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All the news that fits on your cell phone, iPod or PDA

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Wireless handheld media devices are changing the ways in which many of us create and consume information. Research suggests that the number of people who have adopted cell phones, PDAs, iPods and other devices to accentuate their media consumption habits has increased dramatically in recent years. Yet studies which examine how such technologies are shaping media content are just beginning to emerge. So too are teaching strategies which engage students in conceiving of and then critically evaluating the pros and cons of wireless content delivery systems within the broader context of international audiences and world-wide communication networks.

This is a five-week research project designed for an international media studies course in which students write stories about a specific international non-governmental organization and then present those stories as basic Web sites which are specifically designed for the small screens of hand-held mobile devices. The collection of student Web sites becomes a text for the course in which students present and critique each others' work.

The aim of this project is twofold. The first objective is to help students gain a better understanding of the structural biases of different wireless media forms as means of communicating content to international audiences. By creating a Web site for extremely small screens, students directly confront the structural limitations of new wireless news formats. In our class discussions, particular attention is paid to both what is "won" and "lost" in terms of news content, quality, context, and reader comprehension in the era of iPod, cell phone, and Blackberry news formats.

A second objective is for students to research and become familiar with the internal organization and external media campaigns of one internationally-oriented NGO.

- **Week 1**

A detailed assignment sheet is handed out to students. Students are asked to investigate an international agency or non-governmental organization which they will profile. A series of Web links are provided on this sheet for data bases of international agencies and nongovernmental organizations (for example, <http://billie.lib.duke.edu/pubdocs/ngo/ae.asp>).

A short list of guideline questions are provided to help students begin their research. These include questions related to the following areas: (1) historical development; (2) stated mission; (3) funding streams; (4) media campaigns; (5) geographic reach of their chosen organization; (6) short-term versus long-term results or identifiable influences the NGO has had.

We spend a good deal of time discussing the expectations for this project and the types of research, writing, and designing that will be required. We also look at a series of sites online which are designed to be downloaded for wireless handheld devices.

- **Week 2**

Schedule Web authoring refresher sessions outside of class for those students who want a review or may be new to Web design. Attention is paid to the limitations of structuring information and designing for small screens.

- **Week 3**

Students turn in an annotated bibliography presented as a series of Web pages and the transcript to

at least one human source interview. In completing this part of the project, students are prompted to identify additional resources they will be using, and to get in contact with potential interviewees.

- **Week 4**

Students work on projects outside of class.

- **Week 5**

Students turn in their Web site projects, and the professor takes their digital files and links them to the course Web site. This becomes a new text for the class. Every student is responsible for reading and viewing every other student's site. Each student performs three Web site critiques of content and design. The critiques are organized so that every student receives at least three student critiques of their site in addition to the professor's critique.

This project has led to increased student interest in issues related to international aid, governance and possible job options following graduation. A number of students have begun using their media skills through internships at local non-profits.

Additionally, students have become much more aware of the structural variations and limitations of different media forms. Students have begun to take the skills they've learned from this project and applied them to projects for our department's online magazine and our college radio station. This project format can quite easily be adapted to the needs and particular content of different courses across a journalism and mass communication curriculum.