

TECM 5200: Digital Content Strategies for Communication Professionals

Dr. Jordan Frith

Hybrid class Monday 6-8:30, August 28-October 20

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Office hours: 2-3:30, 5:30-6, M. 2-3:30 W

This course is accelerated (8 weeks) and will be taught in hybrid format. By that, I mean we will be meeting once a week for 8 weeks, but you will also have a bunch of online materials you will need to complete. The online materials are meant to make up for the fact that we will have 8 class meetings rather than the regular 16. We're going to focus a bunch of lectures/ group work in class, and you'll have additional reading materials/videos in the online modules.

Description

This class will cover various aspects of digital content strategy, including branding, content management systems, and actual content strategy. I will provide shorter lectures on your readings, but we will also spend time working with tools, including Wordpress and Slack. We will also research other CMSs, including Joomla and Drupal.

By the end of this course you should be able to

- develop a course on content strategy using knowledge learned in this class
- understand differences between three major CMSs
- do basic coding in HTML and CSS
- host your own website using BlueHost
- create a website using advanced features in Wordpress or Joomla
- access and understand the Google Analytics for your site
- walk away with assignments you can use in a technical communication class
- understand the importance of developing high quality web content
- create, disseminate, and publish high quality web content
- use various free software important for online content strategists

Required books (total cost)

The total cost for materials in this course will be <\$40 dollars, depending on what you decide to do.

I'm only requiring 1 book for this class to save you money. I included a link to where you can buy the book. Feel free to buy a used copy.

You will also have to buy a BlueHost web hosting account. That account only costs \$4 a month, and you can conceivably cancel it after the semester (though I'd keep it).

Content Strategy for the Web 2nd Edition by Kristina Halvorson & Melissa Rach
<http://www.amazon.com/ContentStrategyWeb2ndEdition/dp/0321808304>
(new for \$22, used from \$16, Kindle version \$15)

Grade

- CMS comparison report (20%)
- Group audit report (15%)
- Code Academy completion (5%)
- Personal website (20%)
- Group content strategy report (25%)
- Blog (10%)
- Group evaluation materials (5%)

Course Evaluation

Your grade in this course will be determined as follows:

A = 90 – 100. To receive an A in this course, you will have exhibited the knowledge to use different new media tools. Your assignments will be well thought-out and relatively error free, and your final project will show that you are able to synthesize the multiple topics we cover throughout the course.

B =80 - 89.9. To receive a B, you will show that you understand the issues and debates about new media we cover in this course. You will also be able to use the new media tools we cover in the course. Your work will be well organized and relatively error free, but it may include gaps in logic or make a few unsupported claims.

C =70 - 79.9. To receive a C, you will be able to understand most of what we have covered, but that understanding may not come through in every assignment. Your work will be adequate, but it may have obvious weaknesses that are not addressed throughout the semester.

D = 60 - 69.9. To receive a D, you will have submitted assignments that are unclear, difficult to read, filled with distracting errors, and incomplete. These assignments are not easy to follow or understand and feature distracting errors and obvious gaps in logic.

F = Below 60. To receive an F, you will have shown an inability to engage with the content we cover. You probably missed a couple assignments and too many classes.

ADA

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504, Rehabilitation Act, I will work with the Office of Disability Accommodation to help reasonably qualified students with disabilities. If you have such a disability, please advise me in writing of your needs no later than the second week of class. I am happy to work with you to help with accommodations.

Academic Dishonesty & Integrity

It is your responsibility to become familiar with UNT's Policy of Academic Dishonesty. This policy defines the following forms of academic dishonesty:

Cheating: intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. The term academic exercise includes all forms of work submitted for credit or hours.

Plagiarism: the deliberate adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, or statements of another person as one's own without acknowledgement.

Fabrication: intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

Facilitating: academic dishonesty intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to violate a provision of the institutional code of academic integrity.

If any course material is submitted that violates this policy of academic dishonesty, the assignment will receive a grade of "F" and appropriate judicial action will be filed. This action includes a report of academic misconduct to your college Dean and possible dismissal from The University of North Texas. There are no first-offense warnings regarding plagiarism. In addition, **if I catch you plagiarizing, you will fail this course.** Contact me if you're ever confused about what constitutes academic dishonesty. Misunderstandings, miscommunication, oversights, or lack of comprehension as to what constitutes academic dishonesty is not accepted in this course.

Assignment Submission

Unless otherwise noted, you must submit your assignments in electronic format through Blackboard.

When you submit an assignment, you **must** use the following file naming convention: LASTNAME__ASSIGNMENTNAME. So if I submitted a personal reflection assignment, the file name would be Frith_PersonalReflection. File names are important. It's difficult to keep track of files when I end up with 22 "mediaanalysis.docx" files. For group work, make sure everyone's name is somewhere on the document.

All assignments should be single spaced and use an appropriate 12 inch typeface with 1 inch margins unless otherwise noted. You should also use headings in your writing

Assignments are due by the day of class at 11:59pm. The only exceptions are blog posts, which are due 11:59pm the night before.

