

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

This course runs from to 16-JAN-26 to 04-MAY-26

Course Modality: Hawk to Hawk

Meeting Times: 10:00 AM - 11:25 AM

Meeting Days: Tuesday Thursday

Meeting Location: MRHD-143

Section Number: STCM140_01SP26

Professor



Joe Amditis

Department: Center for Cooperative Media

Office Location

CCOM Building, Room 2109

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Additional Information

Use this link to schedule office hours with

me: <https://calendar.app.google/gyPP8X5QgAMecjd98>

Connect With Me

Office location: CCOM Building, Room 2109

Student/office hours: [Use virtual scheduler link.](#)

Other ways to contact me: amditisj@montclair.edu

Course Catalog Description

Prerequisite(s): CMST 110. This course is designed to provide students the fundamental principles and skills for designing, producing, and evaluating content published for the Web and other digital delivery platforms. In a hands-on class, students will learn expansive and engaging storytelling

techniques through using the essential elements of multi-media production, such as audio recording and editing, basic photography, video production and editing, interactive infographics, or mobile animation for various groups of targeted audiences. Students will develop strong media professional skills as well as critical and analytical abilities in multi media production.

Overview of Our Section

This introductory course equips you with essential skills in multimedia production for strategic communications. You will learn to:

- Create compelling content for various media channels.
- Use photo, video, and audio production tools effectively.
- Apply multimedia tactics for brand messaging.
- Develop strong storytelling skills.

We focus on the practical application of these tools. You will not just learn *how* to use the software, but *why* specific design and content choices matter in a strategic context.

Technology & resources

- **Canvas:** We use Canvas for all assignments and course materials. Use Chrome, Firefox, or Edge.
- **Wi-Fi:** Connect to **MSU Secure Wi-Fi** using your NetID.
- **Software:** You have free access to Microsoft Office 365 Education and Google Apps for Education.
- **AI tools:** Members of the Montclair community can access Copilot with Enterprise Data Protection at copilot.microsoft.com. Log in with your NetID credentials to ensure your work is protected.
- **Tech support:** Contact the IT Service Desk at 973-655-7971 or itservicedesk@montclair.edu.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- **Analyze media ecosystems:** Identify gaps in coverage and community information needs to determine strategic opportunities.
- **Apply design principles:** Use contrast, hierarchy, alignment, and balance to create visually compelling presentations and graphics.
- **Develop audience personas:** Create detailed user profiles that go beyond demographics to identify motivations, pain points, and media habits.
- **Write strategic copy:** Craft clear, authoritative content that critiques industry problems through a "solutions lens."
- **Produce accessible assets:** Design multimedia content (social graphics, blog posts) that meets accessibility standards, including the effective use of alt text.
- **Build brand consistency:** Develop and apply style guides to ensure visual and tonal uniformity across different media channels.

Course Materials

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS:

- Backlund, H., "Is Your Journalism a Luxury or Necessity?" City Bureau, (2019), available at <https://www.citybureau.org/notebook/2019/7/17/journalism-is-a-luxury-information-is-a-necessity>
- The Cluetrain Manifesto, available at <https://ubereye.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/the-cluetrain-manifesto.pdf>
- Topolsky, J., "Your media business will not be saved," Medium, (2016) available at <https://medium.com/@joshuatopolsky/your-media-business-will-not-be-saved-1b0716b5010c>
- Doctorow, C., "The 'Enshittification' of TikTok," WIRED, (2023), available at <https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-platforms-cory-doctorow/>
- Chiang, T., "Why A.I. isn't going to make art," New Yorker, (2024), available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KGYY5TS4QbtTwkXKI_N_44BKNYijUnMF/view?usp=sharing

RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND READINGS:

