

Katia: Student Reporter in 2007

Thursday morning Katia Jones awakens to her PDA informing her of an urgent message waiting for her. She yawns, reaches to the nightstand to silence its early morning noise, and discovers that the message is from her media advisor Dr. Soffel T. Ware. As editor of the Student News section of the Abilene Christian University news organization, Optima, Katia realizes something must be breaking on the West Texas campus. The university serves more than 10,000 students worldwide, and about half of them choose to have a traditional, residential, full-time college experience. Katia is one of them. As the second daughter of a financially secure family from Edmond, Oklahoma, she had the option of taking four years to study full-time – a luxury in the connected world of 2007. As a junior Mass Media Communication major, she has already been trained on many aspects of the current media field, including writing several versions of the same story to be delivered by different media, shooting and editing video for electronic, wireless delivery, and using the proper software to disseminate to all of these media. This semester in addition to being a section editor, she is enrolled in a block of courses to prepare her for the media profession – Writing for Wireless Delivery, Non-Linear Video Composition and Editing and Ethics of Communicating in a Connected World. Her class begins at 9 a.m., so she wonders why Dr. Ware’s message couldn’t wait. As she cleared her groggy head, the message became clear :

“Katia - Students are protesting in-class infra-red communication scrambling in front of the Administration Building beginning at 8 a.m. Cover this story for all Optima media. Stay on the story; you are excused from our face-to-face class meeting today. – Dr. Ware.”

The Equipment

Her eyes now clearly in focus and her adrenaline pumping, Katia checks the time on her PDA. 7:30 a.m. She hurries out of bed and into the shower; her roommates are still happily snoozing. Katia's mind is already racing. She thinks about her news gathering kit, hoping she remembered to charge her 12-hour battery. Her mental checklist includes her PDA and her GNU (Gathering News Unit). Her GNU includes a computing device similar to a laptop, complete with word processing, voice recognition, video editing software, satellite linking ,and infra-red transfer; a mini printer and a digital video/still camera with a compact lighting system. All of this is enclosed in a 12x18-inch case, which can be carried as a backpack or a briefcase. Katia's GNU is one of 20 that the university owns. Only upper level students, who are employed by Optima are able to be issued a GNU, though some students lease their own personal GNUs. Lower division students are able to check out a GNU for 24-hours to complete an assignment.

Katia yanks back her long brown hair into a ponytail, grabs her PDA and her GNU backpack and heads out the door of her apartment. As she rides her bike to campus, she uses the wireless earphones to call the office of the President of the University via her PDA. She thinks if she can get him prior to the beginning of the protest, he may be more likely to comment. No answer. Using the wireless mic, Katia asks her PDA for the time. 7:57 a.m. She pedals faster.

Interviewing the President

As she nears campus she can hear the students chanting. "This is still America. Let us speak," and "Communicate to congregate." She had heard through student gossip that the university administration was planning to scramble all infra-red communication among PDAs on campus in an effort to end cheating on exams and virtual note passing during class. The angry

students contacted the ACLU, which helped them build a case against the university. Because many of the students involved in the protest are very pleased with their other associations with ACU, they have chosen not to move forward with the litigation, but rather to make their voices heard by the administration to stop the purchase of the signal scrambling technology. Katia's mind was whirling with story angles. She decides to try the President's office again, before she speaks with the leader of the student protesters.

One ring. Two rings. (She wishes she had the President's private number.) Three rings. "President's Office, how may I help you," the reception bot answers, "President Change," Katia replies to the bot, hoping she gets through. The system connects her with the President's executive secretary, who informs Katia that the president is concerned about the protest and would like to talk to an Optima representative. Katia requests for her PDA to begin recording and transcribing their conversation. "Thank you, Dr. Change, for talking to me. I have to make you aware that you are being recorded," Katia says. "Of course, Katia. I'm glad you called," the President says. They proceed to talk as Katia parks her bike and walks toward the President's office. She sees him on the sidewalk – he is just getting to campus after his morning workout. They wave to each other, but maintain their on-air conversation, so that the recording continues. Katia requests to visit Dr. Change's office to get some video footage, and he agrees.

They arrive at his office on the second floor of the Administration Building, and the student chants can still be heard through the thick stone walls built nearly 80 years ago. Setting up the compact lights and video/still camera takes Katia three minutes, during which time Dr. Change checks local headlines to see if other news organizations are covering the protests. He is relieved to find out that Katia is the first on the story. Following the interview, Katia partially

edits and sends the video to a server in the Optima newsroom via satellite. No need to eat up disk space with heavy video; she knows she can access it remotely later.

Global Collaboration

Now that the primary, raw video is on the server, Katia informs her classmates Andrew and Jillian. Her classmates are able to access and review the video. From this point, they are in periodic contact with Katia about the story. Later in the day, Andrew decides to pursue a sidebar to the story – the technology behind infra-red communication. Andrew is in Itu, Brazil, but he is interested in this technology and relishes the opportunity to collaborate on a story in the U.S. Although Andrew and Katia have never met face-to-face, their online communications and video conferences have solidified their relationship. Jillian is on campus, so she goes to a classroom setting to shoot some B-roll video/stills for Katia to use in her packages. Other classmates are working on a variety of stories. The three, Katia, Andrew and Jillian, maintain contact throughout the day.

