Leading journalism school uses Adobe Creative Suite 5 software to revamp its curriculum to prepare students to succeed in an evolving industry

For generations, the public has relied on journalists to provide information about world, national, and local events. Across media—in newspapers, magazines, television, and now online—journalists bring color and insight to the day’s hottest topics.

As a leader in media studies and education, the University of North Carolina’s (UNC) School of Journalism and Mass Communication trains the next generation of media professionals, including journalists, strategic communicators, teachers, and researchers.

"The media industry has evolved," says Terence Oliver, assistant professor at UNC. "Today, media professionals are expected to possess a wide array of storytelling skills that involve using digital technologies to make impactful communications through video, enriched graphics, animation, and other multimedia presentations. Our job is to figure out the best way to prepare them to meet these expectations."

In response, schools like UNC have adapted their curriculum to better prepare students as they enter the workforce. After conducting a commissioned survey of industry professionals—including recent graduates, hiring managers, and educators—the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication deployed Adobe Creative Suite 5 Web Premium and Design Premium software to revamp its media education curriculum for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programs.
Challenge
- Teaching students advanced multimedia skills with industry-standard software
- Adapting curriculums to match a changing industry
- Improving student job placement rates

Solution
- Digital design and animation
- Audio and video production
The University of North Carolina’s journalism school is using Adobe Creative Suite 5 software to revamp its media education curriculum for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students to better align with changing industry expectations and standards.

Benefits
- Created a unique, integrated multimedia curriculum
- Helped students develop broad multimedia skills
- Improved student job placements
- Featured student content on well-known sites like Discovery Education
- Won awards for high-quality student work

Beyond the traditional interviewing, writing, and editing skills of most mass communications programs, the revised curriculum leverages Adobe Creative Suite 5 to help UNC students develop a well-rounded skill set that enables them to produce high-quality, impactful, and engaging stories across a variety of media.

Knowing the market
Traditionally, journalists have produced stories through traditional journalism outlets including magazines and newspapers. The job mostly required the ability to investigate, write, and edit stories for publication. "Now, news sources can be anything from blogs and podcasts to traditional broadcasts presented on television or streaming online, which requires a much wider, more diverse set of skills," says Don Wittekind, assistant professor at UNC. "Using Adobe Creative Suite 5 software, we can help our students develop a well-rounded and solid skill set that makes them more employable."

To get a better understanding of what prospective employers are looking for in graduates, UNC dispatched a Ph.D. student to survey industry professionals. The survey was designed to gather information about different positions within media organizations, the skills required for those roles, and the relative preparedness of recent hires with regard to these areas of expertise. Participants in the survey answered questions regarding the frequency of their use of a number of specific skills and software programs in their current work.

The survey results showed respondents generally placed heavy emphasis on skills involving working with a variety of media platforms. The four skills perceived as most important were photo manipulation, creating two-dimensional graphics, editing video, and editing sound. In particular, respondents cited Adobe Photoshop® CS5, Illustrator® CS5, Flash® Professional CS5, and Dreamweaver® CS5 as essential components to daily activities.

"The results were actually a bit surprising," Wittekind says. "We realized that even though we’d been offering introductory courses for some of these topics, we needed to lean more heavily on the visual communications portion of our program, specifically in website design and animation."

Enhanced storytelling
Industry players are looking at skill sets that are able to leverage technology to help solve many challenges facing the journalism industry. The UNC curriculum has always provided students with courses teaching the basic concepts of graphic design and layout as an important part of understanding the publishing and journalism business. However, courses were offered specifically for degree programs, meaning that a student pursuing a career as a graphic artist would take graphic design courses while a student focused on becoming a broadcast journalist would not.
Now we use Adobe Flash Professional CS5, After Effects CS5, and other Adobe software to take students through a progression of animation and web development applications required by big media companies, advertising firms, and other hiring businesses.