- Berger, E., "Peak Content: A shitstorm of information, and an opportunity of a generation," Medium, (2015), available at <https://medium.com/@goodberger/peak-content-c89b436dd861>
- Haimson, O. et al, "The online authenticity paradox: What being "authentic" on social media means, and barriers to achieving it," Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact. 5, (2021), available at <https://doi.org/10.1145/3479567>
- Roberts-Breslin, J., "Making Media: Foundations of Sound and Image Production," 3rd Edition, Focal Press, (2011), available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tJaRJ4y6c-7UKPFyCWSxb0KtLpjWEmY/view?usp=sharing>
- Vaughan, T., "Multimedia: Making It Work," 8th Edition, McGraw-Hill (2011), available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1z_dSWa6X1OYdIcL5UWyMIBCXhl6mTEne/view?usp=sharing

★ USEFUL TOOLS, LINKS, AND RESOURCES:

-  [**NOTEBOOKLM FOR THIS CLASS**](#)
- [MASSIVE list of .edu benefits and discounts](#)
- [Useful links and websites for news and media organizations](#) (Center for Cooperative Media)
- [ChatGPT for local news: Prompt engineering for beginners](#) (Center for Cooperative Media)
- [YouTube playlist: Intro to AI for journalists](#) (Center for Cooperative Media)

Course Schedule

NOTE: Topics are subject to change based on the pace of the class and industry developments.

Week 1: Introduction & the state of media | We establish the ground rules and discuss the reality of the media business.

- **Topic:** Syllabus review, course expectations, and the "Enshittification" of platforms.
- **Reading:** "Your Media Business Will Not Be Saved" by Joshua Topolsky.

Week 2: How to use your computer | Digital fundamentals for strategic communicators.

- Topic: Keyboard shortcuts, file organization, and professional workflows.
- Activity: Keyboard shortcut speed challenge and folder structure setup.

Week 3: Media markets & information needs | Understanding where your audience lives and what they actually need versus what they get.

- Topic: Analyzing media ecosystems and identifying coverage gaps.
- Activity: Market analysis workshop.

Week 4: Authenticity & The Cluetrain Manifesto | Why human voices matter more than algorithms.

- Topic: The 95 theses of the Cluetrain Manifesto and the allure of the "New Thing."
- Discussion: AI ethics and the value of genuine perspective.

Week 5: The attention economy | How platforms harvest attention and what it means for creators.

- Topic: Algorithms, privacy, and screen time metrics.
- Guest lecture: The mechanics of the attention economy (Subject to availability).

Week 6: Principles of design | The fundamentals of visual communication: contrast, hierarchy, alignment, and balance.

- Topic: Why bad design hurts credibility.
- In-class activity: Alien Propaganda Posters—applying design principles to absurd constraints.

Week 7: Presentations & final project kickoff | Putting design theory into practice.

- Activity: "Slide Deck That Doesn't Suck" student presentations.
- Topic: Introduction to the Final Project: Multimedia Asset Package.

Week 8: Research & synthesis | Gathering intelligence before creating content.

- Topic: Building a research dossier and using tools like NotebookLM for synthesis.
- Focus: Competitor analysis and finding inspiration.

Week 9: Spring break | NO CLASS.

Week 10: Audience strategy & personas | Moving beyond demographics to understand motivation.

- Topic: Creating detailed customer/user personas.
- Activity: Mapping user pain points to strategic solutions.

Week 11: Copywriting & voice | Writing with clarity and authority.

- Topic: The "Solutions Lens"—critiquing industry problems without being toxic.
- Reading: Selections from On Writing Well by William Zinsser (Simplicity and Clutter).

Week 12: Visuals for the web | Designing for the feed and the article.

- Topic: Blog posts, featured images, and aspect ratios.
- Workshop: Canva best practices for high-resolution assets.

Week 13: Social graphics & accessibility | Creating standalone assets that convert.

- Topic: Social cards, call-to-actions (CTAs), and the necessity of alt text.
- Focus: Designing for accessibility and mobile screens.

Week 14: Branding & consistency | Ensuring your organization looks the same everywhere.

- Topic: Style guides, branding kits, and defining visual rules.
- Activity: Building the "instruction manual" for your brand.

Week 15: Final project workshop | Crunch time.

- Topic: Peer review, troubleshooting, and polishing deliverables.
- Focus: Refining the asset package and ensuring all links work.

Week 16: Final presentations

- Activity: Final project overview and course wrap-up.

