Tracy Kidder & Richard Todd, "Narratives" from *Good Prose* (2013)

F, January 24: Story Elements
        Read: Tommy Tomlinson, "Everything You Need to Know About Storytelling, in 5
            Minutes" (2013), https://goo.gl/7sZ8eb
        Due: Quiz #1

Week 3: The Fundamentals of a Good Story, Part 2

M, January 27: Structure
        Read: Hart, Chapter 2 "Structure";
            John Truby, "The Seven Key Steps of Story Structure" from *The Anatomy of
            Story* (2007)

W, January 29: Point of View
        Read: Hart, Chapter 3 "Point of View"

F, January 31: Voice and Style
        Read: Hart, Chapter 4 "Voice and Style";
            Tracy Kidder & Richard Todd, "The Problem of Style" from *Good Prose* (2013);
            Matt Madden, Excerpts from *99 Ways to Tell a Story* (2005)
        Due: Quiz #2

Week 4: The Fundamentals of a Good Story, Part 3

M, February 3: Character
        Read: Hart, Chapter 5 "Character"
        Listen: *The Moth*: start with "Life Support by Stephanie Summerville" (2007)
            https://themoth.org/stories/life-support & then listen to at least 2 other stories
            from the Story Library at https://themoth.org/story-library/stories

W, February 5: Character
        Read: Phillip Lopate, "On the Necessity of Turning Oneself Into a Character" from
            To Show and To Tell (2013)

F, February 7: True Story In-Class Presentations
        Due: Quiz #3
        Due: True Story

Week 5: The Fundamentals of a Good Story, Part 4

M, February 10: Scene
        Read: Hart, Chapter 6 "Scene"

W, February 12: Action
        Read: Hart, Chapter 7 "Action"

F, February 14: Dialogue & Theme
        Read: Hart, Chapter 8 "Dialogue";
            Hart, Chapter 9 "Theme"
        Due: Quiz #4

Week 6: Web TV & Video, Part 1
M, February 17: Introduction to Web TV & Video
      Read: Aymar Jean Christian, "Expanding Production Value: The Culture and Scale of Television and New Media" (2019), https://tinyurl.com/yf9g9xp3

W, February 19: Web TV: The Series Concept
      Read: Browse *IndieWire*'s Best Web Series of 2018 list, https://bit.ly/2EGq28o
      Watch: View the first 2-3 episodes from 1 of the web series on *IndieWire*'s list

F, February 21: Web TV: Characters and the Character Landscape
      Read: Hannah Giorgis, "'Brown Girls' is the Future of Television" (2017), https://goo.gl/XWzEJt
      Watch: Explore OpenTV Originals by watching 1 episode from at least 3 series (other than *Brown Girls*), http://www.weareo.tv/originals/
      Due: Quiz #5

Week 7: Web TV & Video, Part 2
M, February 24: Web Series Review Essay Workshop

W, February 26: Web TV and Cultural Diversity
      Watch: *Her Story* (2016), view the series' first 3 episodes, https://tinyurl.com/j7brv5h

F, February 28: YouTube Roulette
      Due: Web Series Review Essay

Week 8: Social Media Storytelling
M, March 2: Social Media Storytelling
      Read: Vinson Cunningham, "Humans of New York and the Cavalier Consumption of Others" (2015), https://goo.gl/VGDufs;
      Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "Humans of New York Isn't Journalism, But It Helps Us Get Beyond the Headlines" (2015), https://tinyurl.com/hhmqhgo

W, March 4: Interviewing Techniques
      Read: Celeste Headlee, "How to Ask the Right Questions for a Great Interview" (2016), https://bit.ly/2NlJ2wt

F, March 6: Living Portrait Workshop
      Due: Quiz #6

Week 9: Spring Break
M, March 9; W, March 11; F, March 13: **No Class** – Spring Break

Week 10: Training: Fundamentals of Audio-Video Recording
M, March 16: Audio Recording Basics
      Read: Claire McDermott, "Tips on Recording for Radio" (2010), https://goo.gl/kmwEaB

W, March 18: Smartphone Photo/Video Shooting Basics
>   Read: Terry Sullivan, "A Beginner's Guide to Taking Great Video on Your Phone"
>   (2018), https://goo.gl/t1qapj

F, March 20: More Audio and Photo/Video Recording Tips

Week 11: Training: Fundamentals of Audio-Video Editing
M, March 23: Audio Editing Basics
>   Read: Michael O'Connell, "Editing: Pulling All the Pieces Together" (2017)

W, March 25: Living Portrait Workshop

F, March 27: Video Editing Basics
>   Read: "Introduction to Basic Editing in iMovie" (2017), https://goo.gl/V2VQPi
>   **Due: Living Portrait**

Week 12: Soundslide Story
M, March 30: Soundslide Story Overview

W, April 1: The Power of Personal Storytelling
>   Read: StoryCenter, "Silence Speaks > Impacts," https://tinyurl.com/yzs3rzwf

F, April 3: Soundslide Story Workshop

Week 13: Podcasting & Audio Storytelling
M, April 6: Podcasting and the Audio Media Revolution
>   Read: Nele Heise, "On the Shoulders of Giants?" (2014);
>   Martin Spinelli & Lance Dann, "Introduction: The Audio Media Revolution" from
>   *Podcasting: The Audio Media Revolution* (2019)
>   Listen: Third Coast International Audio Festival "Best of the Best 2018,"
>   https://bit.ly/2Hn7HN8

W, April 8: Audio Storytelling
>   Read: Jessica Abel, "Preface" from *Out On the Wire* (2015)

F, April 10: Audio Storytelling
>   Watch: *This is Radio* web video series (all 7 episodes), http://www.thisisradio.com/
>   **Due: Quiz #7**
>   **Due: Soundslide Story**

Week 14: Further Uses of Digital Storytelling
M, April 13: Multimedia and Interactive Journalism
>   Read: "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek," *New York Times* (2012),
>   http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek

W, April 15: Visual Storytelling for the Web: Instagram Stories & AMP Stories
>   Read: Christine Schmidt, "Can Social Stories Work for News Organizations…?" (2018),
>   https://tinyurl.com/yg2v89bx

F, April 17: Digital History Projects
      Read: Douglas Seefeldt and William Thomas, "What is Digital History?" (2009),
          https://goo.gl/XezCJU
      Due: Quiz #8

Week 15: Further Uses of Digital Storytelling
M, April 20: Locative Media and Data Mapping
      Read: Jack Gonzalez, "How Mapping Can Change How We Do Journalism" (2015),
          https://goo.gl/QcTpgh

W, April 22: Infographics and Data Visualization
      Read: Jennifer George-Palilonis, "Information Graphics: Visualizing the News" from *The Multimedia Journalist: Storytelling for Today's Media Landscape* (2013)

F, April 24: Communication and Media Day Events
      Due: Quiz #9

Week 16: And One More Thing Before You Go…
M, April 27: Digital Storytelling Analysis Final Project Workshop

Final Exam: Digital Storytelling Analysis Final Project
W, May 6, 8:00–10:30 AM
      Due: Digital Storytelling Analysis Final Project