Terence Oliver
Assistant professor, University of North Carolina

Taking cues from industry leaders, the department’s administrators overhauled the existing curriculum to focus on helping students develop audio and video editing, animation, graphic design, and web design skills—regardless of their program of study—using Adobe Creative Suite CS5 software. In the new curriculum, every student entering the school takes either an audio or video editing and production course to become familiar not only with general concepts, but also step-by-step execution. Students also take a subsequent three-course visual communications mini-program that focuses on leveraging Adobe Flash Professional CS5, After Effects CS5, Dreamweaver CS5, and ActionScript 3 to design and deploy highly interactive websites with advanced animations to enhance their stories.

For example, Oliver’s motion graphics course, offered spring semester, is a project-based course in which students utilize Adobe After Effects CS5 to communicate in some of the most sophisticated, contemporary, and effective methods in new media today. “Animation and web-based content is the new face of the media industry and our new curriculum reflects that reality,” Oliver says. “Now we use Adobe Flash Professional CS5, After Effects CS5, and other Adobe software to take students through a progression of animation and web development applications required by big media companies, advertising firms, and other hiring businesses.”

The intermediate multimedia storytelling course covers basic programming, graphic design, and storytelling for the web. Students work in Adobe Flash Professional CS5 and learn how to design, storyboard, and script interactive storytelling by combining words, photos, graphics, video, motion, sound, and voice-over narratives to convey news stories and entertain in a fresh, dynamic manner. Students also build on their image creation and manipulation skills using Adobe Illustrator CS5 and Photoshop CS5 as they push for professional-quality projects finalized in After Effects CS5.

The new—and continually evolving—curriculum gives UNC students hands-on experience in creating rich, engaging content from start to finish. This year, for example, students are collaborating to create a magazine. Starting from scratch and utilizing several Adobe software components—Adobe Illustrator CS5, Photoshop CS5, InDesign CS5, and InCopy CS5—students are producing Earth & Sky Magazine, directed toward the under-represented, culturally vibrant community of Native Americans in the United States.

In addition, students drive experimental digital programs like Reesenville.org (www.reesenville.org), a research-driven digital news site programmed, designed, reported, packaged, and edited by a staff of 26 undergraduate and graduate students from all disciplines in the school.
Using Adobe Creative Suite 5 software to develop engaging and interactive content, UNC students are being recognized for their outstanding work. Along with awards and other accolades, student-developed animated multimedia content has earned prime placement on high-profile websites such as Discovery Education.

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Reaping the rewards
Results of the revamped curriculum are impressive, with UNC students winning awards and accolades that recognize their outstanding work. Students were awarded a gold medal in the Large Group Multimedia Project in the College Photographer of the Year Competition. The project, called "Powering A Nation," is presented by News21—a program that joins 12 journalism schools across the country in hopes of serving as an incubator for innovation within the news media industry project.

Additionally, Discovery Education—a branch of media broadcaster Discovery Network—featured animated interactive content produced by UNC students on its website. "Having student work featured on such a highly respected site is a testament to the quality and depth of the work they’re creating," Oliver says.

More importantly, the skills students develop in the rejuvenated program help prepare them for future professional success. Many recent students have secured jobs at high-profile media companies like the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Smithsonian Magazine, and Atlanta Journal Constitution, as well as in other non-media organizations including Duke University Medical Center and the Smithsonian Institution.

"There are a lot of good animators and a lot of good writers in the journalism and media field. But they’re good at those individual things," Wittekind says. "Adobe Creative Suite 5 gives our students a broader, higher-level skill set that not only helps them create animations or write an excellent article, but to understand how a story should be told and to communicate it using all the tools available to them."

Adobe Creative Suite 5 Web Premium and Design Premium. Components used include:
- Adobe Illustrator CS5
- Adobe Photoshop CS5
- Adobe InDesign CS5
- Adobe Flash Professional CS5
- Adobe Dreamweaver CS5
- Adobe InCopy CS5
- ActionScript 3
- Adobe After Effects CS5

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