Grading Breakdown

Schedule of assignments (tentative)

Dates are subject to change based on the pace of the class. Check Canvas for the most current deadlines.

- **Week 2** | Academic engagement verification
- **Week 4** | Media markets, communities, and information needs
- **Week 6** | Readings: Enshittification & file organization
- **Week 7** | Design a slide deck that doesn't suck
- **Week 8** | Research dossier for final project
- **Week 10** | User/customer persona
- **Week 12** | Critical copywriting: Calling bullshit with a solutions lens
- **May 4, 2026** | Final project: Multimedia asset package (~40% of grade)

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Media markets & information needs (20 pts) Analyze a specific media market to identify gaps in coverage and community information needs. You will determine where opportunities exist for strategic communication intervention.

Readings & file organization (25 pts) Demonstrate your understanding of the "enshittification" of digital platforms and prove you can organize your project files professionally.

Design a slide deck that doesn't suck (50 pts) Create a slide deck on a non-serious topic (e.g., "Why Birds Aren't Real" or "My Ranking of Fast Food Fries") that demonstrates mastery of key design principles: contrast, hierarchy, alignment, and balance.

Research dossier (50 pts) Compile a dossier of research, inspiration, and competitor analysis for your final project. This collection will serve as the foundation for your campaign strategy.

User/customer persona (75 pts) Develop detailed personas representing your target audience. These must go beyond basic demographics to include motivations, pain points, and media consumption habits.

Critical copywriting (100 pts) Write a blog post or essay that identifies a problem within an industry and critiques it through a "solutions lens," positioning your chosen organization as a thought leader.

Final project: Multimedia asset package Create a comprehensive multimedia package for a company, organization, or cause of your choice. Deliverables include a style guide, branding kit, social media graphics, written content, and a strategic campaign overview. This is the capstone of the course.

Grading Scale

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	94-100%
A-	90-93%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-79%
C	74-76%
C-	70-73%
D+ (undergraduate only)	67-69%
D (undergraduate only)	64-66%
D- (undergraduate only)	60-63%
F	0-59%

Academic Honesty and Integrity

Academic Honesty is a core University value. Take time to understand the [University's policy](#). Your questions about academic honesty are always welcome. You can ask me or consult the [Center for Academic Success and Tutoring \(CAST\)](#) or the [Center for Writing Excellence \(CWE\)](#) before submitting work.

Course Policies

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

This is a hands-on workshop course. Your presence matters. If you miss class, you miss the opportunity to use the tools and get feedback. Communicate with me early if you have scheduling conflicts.

COMMUNICATION

I use the [Office Hours Scheduler](#) for appointments. For quick questions, email is best. I aim to respond within 24 hours on weekdays.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Work submitted must be your own. When using AI tools (like Copilot), you must disclose their use and ensure the final output meets the assignment's quality and accuracy standards. Unattributed use of AI where prohibited will be treated as an academic integrity violation.

Land Acknowledgement Statement

We respectfully acknowledge that Montclair State University occupies land in Lenapehoking, the traditional and expropriated territory of the Lenape. As a state institution, we recognize and support the sovereignty of New Jersey's three state-recognized tribes: the Ramapough Lenape, Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape, and Powhatan Renape nations.

We recognize the sovereign nations of the Lenape diaspora elsewhere in North America, as well as other Indigenous individuals and communities now residing in New Jersey.

By offering this land acknowledgment, we commit to addressing the historical legacies of Indigenous dispossession and dismantling practices of erasure that persist today.

We recognize the resilience and persistence of contemporary Indigenous communities and their role in educating all of us about justice, equity, and the stewardship of the land throughout the generations

