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Comm-490: Convergent Media and the 2008 Election (Honors)
Capstone and Skills Course
Description and Work Plan
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Description: COMM-490: “Convergent Media and the 2008 Election” is a journalism skills/Honors capstone course that explores the various storytelling techniques available to Web journalists throughout the presidential election cycle. The class consists of four assignments in traditional print reporting, video documentary, blog storytelling and interactive reporting, all of which comprise a portfolio to be graded by my faculty advisor, Prof. Dotty Lynch.

The four assignments, in order of their due dates, are as follows:

1. **A politics blog, called politics@theEAGLE***. One of the foremost rules of journalism is to inform your readers fairly and objectively, and newspapers often assume their staff reporters and editors are the only writers capable of that task. Not so. If the past few years have taught journalists anything, it is that communities – individual locales, publics interested in specific topics and, of course, motivated students – are just as ready and able to deliver dynamic content as trained reporters are. Politics@theEAGLE is an exercise in that very principle – community reporting and blogging – and it seeks to offer a unique perspective on the '08 election. The blog consists of two parts/assignments:

- a. ConventionWatch – Covering the Democratic and Republican National Conventions is expensive, if not logistically impossible. However, there are a number of AU students attending or observing both or either the DNC and/or RNC, many of whom want to tell their stories and analyze the election in their own unique ways. ConventionWatch pools those students – eight, to be exact, split between the conventions – for writing, photos and videos that document how AU students have helped during this historic election year. In addition to editing and moderating this blog, my role during ConventionWatch is to write weekly analysis pieces and answer user questions in the form of blog entries.
- b. Once the conventions end, the blog will continue to function. I will update the blog at least once a week, documenting, reporting or analyzing the most important election issues as they affect students. I may solicit contributions from other *Eagle* writers, but my portfolio will consist solely of my work. I hope to run the blog until the Nov. 2 election, which would amount to at least 12 blog entries, all of which would be 400-words or more. **DUE DATE: Recurring, but no later than NOV 2.**

**Although the project share's The Eagle's name, I am in charge of it. I am The Eagle's Special Projects Coordinator, and I'm wholly responsible for the newspaper's election coverage. Most, if not all, of my work will be published, but it will be submitted at the same time as my portfolio; The Eagle will not receive (and therefore edit) my work before it makes print, and Professor Lynch will not edit the work prior to the content's submission to The Eagle.*

2. **Politics@theEAGLE podcast** – In addition to reporting and opining about the election, the capstone portfolio will include five podcasts, produced each week between now and the election. The podcast, which I hope to make available on iTunes and the blog Web site, will include summaries of the most popular blog posts, original analysis and some reporting. **DUE DATE: WITH PORTFOLIO**

3. **A two-part article series, 2000-word minimum, on the type of economy graduates might**

experience during a McCain or Obama administration. Blogs and interactives are important, but in-depth reporting will always be the cornerstone of good journalism. This capstone, despite dabbling in more Web-based forms of storytelling, emphasizes writing above all other skills.

The topic for the in-depth story should prove unique: An interesting fact about this election is that all students, from the class of 2009 to 2012, will graduate while the next president is in office, so every student will experience the economic policies the winner implements. My two-part series would analyze the type of economy graduates might face, including interviews with experts in the field, professors at AU, campaign staff and students.

With this story, I want to incorporate as much multimedia as possible. This, for example, means bringing a video camera to my interviews, among other things (though I cannot predict with full certainty which tools I will use). This article is the backbone of my capstone and this independent study, and for timeliness's sake, it must be finished/possibly published by the end of October. Thus, **DUE DATE: OCT 17.**

4. A 10-15 page narrative article analyzing the effects of new media on '08 election reporting. In lieu of a 15-page research paper, I would like to write a 15-page narrative – another growing Web storytelling technique – about my experiences. Instead of merely synthesizing information provided in published scholarly articles, I'll interview researchers and reporters and report my findings (and my own experiences) in magazine format. **DUE DATE: DEC. 10**

Grant Proposal

Although student journalists have a variety of open-source programs and free services at their disposal, hardware is not as easy to procure. The school's Media Production Lab makes its equipment available primarily to students in pre-designated courses, specifically Visual Literacy, in order to prevent shortages. And personal purchases are incredibly expensive; to replicate the set-up *The Washington Post* uses for their video and interactive projects, for example, would cost thousands – a budget demand that this college senior, who only very recently met with honors advisors to ward off an unforeseeable financial aid crisis, cannot meet.

That's why I'm submitting a grant proposal for \$318.64. Everything included on the attached list is absolutely necessary, and the items are the cheapest of their kind. The video camera is the backbone of two of the four components of this project, without which onPolitics and my mini-documentary on the economy cannot happen. The HTML/CSS guidebook and media analysis texts are also crucial; they are two of the primary references I need for my capstone (that I could not already find in the library) and the prices I've submitted are, again, the cheapest I could find.

Any financial support, at the very least enough for the video camera, is very much appreciated.