

100,000 and Counting:

NewsU Serves Global E-Learning Audience

NewsU
A Poynter Project

Training for Journalists.
Anytime. Anywhere.

www.newsu.org

THE POYNTER INSTITUTE / NEWS UNIVERSITY

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The Poynter Institute's News University **has changed the way journalism training is offered to professionals and others.**

OVERVIEW

Since its launch four years ago, The Poynter Institute's News University has changed the way many journalists approach their jobs and how they train for them. The innovative site has led the way for a wide variety of journalists embracing e-learning, a growing cultural phenomenon that has Americans finding career development and job training online. News University is the premier online educational resource for journalists, educators, students and others who are interested in journalism skills.

Funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, NewsU recently passed the 100,000 registered users milestone and will celebrate its fourth birthday in April. From a site that started with 2,247 users at launch in April 2005, NewsU has grown consistently and rapidly to answer the call for training that journalists have specifically asked for.

Most important, NewsU works. More than 60 percent of NewsU's users said the courses helped them get better on the job.

"I credit NewsU for helping me do my job better than I could on my own, giving me courage to try new things," says Sheila Hagar, a reporter for the Walla Walla (Wash.) Union Bulletin. "I don't feel alone when I take a class."

In a time-crunched and cash-strapped world in which journalists are accepting more and more job responsibility, training is both much more necessary and simultaneously less of a priority for overstretched media outlets. NewsU fills that void by working with a variety of organizations to provide a wide range of courses across all skills and platforms. At the same time, NewsU courses are designed to meet the limited time and financial resources of journalists, educators and others. Many courses take just an hour or two to complete and most are free or low-cost.

NEWSU OFFERS 4 TYPES OF E-LEARNING

SELF-DIRECTED COURSES

These are the ultimate in e-learning flexibility. Start and stop whenever you like, progress entirely at your own pace, and come back anytime to review the material. The courses use interactive games, simulations and multimedia so they're more engaging than a screen filled with text.

ONLINE GROUP SEMINARS

Participants gather in virtual space, logging in from anywhere, day or night, over the course of several days or several weeks. An instructor guides the group through new materials, moderates discussion and provides individual feedback.

WEBINARS

There are live seminars or events broadcast over the Internet. Tune in from your computer at work or at home and ask questions in real time. Recordings of these seminars are also available as self-directed learning modules.

SEMINAR SNAPSHOTS

These are edited highlights from presentations at The Poynter Institute and other conferences, workshops and training events that capture and share key learning moments.

“

...I was being given an amazing opportunity to revive my own skills as well as a chance to help others who are keen to learn...

”

AMIRA ELGHAWABY
former editor-in-chief,
Muslim Link of Ottawa

61%

SAID NEWSU WAS HELPFUL TO EXTREMELY HELPFUL IN GETTING **BETTER** ON THE JOB (OR IN THE CLASSROOM)

Carroll Wilson is the managing editor of *Temple (Texas) Daily Telegram*. “We don’t have resources to send our journalists to faraway exotic places for training,” he says. So he encourages his staff to learn more at News University. “NewsU is essential to my operation.”

Beginnings

NewsU launched in April 2005 following the results of two studies that demonstrated the appetite for online journalism training. In a 2004 study about journalism training conducted by Urban & Associates, Inc., for The Poynter Institute and News University, 98 percent of the respondents said they would be at least somewhat interested in online training. In a study from 2002 titled “Newsroom Training: Where’s the Investment?” almost 50 percent of the news executives who responded said they would seriously consider using e-learning. That survey was conducted for the Council of Presidents of National Journalism Organizations, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

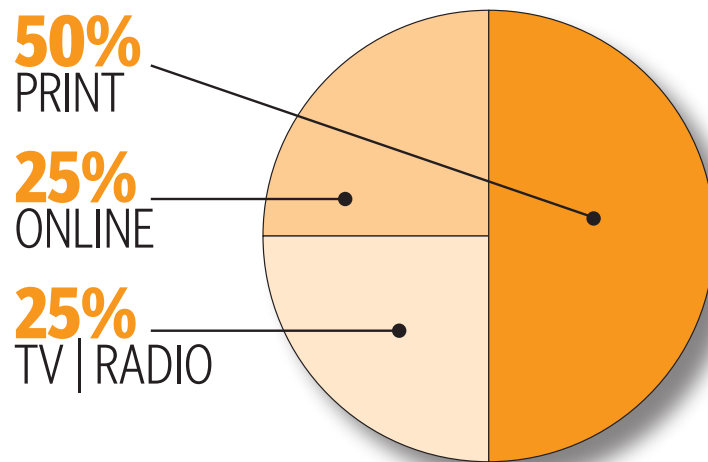
NewsU was designed to meet those needs, using the Internet as a way to reach those who wanted training. Just as the corporate world and universities have turned to online training, journalists, educators and students are coming to the e-learning available at NewsU. Today, NewsU has more than 85 courses, more than 20 Webinars and a series of multi-week online group seminars. Its Webinars have hosted more than 6,000 attendees since their 2007 launch, and there is a plan to host Webinars bimonthly in 2009.

