**VISUAL STORYTELLING VIC 4001**

Telling Stories of a Changing Miami through Digital Curation and Virtual Reality

School Communication, Architecture + The Arts, Florida International University

Spring 2017

(Updated 12/20/16)

Tuesday/Thursday
9 a.m. to 10:50 a.m.

This class will meet in GIS Lab, Hubert Library 124
AND
Mobile Virtual Reality Lab, Hubert 156/155

Dr. Robert Gutsche Jr.
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Individual workshop hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. (or by appointment)

**About Your Professor**

Dr. Gutsche has been a journalist since 1996, having written for *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, the *Wisconsin State Journal*, and other regional and local publications. He helped launch or co-founded two non-profit online news operations in 2009 and is the Faculty Lead of FIU’s Mobile Virtual Reality Lab. His scholarship surrounds cultural and social meanings of news, particularly in terms of how news media demarcate space and characterize place. Dr. Gutsche is the author and editor of four books and more than a dozen journal articles, and an affiliated faculty member with Florida International University’s African and African Diaspora Studies Program, the Sea Level Solutions Center, and FIU’s Latin American and Caribbean Center. He was a Research Scholar at the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri in 2015-2016.

**Course Overview**

A recent talk given by Knight Foundation officers and digital content creators of Human Rights Watch in Miami highlighted the fact that very soon, 50 percent of all content at *The New York Times* will be digital and visual in nature, with much of that work being created with virtual reality and 3D components. This class is designed to prepare students for heightened technical skills in digital storytelling, to enhance the technological production of digital work, and to improve innovations in digital storytelling that students will be able to express in trade and professional publications,
as well as in faculty-led, refereed articles. Questions for both practice and scholarship that students will explore include:

- To what degree does VR/3D target messages at specific audiences while still keeping objectivity of the reporting?
- To what degree can VR/3D enter the voice of the storyteller into the reporting as a means of engagement?
- How can journalists and strategic communicators use VR/3D to include graphics and text as data points, perhaps including questions and user comments?
- To what degree does the interjection of self in to VR/3D storytelling guide people to particular messages?
- What ethical and legal challenges exist in the use of the platforms to report and deliver information?

This course, therefore, will utilize the Mobile Virtual Reality Lab (eyesontherise.org/virtualEYES), a funded space of at least $50,000-worth of new technology and software that provides an opportunity to test new technologies. Students created this lab in Summer 2016 and run it through courses, 0-credit internships, and collaborative, funded initiatives. The success of the Lab depends on the involvement of students.

This course and the MVR Lab in Spring 2017 will lead to several major outcomes:

1. A 10- to 15-minute VR product that introduces users to the interactive and daily experiences of sea level rise, a story that has since been difficult to tell given the “hidden” nature of rising seas in South Florida. This is the Highland Village project.
2. A 10- to 15-minute VR product that discusses the Everglades and the role of infrastructure in South Florida to address rising seas, including in communities covered by The Miami Times. This is the Everglades and Miami Spaces project.
3. Curated research and stories of Bahamian immigrants in Coral Gables, Florida that includes an introductory VR product of the Coral Gables Museum and Coral Gables locations. This is the Immigrant Narratives project.
4. A VR product and digital content that encompasses new storytelling methods, including an April play. This is the Inside project.

In the end, ALL GROUPS will contribute to the outcomes necessary, including the successful publication of a VR documentary about sea level rise, work related to “A Sea Change” play in April, a February Open House, public events, and experimental work.

From these experiences, students will be able to learn about and discuss issues of:

- New technologies in the advancement of digital storytelling through virtual reality
- The creation of journalistic narratives and the cultural meanings assigned to them
- Multifaceted approaches to user testing and interpretation of audience reception
- Challenges of public journalism in a digital age
This class is an experiment, an FIU course designed around using virtual reality technologies to create public journalism and digital storytelling related to changing communities and environments. Slight changes in dates and tasks will occur.

Students should make themselves aware of the experience of using virtual reality and consider sitting down when viewing virtual reality or otherwise understand potential health effects of using this technology: vrs.org.uk/virtual-reality/human-factors-and-user-studies.html. Please discuss with your instructor if you have concerns.

