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USC Is Offering a Google Glass Course for Journalism

By Kurt Wagner

OK, GLASS, it's time to change journalism.

That will be the collective mindset of students taking "Glass Journalism," a new course slated for the fall semester at the University of Southern California, where students will be tasked with thinking up new ways for journalists to tell stories using augmented reality and Google Glass.

It's a first-of-its-kind class for USC, and web-journalism professor Robert Hernandez believes the class offers a rare opportunity for journalism to get ahead of a budding technology trend. Hernandez said journalists have been followers — not trailblazers — when using other technology like mobile and social media, but that the industry has a chance for a head start with Glass.

"As someone who hijacks technology for journalism, I want to be proactive about shaping what journalism will look like on this," said Hernandez, who worked most recently as director of development for *The Seattle Times* before joining USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism in 2009. "This platform is so new, no one has defined what journalism looks like on there. It's such an opportunity for the journalism industry to jump on there."

Hernandez is opening the class to all students at the university, although he will approve each signup. He expects roughly 12 students will join the class, including students from a variety of different backgrounds and majors, such as design, computer engineering, public relations, and of course, journalism. The class is intended for the advancement of



Matt Rosler, a member of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, gets a Google Glass lesson from a Google employee at YouTube Space in Los Angeles. *Chris Pizzello /Associated Press*

journalism, but is not limited to its disciples.

According to the syllabus, students will create apps for Google Glass that help enhance both storytelling and story consumption on the platform. Hernandez hopes to answer questions such as, what does long-form content look like on Glass? Or, how can readers create and watch stories using Glass?

They are difficult questions to answer, considering most Americans have never worn Google Glass, and very few people actually own a device (it's not yet commercially available.) Hernandez secured his device through an application to become a Glass Explorer with Google, and a few of his students have pairs of their own, which means the class should have roughly five in total.

Offering a class of this nature aligns with the Annenberg School's new strategy, which aims to provide more hands-on skills for students looking for jobs in communications and journalism, according to Ernest James Wilson III, the school's dean. When he took the role as dean in 2008, Wilson spent

months traveling across the country, and asking prospective employers what skills they expected from USC communications and journalism graduates. He found that much of what was being taught needed to be updated to reflect emerging technologies and the need for more holistic skill sets.

"They said, 'Our industry is upside down and inside out, and if you don't have students who can think upside down and inside out and have an appetite for that, we won't hire them,'" Wilson said. "That got my attention."

These meetings shifted USC's curriculum, paving the way for more unique classes such as "Glass Journalism" and a separate augmented-reality course taught by Hernandez in the fall of 2013. USC even offers a class that teaches students how to be a good mentee — that is, how to best learn from mentors in the working world.

"Glass Journalism" is not the first time Google Glass has been used at the university level. A Syracuse University professor tasked his social-media class with creating Glass apps last fall, and Northeastern University in Boston did something similar with Glass and healthcare around the same time.

At USC, Hernandez hopes his students will change journalism, an industry with deeply rooted practices that tends to be slow to change with technology. It starts with those in leadership positions within the field, Hernandez explained, a major reason why he's excited to take on this new challenge.

"Half my colleagues don't know what I do for a living," he joked. "They don't understand it, some of them might think I'm trying to kill journalism. The truth is I'm trying to save it, and advance it."

Ok, Glass, let's get to work.