The NewsU Approach

While the e-learning universe quickly expands, NewsU has charted its own independent course and approaches the creation of e-learning in its own way. Its continued aim is to provide focused, quality training for journalists anywhere at anytime. NewsU approaches that broad challenge by designing its courses with specific goals in mind.

- **Control.** NewsU users choose what course they want to take, when they want to take it, and where they take it. They can start and stop on their schedule, coming back as often as they like.
- **Time.** Most NewsU courses are designed to be completed in one or two hours, and they all allow users to move through the information at their own pace.
- **Focus.** NewsU modules provide specific training. Rather than a 16-week course about writing, NewsU courses focus on a targeted skill, such as interviewing or writing better leads.

WHO USES NEWSU?



- **Cost.** NewsU courses are either free or inexpensive. Particularly in an age of shrinking budgets, NewsU's aim is to be as accessible to as many as possible.
- **Engaging activities.** Information retention increases when participants get involved in a class rather than just listening to or reading information. NewsU courses include a wide variety of interactive activities such as quizzes, video simulations, and games, among other things, that help drive home the educational point while simultaneously inviting the user to return to the course time and time again.
- **Continual resource.** Courses include links for additional readings, contacts and other resources participants can review anytime whether to refresh their knowledge of a particular skill or to help them with an assignment on deadline.
- **Accessibility.** No matter how technically advanced a course may get, the goal is that courses will be available to both PC and Macintosh computers and not require programs to be downloaded. A high-speed Internet connection can help on some courses, but is never deemed to be necessary.

TOP10 NEWSU COURSES

- Cleaning Your Copy
- The Be a Reporter Game
- The Interview
- The Lead Lab
- News Sense: The Building Blocks of News
- The Writer's Workbench: 50 Tools You Can Use
- Language of the Image
- Get Me Rewrite: The Craft of Revision
- Five Steps to Multimedia Storytelling
- Math for Journalists

72%

SAID THEY WOULD DEFINITELY RECOMMEND NEWSU TO A COLLEAGUE; 19 PERCENT SAID THEY PROBABLY WOULD RECOMMEND NEWSU

TOP 10 COUNTRIES WITH MOST REGISTERED USERS

1. United States
2. Canada
3. India
4. Australia
5. Philippines
6. United Kingdom
7. China
8. Brazil
9. South Africa
10. Nigeria

70%

SAID NEWSU MODULES WERE USEFUL TO EXTREMELY USEFUL TO THEIR WORK (OR CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

Measuring NewsU's Effectiveness

That kind of strategic approach to the needs of its audience has paid off. One measure of success is the dramatic growth in the number of users on the site to more than 100,000 in four years. Other statistics show the value of NewsU's training. Sixty-two percent say they're likely to use the course they've taken as a reference in the future. Eighty-two percent say they'll return for another course.

But the true success of NewsU is how it's helping its participants become better journalists. Seventy percent say NewsU modules were useful to extremely useful to their work. Sixty-one percent said NewsU's courses helped them get better on the job.

"I really got excited when NewsU offered the multimedia course last year. I completed the course just before our paper hired our convergence editor and I couldn't wait to get started," says Christine Haines, a reporter at the *Herald-Standard* in Uniontown, Pa. "Since then, I have developed a travel column for our newspaper's entertainment site, incorporating slide shows and have had the opportunity to produce several news feature pieces. It's great having the opportunity to use all the skills I've acquired over the years and to add to them daily."

