

Tech Fellows 2008
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“Bridging the Digital Divide through Multimedia Training”

Introduction

Multimedia Journalism. The Backpack Journalist. Online Storytelling.
Whatever you call it, we need to find ways to integrate the new technology into our journalism department curriculum. Our goal was to create a tool for the growing number of instructors in the Journalism Department who are incorporating multimedia skills into their courses.

Purpose

The original purpose of this project was to provide clear, detailed instructions to faculty who will teach students how to produce short videos as well as photo slideshows. In the last year, we’ve learned that instructors are willing to practice these skills on their own, but they want and need specificity. We planned to produce a detailed, multi-faceted guide they can be accessed 24-7 and used in other departments throughout the college that are teaching similar skills.

Our initial idea was to create a digital guide for faculty and students incorporating video or slideshows that we could send via e-mail. We had hoped to make videos for Macs, PCs and also a slideshows. We soon realized how much time that would take and decided to focus on the Mac guide, as more of our reporting and writing classrooms have Macs than PCs. We also realized that we would want to make these tutorials available online, as opposed to simply through e-mail.

The Project

We produced a series of seven video shorts on reporting with a Flip video camera and editing on iMovie on Macs. The videos combine footage of students reporting in the field, screen grabs and audio commentary. The videos can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/teresapuente>.

The videos were created for a course called Reporting and Writing II (53-2020A), a six-section course with 85 registered students that is the gateway to the Journalism Department’s more advanced classes. In one assignments, students brainstorm a story idea then go out into the field and report it using one of the Department’s 15 Flip video cameras. Then they come back and edit their video story on Mac computers. We initially created one long 14-minute video but soon realized that students – and possibly instructors – might not watch something that long. We also wanted to make the tutorials more readily available, and one 14-minute video would have been too long to post on You Tube. So we broke it into seven different videos.

Video One: “How to use the Flip Video camera,” simply shows the students how to turn the camera on and off.

Video Two: “Introduction to Video Reporting” explains the importance of reporting in a multi-media world and shows footage we shot of students while they were doing the video reporting in the field in the summer of 2008.

Video Three: “Step One: Importing Video,” shows the students how to connect the camera to the computer and import the video into the iMovie editing software.

Video Four: “Step Two: Editing Your Video Clips,” shows how to splice the video clips into shorter segments.

Video Five: “Step Three: Building and Arranging Your Video Clips,” shows how to arrange the clips to make a short video.

Video Six: “Step Four: Adding Transitions and Other Features,” shows how to add special effects to enhance the movie.

Video Seven: “Step Five: Saving and Sharing Your Video,” shows how to save then condense the movie to Quick Time so it can be easily sent as an e-mail or uploaded to a blog.

The Results

We asked the teachers in the six sections of Reporting and Writing II to show the videos to their students. We can see which videos got the most views on you tube and that was the “How to Use the Flip Video” segment with 112 views as of Dec. 11, 2008. The video with the least number of hits was “Step Three: Building and Arranging Your Video Clips,” with 34 views. We should note that it’s not clear who among our faculty and students was viewing the videos on You Tube, since they’re available to anyone.

We received positive feedback on the videos from several of the Reporting and Writing II instructors. Before creating the videos, we offered in-person training session to instructors on how to use digital cameras and edit the videos. But when the time came for them to do this weeks later, they couldn’t always remember the finer points.

Instructor Steven Gray, a former Wall Street Journal reporter who has begun doing multi-media reporting for Time, called the video tutorials “heavenly.” Gray said the students in his class watched the videos and followed the steps as they made their movies.

Instructor Nancy Traver said the videos were “great.” “I sent them out to students during the week before we went out on the streets to make our videos. They came in that day ready to do the shooting. The tutorials were very clear. It was so much easier to watch the tutorials than try to instruct the students in using the cameras. They caught on quickly and it was a successful assignment.”

Ultimately, the videos allow us to reach a greater number of teachers and students.

Survey Results

Twenty-four of the 85 registered students participated in an eight-question survey, for a 28.2 percent response rate. The survey was designed to gauge the students' previous experience with video editing, the usefulness of the video tutorials and how these skills might be used in the future.

More than half – 58.3 percent - of the students had edited video before taking the course, while 41.7 percent said this was their first experience. It was clear from the comments that students' previous experience with this skill varied widely, with one student reporting using Avid in another college course and Final Cut in high school to another student who stated, "I have not edited a video before." Not surprisingly, some of the students – usually those who had prior editing experience - reported they didn't learn much from the videos nor did they plan to use them in the future. One student's comment underscored the need for faculty members to think about how we're explaining to students the value of multi-media skills in earlier courses. That student, "I'm a magazine writing major, (sic) I'd love to never do broadcast again." In fact, the changing media landscape suggests instructors need to make sure this student and others in the Journalism Department understand that magazines increasingly expect and require their employees to use these multi-media skills.

Half of the students who viewed the videos found them to be very or somewhat helpful, while just one student – or 4.2 percent – found it somewhat unhelpful. Two-thirds of the students – 66.6 percent – said they were definitely going to or interested in using what they learned from these video tutorials in the future. Their comments included:

- 1) "My skills are a lot better."
- 2) "This will be helpful through out (sic) my entire life."
- 3) "It is fun and I hope I get another chance to use it."

One of the students who found the videos useful said, "I saw all the videos (sic) they were pretty helpful because I am a visual learning." This serves as an important reminder that students' learning styles in this course and others differ markedly, so we instructors need to make sure we're using a variety of techniques. It would be interesting to know how many of these students would have preferred a written guide over the video tutorials.

Some of the students made specific suggestions as to how to improve the already produced videos (and also what we should keep in mind when making new ones). Those recommendations included:

- 1) "Placing a voiceover was not explained in the video. This is important for a journalism class."
- 2) "Show how to export audio and put audio under video."

Conclusion and Next Steps

This is a project that can and should be continued. Because some of our classrooms are PC-equipped and the majority of our 700-plus journalism student body use PCs outside of class, the next step would be to produce video tutorials for PCs. In the Journalism Department, we have old and new Macs as well as PCs, so it also would be helpful to consider producing a second version of video tutorials for those using the newer Macs. Since there are three different ways to teach video depending on which classroom is being used, making video tutorials available for all of these teaching scenarios would help our faculty and students. We're also interested in creating video tutorials on how to blog, how to create soundslides or edit audio.

One goal for coming semesters is for more of these multi-media assignments to be completed in other advanced classes as well as some of the lower-level courses, so these new video tutorials will help us better train faculty beyond the six instructors involved in this project. And expanded training will ensure more multi-media work happens throughout the Department's curriculum, not just in this course and a handful of others. While working on this project, we also realized that students taking Reporting and Writing II would be better served by getting a Flip camera rather than the digital recorder they now receive through their course fee. Having students leave this course with their own Flip camera also will help build students' video skills well beyond this one course.

Another project of interest to us would be to develop a best-practices guide for integrating these video tutorials into other more advanced Journalism courses, with the goal of reaching those instructors more resistant to teaching these critical multi-media skills.

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