At the scene

Back at the Administration Building, Katia heads downstairs to interview the protesters. Before she speaks to anyone, she unobtrusively shoots some video/stills. Katia has learned the effect that the media outlets can have on the news – everything gets more intense when the camera is spotted. She attempts to gather as much as possible without being detected. She succeeds because her camera is small and doesn't require a light kit outside. Katia is pleased with her protest footage and beams it back to the server as well.

After asking many protesters who is leading this uprising, Katia is pointed toward Mark, a political science major. He is pleased to respond to the questions Katia raises, as well as the President's concerns. Katia gathers the interview using the video/still and sends it to the server.

She does a few more interviews: with a student protester, with a student non-protester, with a faculty protester and a faculty non-protester. All of this video is sent to the server.

Submitting the Story

Katia finds a relatively quiet bench, so she can hear and/or see the story developing. From her benchtop perch, Katia accesses and edits the video, audio and transcribed text into three stories –

1. A long detailed story for the e-paper audience, who wants lots of details. She includes three still pictures and a short clip from the President and the student leader.
2. A short, headline-oriented story for the online, wireless audience. With this Katia includes a link to a photo and the two video clips
3. A broadcast/Webcast edited video package.

She files each of these stories/packages in the appropriate spot on the Optima servers and calls Dr. Ware and the editor in chief and lets them know that phase one of the story has been filed, and is ready to be disseminated when appropriate. Then Katia begins again for phase two of the story and continues this pace until 3 p.m. when the protesters begin to break up and go home.

Back at the Office

At the Optima office, Jorge, the editor-in-chief of all Optima news outlets, and Dr. Ware are reviewing the packages they have released and those still pending. The e-paper version is released twice a day at 5 a.m. and 5 p.m.; the online, wireless version is released as necessary, but usually at 4-hour intervals; the video packages are broadcast/Webcast on-demand, as with all other broadcast news, and in a traditional newscast at 7 a.m., 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. The 10 p.m. cast is re-run at 1 a.m. on television.

John: Student News Consumer

John Santana skips his classes Thursday at Abilene Christian University to protest the university's place to scramble in-class infra-red communication. He has to wake up earlier than usual to get to the Administration Building by 8 a.m., but to him it is worth it. Because of the emerging laws regarding digital information and its transfer, most electronic devices are still far ahead of the government's ability to regulate them. That leaves much of the regulation up to private entities, like the university. As a senior double major in computer science and political science, John has dreams of being a lawyer and legislator in the digital electronics/software/information transfer field. He believes his participation in the protest will give the students a credible voice.

At the Scene

He arrives at 7:45 a.m. Some of the other students have brought Starbucks and muffins to fuel the protesters. John happily drinks three cups of coffee and eats a carrot-raisin-bran muffin, as the balance of the 226 protesters arrive. He notices Katia, a reporter for the campus news organization Optima, exit the Administration Building and arrive at the protest about 8:15 a.m. He wonders who she has been able to talk to in the Ad Building so early. She is shooting video and interviewing people. John grabs his PDA and logs on to the Optima site. No news of the protest –yet. He personalizes the site so when a story with the words “student protest” is posted, he will be alerted. His ego encourages him to set another alert; this time, when the words “John Santana” are in a story he will be alerted. “Having a clip of this will look great on my e-resume,” he thinks.

About 9:30 a.m. John's PDA beams a signal to his wireless earphone that says “A story containing the words student protest has been posted to the Optima site.” He tells the PDA to go

to the story and load the video. Ten seconds later, it is ready for viewing. He watches the webcast of the two-minute story, in which he is not mentioned, and makes a mental note to find Katia amid the fray. Then he downloads the short printed story, to see how she wrote up the protest. He views the still pictures and video clips from the text story, but he is still unable to find himself in the crowd of students.

The protest continues throughout the morning and into the early afternoon. John decides to abandon searching the Optima site and focus on the task of the day—protesting the scrambling of the infra-red signals. “I will catch all the stories later. I can download them then, if I need to,” he thinks.

Later at Home

After an exhausting day, John relaxes on his sofa eating a fast food burrito and watching reruns of the 1990s sitcom Friends on Nickelodeon. About half-way through the show, the news icon starts flashing in the upper right corner of his plasma screen. His PDA has transferred its personalization data to the television, so now when the stories he is looking for are posted, he will be notified via the television. John uses the remote control mouse to pause the sitcom and diminishes it, so he can view the Optima site in 90 percent of his screen. In the latest version of the story regarding the protest, John was interviewed. He is relieved that the day was not wasted – he protested for something he believed in and got a clip for his e-resume. After he watches the broadcast/Webcast version of the story, he downloads it to his PDA and downloads the e-paper version to read the story in depth. That will have to be later, though. Right now, he must find out if Monica really marries that old guy with the moustache.