For each 24 hour period the assignment is late, you will lose 10% off the final grade for the assignment. After 7 days, I will not accept late assignments. If you have a genuine reason to turn an assignment in late (an athletic event, family emergency, etc.), you must let me know beforehand. Also, I'm nice (or at least I like to think so), so if you have something that comes up, you can ask me for help.

Resources

Code Academy: <https://www.codecademy.com/>

Slack (download the app): <https://slack.com/>

Lynda login (UNT login) <https://it.unt.edu/lynda>

Bluehost web hosting: <https://www.bluehost.com/>

Assignments (total of 100 points)

CMS comparison report (20 points)

The online CMS landscape is rather crowded. However, three CMS dominate the market: Wordpress, Drupal, and Joomla. If you go into web development/content strategy, you may have to work with any of these three. Consequently, for this report, you will research each of these three popular CMS.

For the report, your audience will be a high-level manager who knows almost nothing about web development. She just wants you to figure out which direction the company should head in to build a web presence. Consequently, you will start the report by explaining why you're writing. You will then spend a significant amount of time explaining what a CMS is, why people use them, and what the advantages are.

You will then break the report down into a comparison of the three CMSs listed earlier. For each of these sections, you will describe the CMS and give background on how popular it is and who uses it. You will then describe the strengths and weaknesses. You will do this for each of the three. Use subheadings!

You will conclude the report by recommending which CMS will be best for the project. You don't have to make a set-in-stone recommendation. Instead, you can make a conditional recommendation. In other words, use "if". As in, "If we want to hire programmers and have additional freedom, we should...". "If we want a simple, easy to change site, we should..."

I expect this report to be detailed and around 2,000 words. You also must use citations, and don't hesitate to cite videos you may watch. Importantly, however, consider your sources. Some sources

have a reason to promote one CMS over another. That doesn't mean their points aren't good, but it does mean you should be skeptical and verify.

Qualitative and quantitative content audit report (15 points)

For this assignment, you will work as a group to do a complete audit of the [Department of Technical Communication's](#) web presence. You will go through every TC web page to catalog and evaluate the content. You will also audit the department's social media presence.

The deliverable will be a report that provides a fairly broad overview of what is currently on the site and the strengths and weaknesses of the content. Possibly most importantly, you will also include two appendices: 1. Your spreadsheet for your quantitative audit, 2. Your spreadsheet for your qualitative audit. I will grade your group on both the report and the quality of data in the appendices.

I provided examples of each of these in the blackboard modules. None of the examples are perfect, and they are all applicable to an earlier version of the TC website, meaning they are no longer correct. Use them as guides.

As I explained in one of the lectures in module 2, content strategy is an emerging field. You are free to take a different approach from the audit report included on blackboard. But you need to make rhetorically sound decisions, and I encourage you to use graphs and other images to make your points.

Code Academy (5 points)

Follow the instructions in the document in module 1. Just upload to Blackboard a screenshot of your certificate of completion.

Personal site hosted on BlueHost (20 points)

For this assignment, you will create a personal online portfolio to showcase your work. The site must be hosted professionally (I suggest BlueHost) and must use one of the 3 CMSs you wrote about in your first assignment. The ONLY exception will be if you already have a personal website you coded yourself. Module 4 includes some background on Bluehost hosting.

Your personal site must include the following pieces: 1. An intro page with a short description of yourself, 2. Your resume/Cv, preferably in both downloadable PDF form and in the text of the site, 3. Portfolio pieces, and 4. Anything else you want to include (this piece is optional).

The most important part of your site is the portfolio pieces. You choose the portfolio pieces you want to use. I'm not grading the individual pieces; instead, I'm grading how well you describe what the pieces showcase. For each piece, you need to explain the skills the piece shows and potentially any software or pedagogical techniques used for the piece. The sample links below will give you guidance on how to write about your pieces.

Obviously, your portfolio will look different depending on the career you're pursuing. If you want to go into industry, your portfolio pieces should showcase your technical communication skills. If you

want to go into teaching, your site should look more like a teaching portfolio. [Here's a link](#) on possibilities of what to include in a teaching portfolio. Whichever route you go, don't hesitate to ask me questions.

Here are three examples of professional portfolios:

<http://kacyewing.com/portfolioindex.html>

<https://lkettavong.com/home/portfolio-2/>

<https://krbeasley.wordpress.com/portfolio/>

Your portfolio **must** include **at least** three pieces.

Content strategy report (25 points)

This final project is a group project and consists of a few different major pieces. You will submit them all as one large report

Overarching content strategy report

Okay, so this is the bulk of your project. For this, you're going to start off with a broader discussion of the site. You're going to write about how you understand the purpose of UNT's technical communication site. You are then going to fairly briefly talk about the research you did to begin developing the content strategy (the landscape analysis and the audits).