**Project Partners**
- FIU School of Communication + Journalism (SCJ)
- FIU SCJ Mobile Virtual Reality Lab: eyesontherise.org/virtualEYES
- Coral Gables Museum
- FIU Coral Gables Virtual History project
- FIU Digital Collections
- FIU Sea Level Solutions Center
- eyesontherise.org

**Student Learning Objectives**
1. Examine current understandings of journalism in a digital age
2. Identify and critique methods for examining the role of journalistic traits in content creation
3. Execute community based journalism via digital innovation
4. Analyze audience methods and forms of analysis through critical and cultural explanations identified in current scholarship
5. Express issues of power, economy, and reception through clear and critical forms of language and argument

**Applying Learning Objectives**
Students can see in the schedule below how these objectives are applied through a written “purpose” for that course period, assignments, readings, and discussion topics.

**Required Readings**
Other readings may be provided in class or in the Mobile Virtual Reality Lab

**Assignments/Assessments**

In-class Responses to Readings (10): 20 percent
Students will be required to submit a one-page response to the readings; these will be conducted in class. Students must define the concepts that tie the readings together for the week and apply them through an original, scholarly analysis of an assigned reading, connecting all readings for the week with proper citations and thought that extends beyond personal opinion. These assignments are pass/fail. To “pass,” papers must: 1) include a concept definition that is applied correctly to the readings; 2) address new ideas and conceptualizations of how the readings operate together (or do not); 3) not include first-person and blatant opinion, but be presented in a scholarly and logical progression; 4) appear to be thoughtful and written at a high level of comprehension and construction.

**Project Progress Points (5): 50 percent**

Each group will have Project Progress Points, which appear on the syllabus. At this point, members of each team will be assessed as to meeting the required points of progress. Expectations for each of these PPP sessions will be explained in advance to the project members.

**Sharing with Project Partners and Community: 20 percent**

**Tweaks to Projects and Final Submission: 10 percent**

**Groups and Responsibilities**

These are major groups/responsibilities. Some duties might be shared, others created as the projects grow.

**Professor / Team Lead:** provide funding and university support for lab and individual projects; oversee technological innovation and collaboration with community and university stakeholders; manage groups

**Lab Managers:** responsible for access to space, control of equipment, and organization of team members

**Post-Production:** branding and communicating the effort via technological integration into affordable public options; creating and updating video and language for public consumption; coordinate efforts with faculty and community members; assist other groups as needed

**Production:** prepare and develop lab space and technology and facilitate production of stories with projects; assist other groups as needed

**Immigrant Narratives:** facilitate relationships with publics and experts to create narratives via technology; write and produce scripts and narratives; become subject experts and source experts for narratives; assist other groups as needed

**Highland Village Project:** facilitate relationships with publics and experts to create narratives via technology; write and produce scripts and narratives; become subject experts and source experts for narratives; assist other groups as needed
Inside Project: oversee data collection of water samples for music project; produce research and data visualizations related to sea level rise to be verified and used with other groups, including a play about climate change in April.

Everglades and Miami Spaces Project: discuss the Everglades and the role of infrastructure in South Florida to address rising seas, including in communities covered by The Miami Times.

Assessment
The following grade scale will be used as a guideline for determining final grades:

- A = 93-100
- A- = 90-92
- B+ = 87-89
- B = 83-86
- B- = 80-82
- C = 70-79
- F = 71 or below

Extra Credit
None

Attendance Policy
Traffic and rain are not appropriate explanations for lateness or absences. We live in Miami. Therefore, only one class missed this summer without appropriate documentation (see later in syllabus) will be allowed. Every absence after that reduces the student’s final grade by half a grade. In other words, an A would become an A-.

Additionally, two tardies will equal an absence; attendance is taking immediately at 9 a.m.

Makeup/Late Work
Excused absences involve true emergencies (i.e. illness or death in the family, or otherwise according to FIU policy). In order to receive consideration for an excused absence, you must do several things:

1. It is your responsibility to get in touch with me within one business day in the event you qualify for a makeup exam or quiz in order to be considered for makeup or to have a late assignment graded. Otherwise, all missed work will receive a zero.

