

Degree Proposal
Master of Science in Media Innovation and Data Communication
College of Arts, Media, and Design

Executive Summary

The School of Journalism proposes a standalone, interdisciplinary Master of Science in Media Innovation and Data Communication program that focuses on new forms of data-driven media practice, creative digital storytelling, and strategies for fostering innovation in media fields. The new program draws on experience within the current M.A. in Journalism, which currently has a “media innovation” track that has drawn considerable external funding and has been highly successful at placing graduates in competitive positions at prestigious, national media outlets. Initially funded by a \$500,000 grant from the Knight Foundation in 2014, the program has also seen additional research funding – for example, the Stanton Foundation gave \$400,000 for research relating to the use of animation and data storytelling in video. Knight and other funders such as Google News and Facebook have continued to recognize the excellence and potential of the Northeastern School of Journalism and its media innovation faculty. A STEM-designated Master of Science would position Northeastern to attract more funding and increase enrollment.

The M.S. degree will continue our track record graduating professionals who are well-versed in the methodological principles of effective storytelling using the latest technologies. Our graduates have excelled as practitioners, strategists, and leaders in digital media and communications fields. Besides acquiring professional qualifications, graduates will also be ready to continue their education in Ph.D. programs in Media Studies, Journalism Studies, Communication Studies, and other related fields. The 36-hour degree program will also have close connections with the Information Design and Visualization M.S. in Art+Design, including one required course in that Department. This will allow more interdisciplinary work, embodied in new research teams such as the Center for Design and the Co-Laboratory for Data Impact, which spans Journalism and Art + Design faculty.

Program Description

The new Master of Science will offer a distinctive approach to knowledge and innovation in media fields, an approach rooted in the rigor of professional journalism — with its emphasis on empowered knowledge acquisition, empirical verification, and storytelling in the public interest — but one keenly attuned to emerging, data-driven technologies and their potential. The program capitalizes on recent, rapid advances in the application of data gathering, analysis, and visualization technologies to traditional modes of news production, as well as similar advances in video, animation, and augmented/virtual reality technologies. The program also reflects the importance of social networks and audience analytics to modern news-gathering organizations.

Our graduates will be prepared to become leaders in media firms and outlets engaged with cutting-edge technologies and innovative digital startups, as well as a broad range of media and communications organizations across the rapidly evolving digital economy.

While the program will be anchored in the School of Journalism, it will be an intentionally interdisciplinary degree, with one required course in the Art + Design Department, leveraging that department's STEM-oriented faculty who teach in the field of data visualization, as well as four electives drawn from across the university's offerings. In addition, the program will draw on Communication Studies faculty with expertise in areas such as network science and cybersecurity, as well as in fundamental theories of social psychology and communication. The partnership with Art + Design will enable students to gain sophisticated knowledge of well-developed literatures that can guide visual- and experience-related media practice. The partnership with Communication Studies will allow students to strengthen, in particular, their data communication-oriented work by giving them broader theoretical knowledge of areas such as social network analysis, privacy, framing, priming, and agenda-setting. In line with the university's vision to increase the scalability of our graduate offerings, we are restructuring two of our core classes—JRNL 6340 Fundamentals of Digital Journalism and JRNL 6306 Media Innovation Studio—to accommodate class sizes above 30 students through the use of modular teaching assignments and the strategic deployment of teaching professionals drawn from Boston's substantial pool of highly qualified media innovators. The digital communications revolution has affected all aspects of society, and there is strong demand from a wide variety of employers for graduates with knowledge and skills in a suite of relevant areas. The rise of social media has created a strong demand for persons who can tell compelling stories, engage with audiences, and leverage networks to achieve a variety of strategic goals.

Contribution to College and University Mission

The Master of Science in Media Innovation and Data Communication Program supports the University's Humanities mission by educating students who will be adept at communicating stories in the public interest across multimedia in areas such as data storytelling, video/animation, and social media/digital analytics, while also developing deep knowledge about how innovation in media can best be fostered. The skillful communication of information in order to relay complex content to wider audiences is directly aligned with the Health, Security and Sustainability research foci of the University. The curriculum reaches out to other departments and programs in the University to best identify relevant research questions and address significant cross-disciplinary issues. Core faculty teaching in the Media Innovation and Data Communication domain have strong research interests in key university priority areas and have affiliations with important university-wide institutions such as the Global Resilience Institute, Boston Area Research Institute, and the NULab for Texts, Maps and Networks.