

Innovative Leadership: Storytelling for Social Impact

Brown University Summer Leadership Institute

July 11th – July 22nd, 2016

Classrooms: Computing & Information Systems Room 227 & List Art Center Multimedia Lab 315

(First Class Meeting in CIT 227)

Instructor:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

To engage audiences and inspire action, it is no longer enough to simply present “the facts.” Global leaders must be able to transform these facts into compelling stories that captivate audiences. From Kickstarter to Snapchat, TED Talks to IDEO, stories are all around us and are invaluable tools for promoting innovation, inspiring empathy, and igniting change. In this two-week summer course, we will explore the role and value of storytelling for social impact and experiment with researching, editing, and producing unique and captivating stories.

This course begins by exploring the pervasiveness of stories in contemporary society. We will critically examine how stories impact our daily lives and the science behind why storytelling is such a powerful approach to conveying ideas, thereby making it an essential skill for global leaders. Students will apply this knowledge to contemporary case studies and analyze how individuals and organizations have (or have not) effectively used stories to influence social movements, promote businesses and brands, and share knowledge.

After investigating the history and contemporary influence of storytelling, students will engage in a variety of interactive and collaborative workshop-style exercises to find their unique narrative voice and craft an original story. Students will experiment with and evaluate a variety of storytelling media—film, podcasts, photography, writing, etc.—through a series of exercises like “StorySLAM” competitions and story hunts, which will help them to determine the most appropriate medium (or media) for their particular story. To create their story, students will practice and master the essential elements of effective storytelling, including: conducting in-depth research, storyboarding, drafting, editing content, obtaining feedback from peers, revising, and producing a final piece.

In this course, students will gain first-hand knowledge about the power of storytelling as an effective method for social change and an essential leadership tool. By the end of this course, students will be able to evaluate and employ basic storytelling techniques and craft and present a compelling story. The ability to tell one’s “story” and present one’s work in a clear, convincing manner is an essential skill for pre-college students. This course, therefore, serves as a springboard, helping students to master skills--persuasive discussion, captivating presentation,

and powerful writing--that will allow them to be more effective undergraduate students and campus leaders.

COURSE DESIGN

This class is an intensive, two-week summer study that meets from 9am-3pm from July 11th until July 22nd (excluding weekends). The course is divided between a morning and an afternoon session. Generally speaking, during the morning session, seminar-style discussions will be paired with active-learning exercises to stimulate critical analysis and engaged discussion of theoretical and methodological readings for the course. Students will learn how to critically analyze stories and storytelling practices through reading and discussing theoretical, empirical, and methodological work, and by conducting hands-on exercises (both in class and outside of class). Field research exercises will draw on storytelling techniques used by journalists, podcasters, and popular storytellers (e.g., Humans of New York, The Moth, etc.). A portion of time during each morning session will also be dedicated to group presentations and discussions of exemplary stories and storytelling practices.

The afternoon session of each class will be generally structured as a storymaking lab, with students working, in groups, on their collaborative storytelling project. This portion of each class will be devoted primarily to brainstorming, conducting secondary background research, conducting primary qualitative field research (e.g., observations, in-depth interviews, etc.), and refining, editing, and producing a final story. While the majority of this time will be devoted to intra-group collaboration, time will also be allotted for broader class discussions on current research findings, research issues and/or challenges, and exploration of potential overlaps in groups' stories. **Please note: mastery of technical skills in editing and production is not the emphasis of this course (nor would it be possible to master these skills in such a limited timeframe). However, a handful of afternoon sessions will be dedicated to exploring various softwares and technical platforms used for story production.**

The use of technology and various creative media in this course will be highly reflexive, and students are encouraged to explore and use various media to create their unique story. Students will have access to the List Art Center multimedia lab, which can be used as needed to conduct research, edit data and media clips, and complete their final course project. As well, a comprehensive list of relevant resources on the use of various technologies for storytelling will also be collected under a "Resources" page on the course website. No prior technological knowledge is necessary for enrollment in this course, but skills in audio editing, blogging, and/or digital storytelling are welcome.

ACTION PLANS

All participants of the Leadership Institute are required to complete an Action Plan as part of their participation. This Action Plan is "the capstone experience wherein the students apply the knowledge and skills acquired during the summer to construct a plan to address a community

need or global issue of interest to them.” Students in this course will be asked to apply concepts of story research, development, editing, and production learned in this course to develop and refine their Action Plan. More details about the Action Plan will be discussed on the first day of class.

COURSE COMMUNICATION

Students will be expected to regularly check the course website on Canvas to obtain readings, discussion materials, and assignments for the course. As well, on the first day of class students will be expected to sign up for **Slack**--a free messaging and group collaboration software--to communicate with the instructor, teaching assistant, and other students about course topics and assignments.

CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY

It is expected that all students demonstrate the utmost respect for their peers, the teaching assistant, and the instructor. Critical discussion and debate is encouraged, but disrespectful or hurtful language will not be tolerated. Under no circumstances will any work that is not the student’s original work be accepted. Any incidences of plagiarism will be reported to the Leadership Institute Dean and proper action will be taken. Phones and computers should be turned off during class (except during lab time or field research exercises) and there will be absolutely no Facebook, Snapchat, or Instagram allowed.

COURSE SCHEDULE (AT A GLANCE)

Date	Module	Morning	Afternoon
Monday, July 11th	Module 1: Storytelling in Contemporary Society	Storytelling in Contemporary Society	Elements of Effective Storytelling
Tuesday, July 12th		The Sociology of Stories & Storytelling	Listening Skills Workshop
Wednesday, July 13th		The Politics of Representation	Examining The ‘Dominant Narrative’
Thursday, July 14th	CHALLENGE COURSE		
Friday, July 15th	Module 2: Effective Storytelling	Collecting Backstory & Field Observations	Effective Interviewing Techniques

Monday, July 18th	Research Techniques	Public Speaking Workshop	Exploring the Story Formula
Tuesday, July 19th	Module 3: Workshopping Stories for Impact	Script Writing Workshop	Storyboarding Workshop
Wednesday, July 20th		Producing Stories for Impact	Storymaking Lab Time
Thursday, July 21st	Module 4: Presenting and Refining Stories for Impact	"Cringe Test" Workshop	Storymaking Lab Time
Friday, July 22nd		Presenting Final Stories	ACTION PLAN PRESENTATIONS

DETAILED COURSE SCHEDULE

Module 1: Storytelling in Contemporary Society

Storytelling is currently experiencing a popular revival. From Kickstarter to Snapchat, TED Talks to IDEO, stories are all around us and are invaluable tools for promoting innovation, inspiring empathy, and igniting change. In this module we will examine the role of stories and storytelling in contemporary society and discuss how and when stories have been effectively used for social impact. Specifically, we will seek to answer a variety of questions, including: what role do stories play in contemporary society? What are the elements of effective storytelling? How can stories affect social change? In what ways do stories reproduce existing or dominant narratives?

Monday, July 11th, 2016

- **Discussion:** Where do we find stories in contemporary society? What kinds of stories inspire us (or do not)? What are examples of stories that have been effectively and persuasively used for social impact?
- **Materials to Review:**
 - OpenDemocracy - "[What's So Special about Storytelling for Social Change?](#)"
 - Stanford Social Innovation Review - "[Tell Me a Story](#)"
 - Harvard Business Review - "[Why Your Brain Loves Good Storytelling](#)"
 - Ashoka - "[A Changemakers Guide to Storytelling](#)"
 - Additional materials to be assigned (TBA)
- **Assignment:** Come to class with two examples of stories (e.g., podcast, op-doc, short story excerpt, advertisement, documentary, etc.) that you believe display effective storytelling techniques, and draft responses to the following questions: why did you select each story as a model for effective storytelling? What storytelling techniques do you believe make each story effective (e.g., editing, production, narration, visuals, etc.)?

Tuesday, July 12th, 2016

- **Discussion:** What is the social role and value of stories and storytelling? In what ways do stories (re)produce inequality and power? How does the social relationship between the storyteller and the audience impact the kinds of stories that are told? In this class we will discuss these questions and also begin work on the final group storytelling project.
- **Materials to Review:**
 - Tilly - *Why?* (selections TBA)
 - New Yorker - "[Humans of New York and the Cavalier Consumption of Others](#)" (Review: [Humans of New York](#) if you have not already seen this project)
 - Berkeley Journal of Sociology - "[Crafting Feel-Good Multiculturalism in This American Life](#)"
 - Madden - *99 Ways to Tell a Story* (selections TBA)
- **Assignment:** Keeping in mind the readings from *99 Ways to Tell a Story*, come to class with a list of five potential story ideas for your group storytelling project. Remember that even with one event or one topic, there is an infinite number of ways in which your story can be told.

Wednesday, July 13th, 2016

- **Discussion:** How are understandings of groups and/or people (re)produced through stories? In what ways do stories and storytelling practices either confirm or challenge the "dominant narrative"? How do we define the "dominant narrative"?
- **Materials to Review:**
 - Letson - "[A Manifesto on Diversity in Public Media](#)"
 - Adichie TED Talk - "[The Dangers of a Single Story](#)"
 - RadioLab - "[Birthstory](#)"
 - Parks - *The Making of an Argument* (selections TBA)
 - Apeture Magazine - "[Vision & Justice](#)" (selections TBA)
- **Assignment:** Come to class with your group's completed story research plan. This should include: any backstory you have collected on your story topic, a list of potential interviewees, a list of interview topics for each interviewee, and any forms of media that you need to collect (audio, video, photos, etc.) to make your story.