Resources

ACADEMIC

- [Academic Calendar](#): View for important semester dates.
- [Academic Advising](#) is available for all students, with success centers in every college and school:
 - [College of the Arts](#)
 - [College of Communication and Media](#)
 - [College for Community Health](#)
 - [College for Education and Engaged Learning](#)
 - [College of Humanities and Social Sciences](#)
 - [College of Science and Mathematics](#)
 - [The Feliciano School of Business](#)
 - [The School of Nursing](#)
 - [University College Academic Advising](#)
- Graduate Students: Consult your Program Coordinator or the [Graduate School](#).
- [Career Services](#): Provided by each college and school's success centers.
- [Center for Academic Success and Tutoring \(CAST\)](#): Tutoring, supplementary instruction, and peer coaching in subject areas, time management, studying, and school-work-life balance.
- [Center for Writing Excellence \(CWE\)](#): Tutoring and workshops on writing.
- [The Disability Resource Center \(DRC\)](#): Assistance for students in receiving accommodations to equalize access. Use the [AIM web portal](#) to apply for DRC services.
- [Navigate](#): The tool that connects you to your support team across campus.
- [Public Speaking Resource Center \(PSRC\)](#): Assistance and coaching for presentations and job interviewing.
- [University Libraries](#): On the Montclair campus, University Libraries offers a host of [resources](#), including [course reserves](#); [streaming media](#); [study spaces](#); and [research help](#) by appointment, chat, and email, and through [discipline-specific guides](#).

WELL-BEING

- [The Office of the Dean of Students](#) resolves concerns that impact academic and/or personal

well-being: deanofstudents@montclair.edu/973-655-4118. For housing, food, or life concerns, see [Student Social Services](#); for professional clothing, see [Rocky's Closet](#); for food security, see [Red Hawk Pantry](#).

- Campus Safety
 - [Police](#): In the event of an emergency, call University Police at 973-655-5222.
 - [Emergency Exit Plans](#) are available for all campus buildings.
- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) provides free short-term counseling, [group therapy](#), [Let's Talk "walk-ins,"](#) and confidential referrals.
 - Access free online therapy resources with your Montclair NetID: [TAO](#) and [Uwill Teletherapy](#).
 - Crisis number: 973-655-5211.
 - **After-hours crisis number: 973-655-5211, option 2, or University Police: 973-655-5222.**
 - The National Suicide Prevention Hotline offers 24/7 support at 800-273-8255.
 - [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#): Call or text **988**.
- [MSU Cares](#) helps students who are alone, stressed, or afraid. Community members may report concerns about a student via a [CARE Report](#).
- The [Office of Student Belonging](#) is dedicated to creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all students.
- [Student Health Center](#)

STUDENT SERVICES

- [Red Hawk Central \(RHC\)](#): Provides support and resources for Student Accounts, Financial Aid and the Registrar. Live chat available at the website for referrals and quick questions.
- [Undergraduate Student Guide](#) or [Graduate Student Guide](#). See additionally:
 - [Campus Climate for Civility and Human Dignity](#) aims to foster an atmosphere of respect, understanding, and goodwill.
 - [Preferred Name](#): Students may select their preferred name for use at the University. Apply online to make changes.
 - [Sexual Violence Policies and Support](#): The University is committed to a safe environment, and investigates all reports of sexual misconduct. If you share sexual misconduct information with instructors, your instructor is required to report this to the Title IX officer.

Technical Support

- To troubleshoot Canvas problems, click "Help" in the left-hand navigation, visit the [Montclair State Canvas Student Orientation](#), or consult the [Instructure Canvas Student Guides](#).
- Canvas browser recommendations: Chrome, Firefox or Edge. Safari is not recommended.
- Call the [IT Service Desk](#) directly at 973-655-7971 or itservicedesk@montclair.edu for support with log-in, network access, email, and university software and hardware.
- Maximize Wi-Fi functionality by connecting to [MSU Secure Wi-Fi](#) using your NetID.
- Software:
 - Students have free access to [Microsoft Office 365 Education](#) and [Google Apps for Education](#); specialized software is available at the [MSU Software repository](#).
 - Members of the Montclair community can access **Copilot** with [Enterprise Data Protection](#) by visiting copilot.microsoft.com. Log in with the “Continue with Microsoft” login option, then by using your NetID@montclair.edu credentials to ensure your work is protected under Montclair State University’s enterprise security standards.
- [Public computer labs and on-campus loaner laptops](#).

Schedule of Assignments

Due Date	Assignment	Type	Points
1/29/26	Read the Cluetrain Manifesto	Assignment	25