A “MEDILL METHOD” OF VIDEO/TELEVISION REPORTING AND PRODUCTION

At the Journalism department of the Medill School, we teach a great deal of the craft of journalism and the making/producing of video and multimedia stories. The vast majority of our faculty have experience from the news business that proves invaluable in the classroom. But on the video and multimedia side of things, the methods of working on state-of-the-art systems and software have outpaced the knowledge of many of the teachers—even those with stellar pedigrees in their field. And those who have kept up all teach different ways of working toward the final product.

The result is students move from prerequisites to more advanced classes with vastly different ways of working, and there is no uniform, agreed-upon method for the school that is based on industry standards and practices. As a teacher of the upper division video courses, this can be frustrating, because I have to retrain students and, in some cases, break them of some bad habits.

This is a proposal to create an innovative set of online lessons that will be used across Medill; Lessons that are informed by direct connections with top organizations in the news and information industry.

Our technical staff (led by chief engineer Jeff Prah) are quite talented with software, and are often tasked with teaching students the ways of working in programs like Adobe Premiere Pro and Audition. But because their training and expertise are not informed by time spent in a newsroom, they work from a very technical viewpoint, using the methods taught by the software companies themselves rather from practical experience in real-world situations.

As a key professor in the video and broadcast area, I am taking a lead role in developing a faculty-led, standard method of teaching the skills—primarily of video editing and basic multimedia animation—based on a study of real world workflows in major newsrooms.

To do this will require embedding with top editors at key outlets — including news channels (like CNN), network bureaus and local stations, digital-native outlets like Vox and AJ+ and post production houses doing work of the highest level. The research/embeds will take place for two weeks over the summer in New York, D.C., San Francisco and Chicago.

The plan is innovative in two ways: First, it keeps the curriculum fresh and connected directly to industry (where regular innovations mean the methods of working are constantly changing). The visits are also likely to lead to more student opportunities in the organizations I visit. Second, we will create an innovative presentation portal, where students would access the lessons online, and everyone across the school would learn the same way.

The standard would become a new “Medill Method” for the following courses in the undergraduate curriculum and their graduate-level equivalents:

201-2 — Multimedia Storytelling
301 — Journalism in Practice
312 — Media Presentation: Video Producing
322 — Storytelling: Video Reporting, Shooting & Editing
365 — Journalism Residency (modules will include workflows specific to stations or networks students would be working in).
368 — Documentary
390 — Special Topics.

There are many special topics courses (numbered as JOUR390) that we regularly create and teach. I myself have developed courses in persuasive video storytelling and social-media-video reporting and production. And, because the modules will be available via Canvas, they may also be used for students doing special projects or for the crew producing NNN, the Northwestern News Network.

FUNDING

To pull this off, I will need to set up dates/access with and travel to these various newsrooms to build the foundation and workflows we will teach. Then, in consultation with my fellow faculty members, we will hammer out a standard set of expectations for the modules we create.

To produce the online modules, we would need to reserve time at our TV studios at Medill and hire individuals to help put together the lessons (mostly video editing and Canvas development). We would use the model of the online courses that have been developed by the IMC department of our school, using Canvas as our platform. We'll also use some of the more innovative new apps that work in tandem with Canvas (including Arc video).

Here is the breakdown in funding:

Field research and newsroom embeds: $4,000 (two weeks in NYC, San Francisco and DC, including airfare and lodging).
Studio personnel for shoots: $1,000 (since this is not tied to a course, we have to book a separate crew for studio use).
Editing and Canvas development: $2,000.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED IMPACT

The benefit for students is likely to be profound, because we will be preparing them to be successful as soon as they enter a professional news or media organization. Using these tools, they already know the workflow. And it will create a more consistent minimum passing standard for our students, allowing us to build on that consistent foundation to advance their skills.

There’s been a great deal of talk lately about a “mastery curriculum,” one that sets a minimum performance/passing standard for everyone and gives every student the required support and training to achieve it. This is based on that model, and will be an asset that will help every student at the school reach that standard. Plus, it will give faculty a baseline of what to expect students will know be