

Jennifer C. Thomas

Teaching Activity

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

The truism which guides my teaching philosophy, is a quote which I created and consistently share with my students: journalists are the freedom fighters of the First Amendment, defenders of democracy and savvy and sophisticated storytellers. To that end, I believe that to learn one must understand, and then “act.” I believe the best way to achieve this is by combining pedagogy with practice.

Hands-on experience is the key for making it in this industry. As a veteran journalist, I am fortunate to have covered historical stories. As students discuss historical news events I am able to lend my first-hand knowledge— from the trial of George Zimmerman in the Trayvon Martin killing, to coverage of the September 11th Terrorist Attacks as the CNN 9am Show Producer, to Hurricane Katrina, and the Oklahoma City Bombing. I pair this valuable experience with current news stories and cases to lecture and teach on ethics, deadline management, business acumen, and newsroom politics. My students must actively practice the Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics and upon completion of the capstone can intelligently defend and practice journalism as a professional.

I am able to lead by example and combine the professional skills and values associated with the CHSOC and MJFC: “integrity and leadership, respect and civility, collaboration and professional practice.” I underscore the School’s motto, “Excellence without Excuse.” In my courses I stress journalistic standards and incorporate additional courses in media and journalism ethics. The students graduate knowing these standards, but also being able to understanding them in the context of the convergent 24-hour news cycle in which we live. They are informed, ethically sound, highly intelligent graduates who will easily transition from classroom to newsroom, control room, board room, or graduate school. They are also comfortable with working in teams and are thoughtful and creative storytellers with a commitment to the communities in which they will serve.

Understanding the intersection of digital media and core journalistic principles is also more important than ever. The expanding digital landscape, particularly the rise in social media outlets, has created a breed of social media-driven journalism, or citizen

journalism. This new field poses a possibly precarious impact on the next generation of media professionals and creates a challenging prospect for us professors who must stress the fundamentals of journalism, while embracing new constantly changing technologies. This is coupled with the fact that today's millennials are impacted in every aspect of their lives by convergence, while media professionals are challenged with keeping up with it. I recognize this challenge and have made strides to address it by ensuring the young media professionals can produce their work through various multimedia platforms.

Today's climate for journalists is a stormy one in which the media is vilified, oftentimes by the commander-in-chief himself. How to teach "journalism in the age of Trump" is one of the topics for which I have conducted research, and it is a timely topic for today's journalism students. I have also published work on teaching political journalism based on my experience.

I am an affable and rigorous instructor who believes that cognitive outcomes are enhanced by cultivating the pedagogy of experience. This includes scheduling field trips to NPR and the Newseum, as well as inviting industry colleagues to class to provide important industry insight. I have also made significant contributions to the capstone course which transitioned from three (3) to six (6) credits and have introduced industry-standard technology along with an exciting multifaceted methodology to learning in the courses I have taught: Multimedia Storytelling, Broadcast Journalism I, Broadcast Journalism II, Public Affairs Reporting Broadcast, and (6 credit) Capstone NewsVision Lab. My contribution has, in part, helped keep the CHSOC and MJFC a highly-rated and sought-after program for new students.

I continue to work as an industry professional with CNN to stay relevant to the industry in which I worked full-time for more 20 years as both a local and national news producer and Executive Producer/manager.

The highest commendation to my teaching is to witness the "fruits of our labor" by the success stories of the graduates. It is also most humbling to receive a continuous receipt of thank you emails from recent graduates ([see the Honors & Thank You's Sections](#)). A complete assessment of my teaching may also be found on my [ePortfolio](#).

I remain committed to give my all to my students and to this noble profession.