
SERVICE STATEMENT

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I was standing on a stage, garnering not for world peace, but solutions to bring peace to just a small corner.

Rather than a beauty pageant microphone or United Nations lectern, I was poised at a podium in Thailand with less than what they call “kreng jai” (a cool heart).

Before me sat the chairman of Thailand’s Broadcast Committee of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), along with judges, professors, an assistant attorney general and former military officials, all gathered to hear a solution to the problem I’d been invited to answer: How do we stem the blood flow of the Islamic insurgency in the country’s southern provinces through broadcasting measures?

For three days prior, my constructed response had been hammered out with 30 NBTC employees, brainstorming with window-sized Post-Its while employing a unique human-centered design approach toward policy-making.

At the final presentation, rather than a nod of thanks and dismissal, the assembly advanced on me, challenging many of the ideas that evidenced their committed desire to seeing real change reunite their country. It was the opening act of a relationship that is continuing with a delegation visit to UNC this fall.

This international exchange was the offspring of my inter-university relationship with UNC’s Institute for Defense and Business. Given my background with *The Washington Post* and also international travel as an overseas correspondent based out of Thailand, the institute regularly invites me to speak to military officers and logistics personnel from non-governmental organizations. The goal of these speeches and real-world exercises of an international crisis communication effort is to teach these leaders how to work with the media in a crisis situation.

Service is something I see as an overflow of the blessings, talents, education and work opportunities the Lord has poured out in my life. As with the rare opportunity to work with the Thai NBTC, which combined my basic Thai language and cultural understanding with nationally-recognized journalistic work, sometimes unrelated pieces of my life’s work combine to be of the most service to the School of Media and Journalism, UNC, North Carolina, the journalism industry and people and organizations worldwide.

School of Media and Journalism

One of the most entertaining parts of my job parameters are office hours. Every semester, I print or type out legibly two hours of my work week that I'm expected to be available for students and post them on my door. In reality, I think one of the greatest acts of service to our school and my students is that I rarely have a closed door. When I'm not in Carroll Hall Room 77, students can find me at the Reese News Lab, brainstorming new start-up ideas with John Clark and the students or critiquing their pitches in my role as a consultant.

One of the roles of our school is to serve the industry and state. I serve the school by teaching workshops for professionals who come spend a week in Carroll Hall, getting engrossed in new technologies as they relate to the journalism field.

I also serve on the school's curriculum committee and as the curriculum coordinator for the Visual Communication sequences, endeavoring to push our curriculum to prepare our students for the ever-changing media industry.

University of North Carolina

Just like I teach my students to solve problems they identify in the real world, my interest in college sports prompted me to wonder why NCAA athletes never take my classes. From there, I continued to ask questions to ultimately discover that UNC student athletes work 44 hours a week for their sport while still trying to keep up as full-time students, leaving them no time to take demanding courses such as mine.

Following the methods I teach my students, I talked to people (human-centered design concepts) who were directly involved and ultimately came up with a proposal that was completely different than the current NCAA approach toward graduation. I presented this new concept, which I titled "onField, inField," to UNC's Athletic Director Bubba Cunningham. We formed an exploratory committee to discuss the viability of the idea. Ultimately, we decided the timing was not right and have put the idea on hold for now.

Something I always want to make time for is the student requests to speak at university events. Sometimes that means teaching an HTML workshop for the Campus Y. Once I was asked to speak at the student-led organization LiNK (Liberty in North Korea).

As already mentioned, sometimes my varied background experiences can lead to uniquely qualified service opportunities such as my LiNK presentation. Given that I'm one of a handful of journalists who have visited North Korea, I was able to share personal observations and develop relationships with South Korean students interested in helping their North Korean neighbors.

North Carolina

The North Carolina Museum of Art invited me to help write multimedia curriculum as part of their North Carolina Virtual Public School. Serving on their curriculum committee, I have been able to not only prepare high school students across North Carolina but it has also impacted the way I teach in the college classroom, including introducing students to art pieces housed at the museum.

Industry

At the start of the Fall 2015 school year, I entered my inaugural classes wearing shorts. Completely uncharacteristic of my normal dress code, students and faculty asked the reason for such an unusual choice. My answer: to support women in the workplace based on a social media campaign.

While the shorts-wearing was a fun, supportive gesture, a more impactful, industry-wide service has been through my contributions to a women's-only hack-a-thon, Pearl Hacks.

Pearl Hacks began as a creative idea by one of my students to empower women coders, mimicking other successful hack-a-thons where individuals and groups learn a new technology and build something in a finite work time (for example, 24 hours). Pearl Hacks was different than other industry events in that it pulled women from high schools and colleges across the East Coast. Loading up in buses and car caravans, the students converged at UNC to learn and compete, building relationships with each other and meeting industry women leaders from Google, Microsoft and *The Wall Street Journal*. The student-led effort, which I supported and provided contacts for, raised more than \$75,000 including sponsorships by Amazon, IBM and Red Hat. The event took place in Spring 2014 and 2015.

These details make me proud of our students. But my proudest moment was at the end of the inaugural conference when I announced our UNC team as champions after competing against reputable computer science schools from Georgia Tech, Maryland, Virginia, Virginia Tech and Duke.

I'm also involved with Knight Journalism Schools as a board member for the Journalism Interactive Consortium, a group of top journalism schools interested in converging industry and academia. At the J/I conference, I am often asked to expound on UNC's interactive media curriculum that is recognized nationally for the quality of students we produce.

Beyond curriculum, I also consult with media organizations such as *Time* magazine, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* on storytelling using emerging technologies and provide industry workshops such as one tailored specifically to the needs of the ABC11 newsroom in Raleigh.

World

When I left *The Washington Post* newsroom to tackle working in a UNC classroom, I wondered how my life would change, what opportunities would unfold. One I did not anticipate was meeting a Chinese international scholar after speaking to the student group. She worked as a reporter for the country's official press agency, Xinhua.

Months later while leading a multimedia workshop for the Communications University of China in Beijing, that same now-former scholar invited me to speak to the top editors of Xinhua.

I don't know what I expected of the invitation. When the government driver pulled up in a black sedan to collect me, I stared as he whisked me through guarded gate after guarded gate, a virtual onion of security into the inner sanctum of the Chinese Communist government. Greeted by my official handler, a lady I would later realize was there to coach this democratic journalist in what was appropriate for this meeting, we shared breakfast with soldiers and policy spinners in the industrial cafeteria.

Standing before Xinhua's executive board, I spoke of the journalistic values we teach at UNC: truth, government accountability and quality storytelling. Yes, I did pass over that slide about FOIA requests I'd dealt with in my professional life. Yet, I could not help but leave there in awe of the unique opportunity I had to serve journalists who would never be allowed access to that top level of the Chinese Voice.

Conclusion

This fall, I will speak about data storytelling at a national intelligence agency where possessing any technological device is a security risk. Sometimes I wonder how these people got my name. Yet, I am excited they asked me to speak about the intersection of storytelling and technology because regardless of the audience or purpose, I believe we can communicate information in new and better ways than any previous generation. That is why I feel called to serve primarily among this next generation of journalists, encouraging them through my life to take up the call of service.