

Brief Description

This is a request to purchase up to \$25,000 worth of 3D and VR production equipment and software to **enhance the technological production of digital work** in Journalism Capstone, Multimedia Production II, Digital Design and/or Digital Practice for Strategic Communication and in collaborations with graduate students in the Miami Ad School program through Trends in Graphic Design. Furthermore, the project will provide students in Visual Storytelling, Digital Theories, and Audience Analysis opportunities to have hands-on production experience in a class often focused on theory. Specifically, this effort complements VR work being done at FIU and is not redundancy; instead of creating a cave, we will use this equipment to **create mobile storytelling functions** for VR and 3D to replicate the role of the technological advancements in the field.

The New York Times since 2015 has examined the use of VR to report news (<http://www.poynter.org/2015/the-new-york-times-has-launched-a-virtual-reality-project-with-google/379970/>), and a recent talk given in Miami 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. Indeed, Adage indicates 2016 is the year that “sets the stage for virtual reality” (<http://adage.com/article/digitalnext/2016-year-sets-stage-vr/302050/>), and other media watchers indicate the need for advancements in this digital arena, particularly as new professionals enter the market (<http://www.poynter.org/2016/virtual-reality-the-next-frontier-in-journalism-ethics/390280/>).

To: Teresa Ponte, Juliet Pinto
From: Ted Gutsche
CC: Michael Sheerin, Elizabeth Marsh
Date: May 9, 2016
Re: Virtual Reality Equipment/Software Request

Purpose of Request

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.

To prepare students for heightened technical skills in digital storytelling, this request is to purchase 3D and VR production equipment and software to **enhance the technological production of digital work** in Journalism Capstone, Multimedia Production II, Digital Design and/or Digital Practice for Strategic Communication and in collaborations with graduate students in the Miami Ad School program through Trends in Graphic Design. Furthermore, the project will provide students in Visual Storytelling,

Digital Theories, and Audience Analysis opportunities to have hands-on production experience in a class often focused on theory.

Specifically, this purchase will **allow us to create (and view) journalistic and strategic communication storytelling** at the BBC campus without the creation of an entire VR cave, though this request includes the use one of the empty Editing Bays as the VR lab and the dedicated use of *at least* one of the five MacBooks from the MIIL, beginning in Summer 2016.

Lastly, this request, which will lead to **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?

Timeline

VR/3D is a new arena for SJMC, and we would like to become familiar with the equipment and by **Summer B to be prepared for the Fall classes**; this equipment and software would be used for initial work in Summer B's Journalism Capstone course.

Production Outcomes

The work that we would create from this equipment will assist the School in enhancing BBC's digital engagement with communities on issues of sea level rise and community preparation in visualizing the effects of changing environment. This will include:

- A VR/3D project 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
- A VR/3D project that examines the architecture and infrastructure of South Florida related to rising seas to **promote public, digital communication** about

future challenges to our built environment

- A VR/3D project that **shows users potential water height** in some areas of South Florida due to rising waters and absent of massive changes to infrastructure
- A social media and advertising campaign (also in VR/3D) to **engage audiences** with access to low-cost VR/3D opportunities to view and interact with the projects'

Student Learning/Curricular Outcomes

This project will provide enhanced digital skills for students and could be expanded into other forms of VR in other majors, as well as help provide insights and experiences for students in other classes, including in the Digital Media Studies major. Students in Audience Analysis, for instance, can understand more about the technological impacts on audience interactions with digital content, as they have been exposed to through the long-form digital multimedia project funded via **\$29,000 from University of Missouri's Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute** this past year.

Students have also successfully interacted with the coding, design, and usability of digital communication related to the sea level rise via a **\$35,000 Online News Association grant in 2014-2015** that led to a national award for scholastic journalism outreach, the creation of a web-based application that showcases sea level rise at eyesontherise.org, and a documentary and web-series produced by students. Furthermore, the VR/3D project will enhance collaboration with the FIU Sea Level Solution Center and help strengthen a **\$3,800, 11-member CARTA seed grant** effort to apply for **national funding for future work**.

These experiences of production, reception, interaction, analysis, and critique will provide students with **opportunities to connect with others** in the field who are experts in VR and 3D journalism, such as they did recently at Fusion, and to interact with others within CARTA who are doing VR on MMC. Again, this would not be a redundancy. Instead of creating a cave, we would use this equipment to **create mobile storytelling functions** for VR and 3D to replicate the role of the technological advancements in the field.

Additional Returns on Investment

This project will allow **advanced journalism and advertising/PR students** to make a name for themselves and for the project, enhancing the storytelling capabilities of the SJMC, and placing us on a national market of schools undertaking this effort. However, one should also note the return on allowing students the ability to **invest in their careers** in both digital media and in research related to advancements in communication as we attempt to make and **work with other FIU preminent programs** that will assist in recruitment, marketability of students, and the demand for our students as employees and communicators in **digital industries**.

Funding Options

Below, please see three tiers of funding that would help us. Of course, Tier 3 is the best investment, as it provides added value and room for experimentation.

Tier 1: \$12,000-\$15,000

This is the **most basic** level that would include GoPro technology, software, and supplies to create a lab for students. Here, we would still be limited in technology and supplies and would have to tap heavily into the current equipment room for dedicated tools. This would not provide adequate headsets, however, and so would leave us limited in what we could view, as well as produce.

Tier 2: \$16,000-\$19,000

This amount would enhance the **limited level of funding** by providing us with dedicated equipment beyond that of the VR-specific cameras and software and would provide opportunities for have the appropriate viewing headsets. This added funding would also provide secure travel gear to protect the equipment and casings to allow us to have underwater production.

Tier 3: \$20,000-\$25,000

This is the tier we want if we want **to do this right**. This would provide us the ability to have all from the first two tiers and would include the ability for us to have replacement material and equipment or repairs made when things go wrong, as well as to provide us with possible monies to travel or invite experts in for special workshops that could be open to the larger SJMC. Lastly, this tier assists in additional costs associated with enhancing the level of equipment to include more usable and technologically innovative elements as they appear on the market in "real time."

Involved Faculty

Ted Gutsche (Team Lead)

Journalism and Broadcasting

Use will be in creating VR/3D storytelling for eyesontherise.org and will be included in Journalism Capstone, Digital Theories, Visual Storytelling, and Audience Analysis courses

Elizabeth Marsh

Advertising and Public Relations

Use will be in Digital Design and/or Digital Practice for Strategic Communication and in collaboration with graduate students in the Miami Ad School program through Trends in Graphic Design

Michael Sheerin

Journalism and Broadcasting

Use will be in Multimedia Production II. Students produce semester-long projects on a variety of topics. (Past projects have included the Biscayne Bay Campus' 50th

anniversary celebration, the Uber vs. Taxi Miami-Dade County transportation dispute, and the growing craft brewery scene in South Florida. Use of VR/360 technology would have easily enhanced the visual storytelling aspect of these documentaries and others).

Juliet Pinto

Journalism and Broadcasting

Use will be in the continued establishment of BBC and SJMC as a center for sea level rise communication and environmental study.