2. You must provide appropriate documentation. In the case of a medical emergency, you need a doctor or hospital note that says you could not attend class on that date. In the case of a death (family emergency), you need to provide something documenting the dates and your relationship to the deceased, such as an obituary or funeral program. Examples of unacceptable documentation include a note saying you were seen by a doctor or health center, airline tickets to a family event, etc. Other
absences that will not count as excused include family events (wedding, family trip, etc.), conflicts with other classes or school related activities (such as grammar exams or reviews), car trouble, a work conflict or an internship obligation. Failure to provide appropriate documentation means the absence will not be excused.

**Attitude**

It’s everything. We all have bad days, but we don’t need to make our own issues known to the world. If you are having troubles that you think would make their way into the classroom, please let me know. In this class, let’s support each other – and that means showing respect. In fact, if you have something going on that may put you out of commission for the class period, just tell me that (I don’t need to know details). Students who fail to do this will be asked to leave during that class period. Give respect. Get it.

**Discussion of Sensitive Topics and Policy Related to Student Concerns**

At times, conversation in the course, and in journalism, advertising and public relations, may have offensive (or uncomfortable) tones. Covering such topics is a necessary part of the journalist’s role in society and dealing with these topics is an element every communication professional will face at one time or another. Discussing these topics also is important to being a critical media user and member of society. However, this freedom to discuss issues of a sensitive nature does not allow for sexual harassment, racism and other forms of discrimination. If you have concerns about conversations in the classroom or the content shared, please discuss them with me.

Lastly, and just to let you know, **in all facets of this course, you are responsible for your own education and knowledge-base.** I am here to help lead you in the “right direction(s).” That means, stopping by during workshop hours (or making appointments outside of those hours).

**Academic Honesty**

Florida International University is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellent teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly to demonstrate the quality of their learning.

Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct, which demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University. All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for academic misconduct, they will be subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Handbook.

Misconduct includes: Cheating – The unauthorized use of books, notes, aids, electronic sources; or assistance from another person with respect to examinations, course assignments, field service reports, class recitations; or the unauthorized possession of examination papers or course materials, whether originally authorized or not. Plagiarism – The use and appropriation of another’s work without any indication of the
source and the representation of such work as the student’s own. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is responsible for plagiarism.

Any student who fails to meet these expectations will not only fail the course, but will also be reported to the Chair of Journalism + Media and to the Dean of SCJ.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
The Disability Resource Center collaborates with students, faculty, staff, and community members to create diverse learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and sustainable. The DRC provides FIU students with disabilities the necessary support to successfully complete their education and participate in activities available to all students. If you have a diagnosed disability and plan to utilize academic accommodations, please contact the Center at 305-348-3532 or visit them at the Graham Center GC 190. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations. Requests for academic accommodations need to be made to me during the first week of class. Accommodations made mid-semester are not retro-active.

Course Schedule and Assignment Dates

Each class period constitutes a Workshop. This outline makes specific, additional activities. Empty space indicates space for learning on-the-fly.

Week 1: Introduction and Learning Our Mission & About Lab Space
Purpose: Learning Outcome 1
1/10
Course Introduction
In class: Assign Groups
In class: Risk Form and Visit Lab

1/12
Article: Locating Whiteness in journalism pedagogy
Article: Leaning in: A student’s guide to engaging constructively with social justice content
In class: Workshop and Organize

Week 2: Learning Lab Projects, Software, and Researching Topics
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 1, 4
1/17

1/18
Article: A Theory of Vivid Media Violence
Due: Response
Due: UPDATE 1
Week 3: Perfecting Software and Projects for Public Display
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 2, 5
1/24
Article: What is Interactivity For?

