



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

LEARNING LAYER

What do they do in those news labs?

Northwestern University's Knight Lab is a team of technologists and journalists working together to advance innovation, developing prototypes, projects and services. The idea is that journalists should help design the technologies and techniques that are changing their field.

Students should look at the tools in the projects section, such as TimelineJS, which enables people to build visually-rich interactive timelines; Local Angle, which finds national stories of local interest; BookRx, which recommends books by looking at Twitter activity and TweetCast, which used your tweets to predict the candidate you were likely to vote for in the 2012 U.S. presidential election.

Choose from these batches of student activities:

Flashlight: Think about the “Searchlights and Sunglasses” idea from this digital book’s introduction -- that traditional journalism shines a light to help people see, but the future of news also involves the use of filters to help us see. For class discussion: Which of the tools on the Northwestern site operate like searchlights and which like sunglasses? Do you think the lab is achieving its goals? Why or why not?

Searchlight: While imperfect, social media sites like Pinterest can be used for research. A joint project between Philip Merrill College of Journalism and the School of Public Policy in University of Maryland resulted in the creation of PrezPix, a site that analyzed the framing of the 2012 election campaign solely through photos. Try using one of the tools in Knight Lab, or other tools mentioned in the book to research an interesting story.

Searchlight: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology offers "Media Lab Entrepreneurship: Digital Innovations," to increase student understanding of how digital innovations grow into societal change. Look at the Digital Ninja workshops, with step-by-step plans for collaboration. Where on your campus is innovation taught? Ask a teacher from that department to talk to your class, with students assigned to find out what from that department’s curriculum could be used to improve the journalism program. Approach that department to figure out how a collaborative class could be beneficial. Discuss strengths, or areas of interest for both departments that can be fulfilled by team-teaching.

Extra credit: Look into [Frontline SMS](#), which allows broadcasting of text messages via cell phones. Try it as a simple way to communicate with a large group of people and ask them to participate in a report you are doing.