**PR 499 Strategic Storytelling: Content**

**Marketing in the Age of the Educated**

**Consumer**

**4 Units**

**Fall 2019 – Mondays – 2-5:20 p.m.**

**Section:** 21495

**Location:** ANN 406

**Instructor: Alexander Jutkowitz**

**Office:** ANN Lobby or classroom

**Office Hours:** By appointment

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**Phone:** 917-545-2509

**I. Course Description**

This is a class designed to introduce students to strategic storytelling, one of the animating principles behind the future of communications. Based on Jutkowitz’s book, *The Strategic Storyteller: Content Marketing in the Age of the Educated Consumer*, the course will consist of lectures by Jutkowitz, distinguished guest lecturers from academia, PR, advertising, and media, interactive class projects, discussions of assigned reading, and hands-on projects. *The Strategic Storyteller* predicts that in an age of swift, ephemeral communication, those organizations which are able to tell their stories consistently and persistently will have a continued presence in the public consciousness. Storytelling, whether undertaken by individuals or organizations, also acts as a spur for innovation and change by sparking new ideas, uncovering old ones, and inspiring people to make new connections.

**II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment**

In this class you will learn how to:

* Tap into a person or an organization's unique sources of wonder, wisdom, and delight
* Boost individual and collective creativity
* Understand the storytelling strategies behind some of the world’s most powerful brands
* Unlock the secrets of the great strategic storytellers of the past
* Build a place where stories can live online
* Distribute stories so they have staying power and reach in the ephemeral, digital age
* Convene audiences by going beyond demographic stereotypes and tapping into enduring human needs
* Understand how unshakable reputations are built out of stories that accumulate over time

**III. Description of Assignments**

Each class will be inspired by a reading, either one of the chapters of *The Strategic Storyteller,* or selections from philosophy, literature, critical theory, documentary film, television, or digital media. While drawing heavily from Jutkowitz’s own writings and experiences, the class will also feature guest lecturers from great living storytellers in media, marketing, public relations, and academia.

List of assignments:

* **Media Audits:** Much of the way that communications functions is below the level of conscious awareness. This exercise takes a unit of media, like a magazine, film, single television program, or book, or a single brand across multiple channels, and asks students to analyze the storytelling strategy behind it. Responses should be 700-1000 words in length.
* **Campfires:** Students will be asked to complete short in-class exercises based on storytelling prompts. These assignments will be graded as pass/fail and will be counted towards participation.
* **Midterm Paper:** Students will be given a prompt and will be required to submit their response electronically by the designated date.
* **Final Project:** This project will give students the opportunity to understand concepts learned throughout this course and apply them in a realistic scenario. Students will conduct a thorough investigation of a chosen brand and draw on storytelling principles to develop a well-defined content strategy for the organization. This three-pronged strategy document is inclusive of a competitive audit, content strategy development and execution.

Reading List:

* *The Strategic Storyteller* by Alex Jutkowitz
* *Wired For Story* by Lisa Cron
* *Imagine It Forward (selections)* by Beth Comstock and Tahl Raz
* *Creativity, Inc.* by Ed Catmull
* *All Marketers are Liars* by Seth Godin
* *The Copywriter’s Handbook: A step-by-step guide to writing copy that sells* by Robert W. Bly
* *The First 90 Days*by Michael D. Watkins
* *To Sell is Human* by Daniel Pink
* *The Storytelling Animal (selections)* by Johnathan Gottschall
* *Finite and Infinite Games* (selections) by James P. Carse

**IV. Grading**

**a. Breakdown of Grade**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assignment** | **% of Grade** |
| Participation | 15% |
| Media Audits | 20% |
| Midterm Paper | 25% |
| Final Project | 40% |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** |

**b. Grading Scale**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 95% to 100%: A | 80% to 82%: B- | 67% to 69%: D+ |
| 90% to 94%: A- | 77% to 79%: C+ | 63% to 66%: D |
| 87% to 89%: B+ | 73% to 76%: C | 60% to 62%: D- |
| 83% to 86%: B | 70% to 72%: C- | 0% to 59%: F |

**c. Grading Standards**

***Public Relations*“A” projects** have writing near professional quality; one or no mistakes; clearly proofread and edited material. All required elements included (catchy headline, solid lede, varied vocabulary; supporting facts/figures; quotes as required). Excellent organization and flow; original thinking. Showed creativity in packaging/distribution method. High end of scale: publishable today as is.