1/26
Dunaway, Introduction and All of Part 1
Due: Response

Week 4: Public Engagement
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 3, 4, 5
1/31
Due: UPDATE 2

2/2
OPEN HOUSE

Week 5: Applying Public Perceptions and User Experience
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 1, 2
2/7
Dunaway, All of Part 2
Due: Response

2/9

Week 6: Expanding Storytelling and Perfection Through Reporting and Research
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 2, 3
2/14
2/16
Due: UPDATE 3

Week 7: Taking Our Work Abroad: Public Engagement II
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 1, 3, 5
2/21
Dunway, All of Part 3
Due: Response

2/23
In class: Workshop (Possible Field Trip, Presentation at Local School)
Week 8: Applying Public Perceptions and User Experience  
Purpose: Learning Outcome 4  
2/28  
Gutsche and Rafikova, Introduction and Section 1 Introduction  
Due: Response  

3/2  
Due: UPDATE 4  

Week 9: Understanding Visual Culture  
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 1, 4  
Possible Guest  
3/7  
3/9  
Gutsche and Rafikova, All of Section 1 (Chapters 1 through 4)  
Due: Response  

Week 10: SPRING BREAK  

Week 11: Getting Back on Track  
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 4, 5  
3/21  
In class: Workshop and Organize  
3/23  
Gutsche and Rafikovas, All of Section 2 (Chapters 5 through 8)  
Due: Response  

Week 12: Implementing Critical Thought into Production  
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 1, 2, 5  
3/28  
Due: UPDATE 5  
3/30  
Gutsche and Rafikova, All of Section 3 (Chapters 9 through 13)  
Due: Response  

Week 13: Completion  
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 3, 5  
4/4  
Not required: “A Sea Change,” 4/4, 7:30 p.m., MMC
4/6

Not required: “A Sea Change,” 4/7, 7:30 p.m., BBC

**Week 14:**

4/11
Gutsche and Rafikova, All of Section 4 (Chapters 14 through 18)
**Due: Response**

4/13 Gutsche and Rafikova, Conclusion
**ALL FINAL PROJECTS MUST BE COMPLETE**

**Week 15: Public Communication**
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 1, 4, 5

4/18
**In class: SHARING**

4/20
**Due: Response**

**Finals Week: Assessment**
Purpose: Learning Outcomes 1, 5

**Due: Final Exam TBA**
Visual Storytelling Rubric
Responses

NAME ______________________

(20 points possible in each section; each assignment valued at 100 points)

Compliance & Presentation
Does this assignment follow the requirements?
Is the assignment correct in format?
Is the assignment presented in a clean fashion?
Are concepts from the course applied?

Research Quality & Sources
What is the academic rigor of this assignment?
Does the assignment have adequate sources?
Are concepts from the course applied correctly?

Writing Quality
Does this assignment use proper grammar & punctuation?
Is the writing strong, active, and interesting?
Are sentences concise and clear?
Does the assignment flow through proper transitions?

Argument
Are the arguments clearly stated?
Are the arguments sound and focused?
Does the evidence provided support the arguments?
Are the arguments conceptually based?

Analysis
Is the analysis analytical rather than descriptive?
Does the analysis utilize appropriate scholarship?
How well does the analysis capture the literature?
Does the analysis contribute to future research?
Are concepts from the course explicated throughout?

General Comments:
Journalism and Public Storytelling via Mobile Virtual Reality

Project Assessment Rubric

(20 points possible in each section; each assignment valued at 100 points)

NAME ______________________

Journalistic Research and Reporting
To what degree was the contribution accurate?
To what degree was the contribution complete?
To what degree was the contribution presented on deadline?

Storyboard and Narrative
To what degree was the contribution relevant?
To what degree was the contribution accurate and of strong journalistic quality?
To what degree was the contribution creative and engaging?
To what degree was the contribution presented on deadline?

Incorporation of Technology
To what degree did the contribution integrate various forms of storytelling?
To what degree was the incorporation meaningful?
To what degree was the incorporation completed successfully?

Community Involvement & Participation
To what degree was the involvement meaningful?
To what degree was the involvement respectful and impactful?
To what degree was the involvement and participation measurable?

Reflection and Application
To what degree was the reflection based in conceptual meaning?
To what degree was the reflection successful in meeting deadline and expectations?
To what degree was application of cultural meaning recognizable?