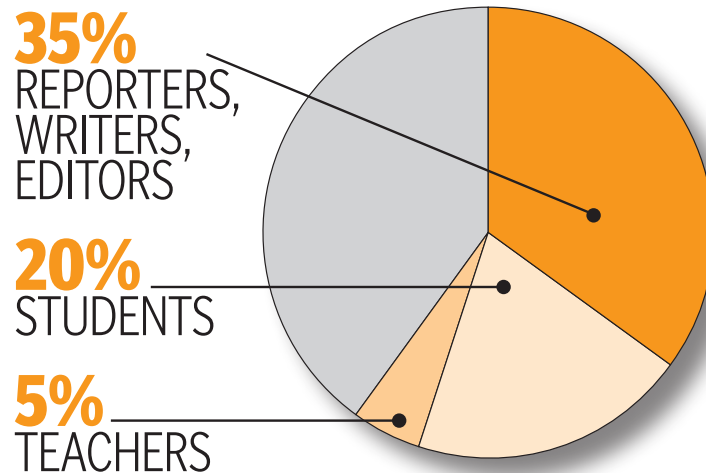
"NewsU broke me out of my writing rut. Rather than becoming complacent, I began to labor over my stories so I could make them the best possible work under deadline," says Tasha Kates, a reporter for the *Daily Progress* in Charlottesville, Va. "A few months later, I got a better reporting job at a bigger newspaper."

John Bonner, a multimedia journalist for Toronto Social Justice Magazine often works alone and doesn't have the opportunity to learn from others on an everyday basis. "With NewsU, I have access to a variety of mentors with different journalistic styles," he says.

As important, NewsU has discovered a new role: serving as adjunct faculty across hundreds of universities across the world. For many educators – at colleges and high schools – NewsU is a digital textbook that is current and interactive. Educators are using e-learning to supplement classroom instruction, and students are responding enthusiastically.

"NewsU is perfect for my traditional and adult students," says Audrey Wagstaff of Hiram College in Ohio. "It's visual, immediate and interactive. Obtaining and holding (students') attention is increasingly difficult, given the type of media their exposed to, but they actually like sitting down a taking a course with NewsU because it contains material they can mold and interact with."

WHO USES NEWSU?



Training Beyond Borders

The global reach of the Internet has made NewsU the place to go for journalism education worldwide. Antonieta Rico, a U.S. Army journalist who served a tour of duty in Tikrit, Iraq, says that most of her learning as a journalist has been self-motivated and on the job. “I did not feel like I was properly capturing the essence of the soldiers and their stories in my articles,” she said. Then she discovered NewsU. Not only did she enroll in a wide variety of courses, but she also assigned all of the journalists in her charge to do the same.

One of the major plusses for them was the lack of time constraints. “It also helped that it was self-paced through the Web,” she said. “We never knew when we would be out on missions or when we would have a computer available.”

In Saudi Arabia, Arab News reporter/translator Hassn’a Moktar, points out that Saudi women cannot receive degrees in journalism within the country and that NewsU has helped her further her career: “I gained so much through the information each course provided,” she said. “These were not only helpful courses that taught me so much about building stories, verifying facts and writing, but they were also free-of-charge.”

NewsU currently has users in more than 200 countries – that’s more than the United Nations has members – including Rwanda, Faroe Islands, Burkina Faso, and Myanmar.

“

NewsU is the reliable source in my work life that has given me guidance in the challenging times.

”

JENNIFER COOK
executive producer,
Central Florida News 13

82%

SAID THEY ARE
LIKELY TO TAKE
ANOTHER NEWSU
MODULE

“

NewsU broke me out of my writing rut. Rather than becoming complacent, I began to labor over my stories so I could make them the best possible work under deadline.

”

TASHA KATES
Reporter,
Daily Progress

76%

SAID HALF TO ALL OF THE COURSE CONTENT WAS HELPFUL IN THEIR CURRENT PROFESSION (OR IN THE CLASSROOM)

Wide Partnership Base

NewsU's breadth of expertise is apparent to journalism e-learners simply by looking at the wide variety of course partners. Radio-Television News Directors Association and Foundation ("Advice for the Newly Named News Director," "Reporting Across Platforms"); Association of Health Care Journalists ("On the Beat: Covering Hospitals"); Media Bloggers Association ("Online Media Law"); National Press Photographers Association ("Best of Photojournalism: What Makes a Winner"); and the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma ("Journalism and Trauma") are just a tiny sampling of the more than 30 partners and subjects NewsU has covered in its first four years. That kind of broad base of content and willingness to tackle any subject makes NewsU even more valuable to everyday reporters who carry a wide variety of responsibilities and need every tool available to help create stronger journalism.