**“B” projects** have two to five spelling, grammar or AP Style mistakes. One or more required elements missing or poorly displayed (i.e., boring headline; confusing lede, etc.). Shows potential as a good writer. Adhered to inverted pyramid. High end of scale will have at least one extraordinary element such as astonishing lead or little-known facts or pithy quote. Some creativity shown. Publishable with medium editing.   
  
**“C” projects** have more than five errors (spelling, grammar, AP style). Poorly edited and/or proofread. May have adhered to inverted pyramid but strayed at beginning or end. Hackneyed elements such as trite headline or uninteresting lede. Little or no facts/figures included. Passive rather than active verbs become the norm. Little or no creativity shown. Publishable with major editing.  
  
“**D” projects** have more than 10 errors (spelling, grammar). Needs to be completely rewritten. Poorly organized with little or no understanding of journalistic style/standards. Needs to work with writing coach.  
  
**“F” projects** are not rewritable, late or not turned in.

**d. Class Outline**

**Here is an outline of how these assignments will be scheduled throughout the semester.** Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Topics/Daily Activities | Readings and Homework (Date assigned) | Deliverable (Date due) |
| Week 1  Date: 8/26 | Explain class structure and assignments  **Wonder, Wisdom & Delight**  The power of an integrated story can transform a brand. In this class, students put storytelling into practice using wonder, wisdom and delight and study story arcs. | *Wired For Story* by Lisa Cron  Chapters 1-2, *The Strategic Storyteller* by Alexander Jutkowitz |  |
| Week 2  Date: 9/2 | **No class: Labor Day** |  |  |
| Week 3  Date: 9/9 | **Storytelling vs. Strategic Storytelling**  After mastering the art of crafting a story, students learn how, using certain storytelling principles, some stories can more strategic than others.  Guest lecture: Ross Martin, CEO, Blackbird | Media Audit #1 (700-1,000 words): Pick a controversy in the news this recently. Using the principles we’ve discussed in class, identify the storytelling techniques that the media is using to frame the debate.    Spend some time combing reputable news sources and TV news. Read and listen carefully. Are the writers and speakers using some of the same terminology and ideas to report on the issue? Is one side’s argument stronger than the other’s? |  |
| Week 4  Date: 9/16 | **Communications and Human Nature**  Starting with Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, there has been a strain of critical theory in Western thought arguing that it is impossible to understand persuasion without understanding at least some of the fundamentals of human nature. In this class, students learn why and how humans react to storytelling to better understand how to craft their narrative.  Guest lecture: Trevor Edwards, Former President, Nike; Grant Gittlin, Chief Growth Officer, MediaLink | Read:  1) The Harvard Business Review’s “Branding In the Age of Social Media”: <https://hbr.org/2016/03/branding-in-the-age-of-social-media>  2) The Digital Marketing Institute’s “9 Ways Digital Has Changed Business Forever”:  <https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/en-us/the-insider/19-04-17-9-ways-digital-has-changed-business-forever>  3) Fast Company’s “The Decline of Premium American Fashion Brands. What Happened, Ralph and Tommy?” <https://www.fastcompany.com/3062474/the-decline-of-premium-american-fashion-brands-what-happened-ralph-tommy> | Media Audit #1 due |
| Week 5  Date: 9/23 | **The Age of the Educated Consumer**  Despite the countervailing narrative that people are getting dumber, the reality is that people are actually getting smarter and more educated. Students learn how to construct a narrative for a world where knowledge is plentiful and information is competitive.  Guest lecture: Brad Grossman, CEO, Zeitguide | *Creativity, Inc.* by Ed Catmull |  |
| Week 6  Date: 9/30 | **Walt Disney: An Empire of Storytelling**  In an age before multiplatform digital media, Walt Disney mastered the art of integrated storytelling in different media, including experiential marketing. By following the marketing of one movie in the 20th Century, *The Lion King*, throughout Disney’s many properties, the students will distill the principles behind the company’s many decades of success.  Guest lecture: Kelly McGinnis, Chief Communications Officer, Levi Strauss; Chris LaPlaca, Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications, ESPN | Chapter 9, *The Strategic Storyteller* by Alexander Jutkowitz  *Imagine It Forward (selections)* by Beth Comstock and Tahl Raz |  |