Thursday, July 14h, 2016

- **LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE CHALLENGE COURSE - ALL DAY**

Module 2: Effective Storytelling Research Techniques

In this module students will be introduced to effective storytelling research techniques, begin to practice these methods, and learn to critically reflect on the politics and ethics of conducting qualitative research. Students will be asked to examine and reflect upon the ways in which their personal backgrounds shape how they investigate and understand individuals' stories and experiences.

Friday, July 15th, 2016

- **Discussion:** Interviewing is an essential component to storytelling and conducting *effective* interviews is even more essential. How should we prepare for an interview? How should one conduct herself during an interview? How do we conduct effective interviews that help tell interesting stories?
- **Materials to Review:**
 - Transom.org - "[On Interviewing](#)"
 - Transom.org - "[Interviewing with Your Skeptical Brain](#)"
 - Crafting Stories - "[Alex Blumberg on Conducting a Good Interview](#)"
 - CreativeLive - "The Power of the Right Question"
- **Assignment:** Draft an interview protocol (seven to ten questions) to be used for your interviews. If you have multiple categories of interviewees (e.g., "teachers" and "students"), you should create a unique protocol for each category of interviewees. Submit a final interview schedule (i.e., a list of interviewees) that you will meet with over the weekend and early next week.

Monday, July 18th, 2016

- **Discussion:** What is the story formula? (Why) does it work? How can we rethink our story so that it meets the formula?
- **Materials to Review:**
 - CreativeLive - "The Power of the Story Formula"
 - Additional materials TBA
- **Assignment:** Come to class prepared to workshop your storytelling project with the rest of the class. Specifically, your group should be able to present your story using Alex Blumberg's story formula: "***We are doing a story about X, and it is interesting because of Y.***"

Module 3: Editing and Producing Stories for Impact

Editing and producing stories is a process as challenging, if not more challenging, than finding and researching your story. In this module we will discuss the process of editing and producing stories for impact.

Tuesday, July 19th, 2016

- **Discussion:** How do we take our story ideas and research and produce a final story? Once we have all of our materials for the final story, what are the various ways in which a story can be told? What are the various forms one can tell an effective story?
- **Materials to Review:**
 - On the Wire - "[Writing: Getting Your Story Straight](#)"
 - Transom.org - "[My Kingdom for Some Structure](#)"
 - BSide Radio - "[Writing a Radio Script](#)"
 - Pixar - "[Storyboarding Mini-Documentary](#)"

- **Assignment:** Come to class with a “rough cut” of your final story. This should include: relevant audio clips, a list of characters, relevant scenes, and the “stakes” of the story. More detailed guidelines for the storyboarding assignment will be provided on Canvas.

Wednesday, July 20th, 2016

- **Discussion:** How can we effectively produce stories for social impact? What role does production play in the overall storytelling process?
- **Materials to Review:**
 - Materials to be assigned
- **Assignment:**
 - To be assigned

Module 4: Presenting and Refining Stories for Impact

In this module students will continue to refine their final group storytelling projects and present these stories to the rest of the class for constructive feedback. Students will engage in a variety of workshopping activities to solicit feedback on their stories, with feedback focusing on storytelling techniques, the politics of representation, and whether the story passes the “cringe test.” Students will learn to effectively and productively critique a story and also to incorporate this feedback to improve the overall effectiveness and impact of a story.

Thursday, July 21st, 2016

- **Discussion:** Coined by Robert Krulwich from Radiolab, the “cringe test” poses the following question: can you sit in a room next to the people you reported on and listen to the story together without cringing because you're worried you didn't get it right or you didn't represent their viewpoint accurately?
- **Materials to Review: To be assigned**
- **Assignment:** Come to class prepared to present your group storytelling project. Your group story should incorporate the elements of effective storytelling that we have discussed in class.

Friday, July 22nd, 2016

- **Discussion:** Groups will present their final group storytelling projects and receive feedback from peers.
- **Materials to Review: N/A**
- **Assignment:** Come to class prepared to present your group storytelling project. Your group story should incorporate the elements of effective storytelling and the feedback from the instructor, teaching assistant, and fellow students that has been raised in class. It should be a cohesive, compelling story and should meet the final assignment requirements (as outlined Canvas).