NewsU's work with partners goes far beyond the actual coursework. From creating newsletters to building custom Web-based registration systems, NewsU has found many ways to foster journalism training throughout the industry.

What's next?

Courses that NewsU is set to launch include "Anatomy of a Multimedia News Organization," "Reporting Global Issues Locally," and "Reporting on Nonprofits."

One of the most innovative courses NewsU is set to launch, though, is "Watching TV News: How to be a Smarter Viewer." This is NewsU's inaugural news literacy course and the first aimed at the general population rather than journalists. The course's goal is to help television viewers understand how and why broadcast journalism works the way it does. When the average viewer understands the way journalism works, he or she can make more educated choices on what journalism to consume. Courses such as this one – and any future ones NewsU produces with its partners – will help consumers continue to understand and choose quality journalism sources.

NewsU is also in the midst of recreating itself. A new version of the site should be in development by year's end and launching early next year. While improving the technological possibilities in course design, the most significant improvement will be to the overall user experience, allowing users to communicate with and help one another. "The idea is to create a sense of community for those who want to share and ask questions of their fellow participants," says Howard Finberg, director of interactive learning at The Poynter Institute. "You could call it a learning network. Your training should be much more than what's on the screen."

Additionally, NewsU is planning to expand its audience by offering courses that serve users in other countries in their native languages. Through partnerships with the International Center for Journalism and other international journalism organizations, NewsU will extend its mission to help journalists around the world make the transition to the digital age.

By expanding its global outreach, NewsU can continue to help journalists such as Elias Bangura, a reporter in Sierra Leone, who had little experience in his field and used NewsU to further his career. “(NewsU) has my eternal gratefulness and appreciation,” Bangura says.

Through these expansion efforts, NewsU can continue to help people like Richard Craig, an assistant professor at San Jose State University, who says he is a better teacher because of NewsU. “In teaching about everything from Web journalism to news writing to contemporary mass media, NewsU’s lessons and examples are absolutely essential,” he says.

Through such efforts, NewsU can continue to help people like Courtney Potts, a reporter for the *Utica (NY) Observer-Dispatch* who discovered she needed some training after doing poorly on a test at her first interview for her first newspaper job. After using NewsU, she quickly became employed. “I don’t think I would have gotten as far as I did without NewsU’s help,” she says.

Through such efforts, NewsU can continue to help veteran journalists learn more about the digital age. “We older journalists are indeed capable of learning new tricks and most of us are eager to do so,” says one. “Our institutional memories combined with the new media can be a great advantage to our companies.”

And through such efforts, it can continue to help journalists like Jennifer Cook, executive producer at Central Florida News 13. “NewsU has helped me lead change in my newsroom,” she says. “NewsU is the reliable source in my work life that has given me guidance in the challenging times. It has opened my eyes to new leadership skills. It has helped me seek out new members of the staff to make them feel welcome. NewsU has also helped me become a better teacher. I have been able to use and recommend it to others to help bring better journalists to the world.”

When Poynter’s NewsU launched in 2005, the site had two major goals: The first was to serve as an e-learning portal that would take the best of training from across the journalism community and make it accessible using the Internet. The second goal was to learn more about e-learning and share that information across the industry. With a robust curriculum and a growing user base, NewsU has accomplished those goals.

Meeting those goals doesn’t mean NewsU is finished. In an ever-changing world that doesn’t allow much time or money for training, NewsU is focused on helping journalists, future journalists and the public with valuable training that is essential to serve and sustain our democracy.

TIMELINE

April 11, 2005 – NewsU launches with 13 courses

August 2006 – First Seminar Snapshot: “Converting to Tabloid”

Sept. 22, 2006 – 25,000 registered users

Feb. 22, 2006 – First Webinar: “Covering Sexual Assault”

Sept. 13, 2007 – 50,000 registered users

February 2008 – Studio H, a television studio built for Webinar broadcasts, opens

Sept. 9, 2008 – 75,000 registered users

Feb. 22, 2009 – 100,000 registered users

62%

SAID THEY WOULD REVIEW THE COURSE IN THE FUTURE AS A REFERENCE; 23 PERCENT SAID MAYBE

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Poynter.  John S. and James L.
Knight Foundation

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