| Week 7  Date: 10/7 | **Asymmetry**  Today’s world is unpredictable. What we thought was up is down. In an asymmetrical world, students learn what it means to think, create and strategize asymmetrically, and learn how to practice asymmetry day-to-day.  Guest Lecture: Dustee Jenkins, Head of Global Communications and Public Relations, Spotify | Media Audit #2 (700-1,000 words): Pick a conflict in the world, either military or political, and describe ways in which the speed of the communications response has affected the course of events. |  |
| Week 8  Date: 10/14 | **Branding in International Relations**  Soft power is a country’s ability to gain power disproportionate to its military and economic might through its cultural exports. This class examines how nations and other entities deploy storytelling for strategic purposes, and debates brands’ roles in the international sphere. | *Finite and Infinite Games* (selections) by James P. Carse  *The First 90 Days* (selections) by Michael D. Watkins | Media Audit #2 Due |
| Week 9  Date: 10/21 | **Stories and the Infinite Game**  Kicking off with James P. Carse’s concept of *Finite and Infinite Games*, this lecture will take a look at the ways in which storytelling is the ultimate infinite game, the goal of which is not to win but to keep the game going at all costs. Students will explore case studies involving historical examples of diplomacy and examples from crisis communications.  Guest lecture: Evan Leatherwood, Slifka Fellow, Fordham University | Midterm paper due 10/28 |  |
| Week 10  Date: 10/28 | **Thought Leadership**  A brand is partially defined by those who represent it. In this class, we’ll examine the strongest and not-as-strong thought leaders in the field and postulate what could be done to improve the role thought leaders play today. | *The Copywriter’s Handbook* by Robert W. Bly | Midterm paper due before class |
| Week 11  Date: 11/4 | **Privacy**  In the digital age, every company, even media companies, are also dealers in the personal information of their readers, viewers, and consumers. We’ll ask the question, how does privacy affect our ability to tell stories? What does it mean for the future of content marketing?  Guest Lecture: Michael Bassik, CEO, Yes and Company | *Made to Stick* by Chip & Dan Heath |  |
| Week 12  Date: 11/11 | **Crisis Simulation**  Crisis communications and response can make or break a brand’s reputation. In this simulation, students will receive a mock brief and will formulate a response that is efficient, creative and effective.  Guest Lecture: Lisa Sherman, CEO, Ad Council | *To Sell Is Human* by Daniel Pink |  |
| Week 13  Date: 11/18 | **The Age of Personalization**  The Internet of Things (IoT), which allows the objects that surround us to receive and send information, is a new frontier for storytellers. As we are increasingly followed by a cloud of personal data, the possibility of brands constructing an integrated experience which follows us around physically is on the verge of becoming reality. This class explores the different types of personalization brands deploy to shape their stories and how we as consumers are playing a part in it.  Guest Lecture: Jessica Yellin, former CNN Chief White House Correspondent | *All Marketers are Liars* by Seth Godin |  |
| Week 14  Date: 11/25 | **Content Marketing Applied**  This class will examine what is needed to generate a culture of creativity that allows a company to design and disseminate the story it is developing in the most effective manner. This will provide a review of previous storytelling concepts as well as guidance on how to fulfill the students’ final assignment. |  |  |
| Week 15  Date: 12/2 | **In-Class Final Presentations**  Students will present topline findings from their final presentations, including competitive audit and content strategy.  Guest Lecture: Helaine Klasky |  |  |
| Final Exam Due date  Date/Time: 12/13,  2-4 p.m. | **Summative experience**  Final content portfolio (includes audit, strategy and launch content) due on Blackboard by 2 pm |  |  |