Then you'll move into the overall content strategy. To do this successfully will require a close reading of the texts you've been assigned and the notes you've taken in class. You'll need a bunch of different pieces:

- Project definition phase. What are you doing it? Why are you doing it? What is the overall goal of the project?
- A statement of the core strategy. The book and powerpoint slides discuss this in some detail. I think it's page 100-101 of the content strategy book. This is important.
- Discussion of audience. Create three personas of whom you think will be interested in the site. Make sure to differentiate primary vs. secondary audience.
- Voice and tone guidelines. Talk about maintaining a consistent voice. You argue for what kind of voice you think should be targeted. Consult your books for detailed discussion of voice in content strategies.

Ok, once you've established a broad content strategy that defines purpose, audience, core strategy, and audience, it's time for you to start creating content in the report. To do that you need to

- Start with a sitemap that names each page you plan on having and shows the linking structure. This is going to come first, but it might be something you do later after you've figured out how content relates. It doesn't require any kind of super fancy design.

- Then you're going to create wireframes for the pages. There's a slide in one of the PowerPoint presentations on wireframes. **This is not hard, nor am I expecting much work!** For one thing, you really only have to use boxes with rudimentary labels. Secondly, once you create one, you'll be able to use that as the basic model for all the other pages. **You aren't going to have a separate section for wireframes. Each individual content page will have its own wireframe.**
- Finally, as possibly the most important part, you're going to devote a page or two to *each* of the pages you're proposing. Start by defining the purpose of the page and the overall message and delineate which of the audiences the page is targeting (look up the importance of defining messaging in the slides and the books). Then include the wireframe of what the page will look like with labels for different types of content. Finally, **write that content and make it clear where it goes on the wireframe.**
 - You will use your own judgment when writing content. If you think a page should have a video, explain that, but I don't expect you to shoot the video. I know you won't be able to do the whole thing. Use your judgment.

Social media strategy document

- A discussion of some of the things you found in your landscape analysis (if anything). Were any of those three places using social media in an interesting way?
- A discussion of which social media sites your client should engage with
- A discussion of best practices for audience engagement on the site
- An outline of reasonable goals for the first six months of the client's social media presence (# of follower, likes, etc.)
- An engagement strategy
- A one-month content calendar. This will be the major part. You will plan how often the client posts to Facebook, Twitter, etc. You will also talk about different types of posts and how frequently the client should use different types of posts

Group evaluation/group tool use (5 points)

I will be a member of your Slack chat logs and your project management group. I will be evaluating your participation.

In addition, each group member will write an evaluation of the other group members. I will take those evaluations into consideration when assigning your group participation grade.

Blog (10 points)

You will maintain a weekly blog for this class. The blog has two main purposes: 1. Show that you understood and are able to synthesize the readings, and 2. Show that you understand the genre of more social blogging. I will be grading you on your ability to explain and draw value from the readings and your ability to write in a social (but not fake) style. Remember, your blog isn't purely informative; it should be engaging as well. Write more like a creative writer than a technical one. I

want you to talk about your experiences and link them to whatever you read. I absolutely do not want a dry recitation of everything you read that week. Think about it this way... someone who has no idea about this class should still be interested in your blog posts. The post should **not** be dry, nor should it describe the entire week's readings. Pick something small you can make interesting in one relatively short post.

Each blog post will be due at 11:59 PM the night before class. You will have to create your own free WordPress blogging account and send me a link to the blog. Each post should be around 500 words, give or take a few hundred.

Here are some examples you can follow for an introduction of the genre:

<http://blog.tyrannosaurusmarketing.com/blog/author/adam-fout> (from a UNT Tech Comm alum)

<https://blog.bufferapp.com/>

<http://www.jennstrends.com/blog/>

Schedule

Assignments are due at 11:59pm the Monday of class. The only exception is the blog posts. Those are due at 11:59 the night before class.

| Date | Readings | Lecture topics/assignments |
|------|---|---|
| 8/28 | A beginner guide to CMSs 5 Reasons to use a CMS Brumberger and Lauer (Canvas) | Structure of this class Web content management systems |
| 9/4 | No class: Labor day | Go to the week 2 module and watch the videos and read the files Blog post due (about week 1 readings) |
| 9/11 | Halvorson (entire book) | Content strategies Audits Competitive review CMS report due Blog post due |
| 9/18 | Help your content go anywhere with mobile 10 steps What your mobile content strategy should steal | Content strategy for mobile Code Academy due Blog post due |

| | | |
|-------|---|---|
| 9/25 | Which stats matter How to use google analytics Twitter analytics Google analytics | Using analytics Audit report due Blog post due |
| 10/2 | Reading 1 Reading 2 Reading 3 Reading 4 Beginner's Guide (glance through it and keep as a resource) Social Media fails | Social media strategies Search engine optimization Blog post due |
| 10/9 | A beginner's guide to branding Introduction to brand strategy | Branding Personal website due Blog post due |
| 10/16 | No readings | Content strategy report due Group evaluation due (materials due Thursday at 11:59pm) |