**IX. Policies and Procedures**

**Internships**

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must by unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism class.

**Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**a. Academic Conduct**

*Plagiarism*

Presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/b/11-00-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

*USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity*

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

**b. Support Systems**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086*

[equity.usc.edu](https://equity.usc.edu/), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu/)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu/)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu/)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

*Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]*

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.

**X. About Your Instructor**

Alexander Jutkowitz is one of the leading evangelists for the shift in marketing and communications toward impactful, integrated content marketing and strategy. The pioneering work of GROUP SJR, which Jutkowitz co-founded, demonstrates that brands who tell their own stories innovate faster, inspire unparalleled consumer loyalty, and make durable reputational gains. Jutkowitz has more than 20 years of experience in a wide array of disciplines – from political pollster to digital architect, brand strategist to content creator. He has worked in more than 30 countries around the globe leading communication, marketing and political campaigns for multinational corporations, not-for-profits, prominent individuals, governments, and trade associations. In addition to co-founding Group SJR and Truffle Pig, Jutkowitz is a board member of The Advertising Council and The New School. He is the author of *The Strategic Storyteller*.

**Final Project**

To fully put strategic storytelling to practice in this class, we’ll build content strategies for brands and organizations and begin putting the strategy in play. Students will be given a list of potential brands to choose from.

Students will analyze the company’s existing content and the competitive landscape, will create a content strategy document — includes editorial components, a distribution plan, and launch content pitches with atomization plans.

Students will present their topline findings in the final class of the semester.

The final deliverable will be a presentation deck and will count for 40% of students’ final grade.

**Brands:**

**TBA**

**Assignment:**

(It is strongly encouraged that groups consult Chapter 7 of *The Strategic Storyteller*, “Content Marketing Applied Pt. 1”)

* *Competitive Audit*: High-level market research is crucial for determining what your organization should be doing to keep up with competitors and where there is white space for your brand to grow and stand out. Your Competitive Audit should be two-fold: details about what your organization and your competitors. Requirements:
  + A brief SWOT analysis of your brand
  + An analysis of 3-5 competitors’ content - what are these companies doing well?
  + White space analysis - where could your brand fill gaps in perspective?
* *Content Strategy*: Building off of learnings from the content audit, this document is the meat of the project. Requirements:
  + Content audit findings to define the white space opportunity, as well as audience identification
  + An overall message or goal for your brand (this will inform everything in your content strategy)
  + Content pillars, guidelines for editorial tone and voice
  + Map of content as it relates to each audience and distribution plan
* ***Five*** *pitches for initial content*: headline, content format, 50-80 word summary of what the piece will achieve

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**Guiding questions for content audit and strategy:**

* Editorial narrative: What is the goal of the content? How does it relate to the product or offerings?
* Topics/Pillars: Are there editorial pillars or clear messaging? If so, what are they? More broadly, what topics are covered?
* Visual identity and Tone: Is there a cohesive style and tone? What can be improved on? What can we learn from competitive style and tone?
* Engagement: Who is the target audience? When/how much is the audience engaging with the content?
* Social Listening: Is the brand discussed in the social space? What are the top conversations happening around the bran?
* Channels: Where is the content being distributed? Is the content deployed in a way that is appropriate for the platform/publisher/audience? Is the content easy to access?
* Earned/Paid: Are stories picked up by media? Are there any clear indications of a paid strategy?

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