

MMC 2604 Spring 2020 Syllabus
Mass Media and You
LoMonte/Walsh-Childers

Class meetings: Monday Periods 8-10 (3-6 p.m.) Weil 279

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About the course

What you will learn in this class

Students in this course will learn to identify and analyze how media content reflects, supports and sometimes curbs societal power structures in ways that influence social justice, whether positively or negatively. Students will be exposed to relevant mass communication theories such as agenda-setting and framing as well as critical/cultural approaches to critiquing and explaining media content. Students will engage in analytical writing in ways that help them understand key current issues of power and justice -- and the presentation of these issues through mass media -- within their historical contexts.

Students who complete the course will:

- Be more informed consumers of all forms of media, including understanding how to distinguish among information sources and evaluate their reliability;
- Gain a fuller understanding of the journalistic process, the challenges journalists face, the impacts of journalism in democratic society, and the relationships between journalists and the public they serve;
- Better understand the workings of state and local governments, including how state and local government decision-making affects our daily lives, how news coverage and other media content influences these decisions and how citizens can engage to influence change.

The course focuses significantly on helping students understand and evaluate journalistic products and processes and their role in democracy. However, it also will provide students an opportunity to learn more about state and local government structures and processes and how they can be influenced by citizen engagement.

Class policies

Classroom Atmosphere: Each of you plays an important role in shaping this course. We encourage you to be actively involved in class discussions and activities. Please also be appreciative of the contributions of others, including the guest speakers, and help create a class environment that is respectful and inclusive. This does not mean you should never disagree, but you should **always** do so courteously.

Cell Phones and Computer Use in Class: As a matter of courtesy to your fellow class members, please turn off or silence all cell phones before class starts. Likewise, **all electronic devices should remain off** except when we're doing online research or, perhaps, discussing a story that you're reading online. We strongly recommend that you take handwritten notes for the class; [research](#) documents that hand-writing your notes increases your likelihood of remembering and understanding the material. DO NOT *instant or text message during class*. Multi-tasking is not [effective](#).

Attendance: We will not take roll for every class, but because the class is so small, you can be sure we will notice when you're missing. Class starts at 3, not 3:05. Your attendance and *participation* are important to making this class a success. We expect that you will attend every class unless an emergency prevents you from doing so. If you find that you do have to miss a class due to an emergency, let us know immediately. Excessive absences *or tardiness* will affect your final class participation score – you can't participate if you aren't here.

Missing Deadlines or Assignments: If you believe you have an exceptional reason for missing a deadline for an assignment, please discuss it with us *immediately* and *in advance*. Please note that poor planning, including underestimating how long it will take to do the research you need to do for your final project, does not constitute an acceptable reason for missing a deadline. Fairness, both to us and to your classmates, requires that you meet all deadlines. *All assignments are due promptly at the start of class, unless otherwise specified in Canvas. Failure to turn in your assignments by the deadline will result in a late penalty, at a minimum.*

Accommodations for Special Needs: If you have a legitimate, documented special needs situation, we will be more than happy to work with you to find accommodations. University policy requires students requesting classroom accommodation to register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide appropriate documentation to you, and you should provide this documentation to us at the beginning of the semester. Please do so, even if you do not believe you will need the accommodations. It is your responsibility to initiate this conversation early in the semester.

Required readings

There is no textbook for this course. The reading materials, podcasts, etc., will all be available as hyperlinks from the syllabus or the course Canvas site or will be available in the Files tab in Canvas. Most of the readings are news articles carefully selected because they represent high-quality journalism. You are expected to read these articles and to listen to or watch the podcasts

or documentaries listed on the syllabus *before* the class for which they're assigned. Weekly quizzes, as well as your participation in class discussions, will help us assess whether you're doing so.

Plagiarism & Academic Honesty

Plagiarism on any writing assignment in the class will result in a failing grade *for the class*.

Many students in this class may have no intention of becoming communications professionals. Nonetheless, every student at the University of Florida is bound by the Honor Code, which demands that students do their own work, independent of unauthorized assistance. In short, it is your responsibility to make certain you understand what constitutes plagiarism and to ensure that you give proper credit every time you draw on someone else's writing.

- Do not rely on what you think you've learned before. We strongly recommend that everyone complete the free Poynter NewsU course called [Avoiding Plagiarism and Fabrication](#).
- Prof. Mindy McAdams has put together an excellent guide: <http://www.macloo.com/cheat/index.htm>
- If you have questions, ask one of us! There's no penalty for asking questions, but the penalties for plagiarism are severe.
- Treat Internet sources like any other book, journal article or other print source. Make certain you copy down correct reference information when you copy material from a website, even if you're paraphrasing. You WILL need to include references for the sources for your final project paper, and it's possible you may want to cite other sources in your reflection essay assignment.
- Upload all assignments to the e-learning site and know that they will be submitted to Turnitin.com to check for plagiarism. We'll set up the Canvas site so that you can submit your paper well before deadline, see the Turnitin report, and then correct any problems identified and resubmit the paper before the final deadline.
- Do not turn in for this class any work you previously have submitted to another instructor or that you plan to submit for any other class at UF or any other institution.

Please see the UF Office of Student Judicial Affairs website for definitions of academic dishonesty (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>). The violations most likely to be potential problems for students in this class include plagiarism, misrepresentation and fabrication. It is YOUR responsibility to understand what kinds of actions are prohibited. If a situation ever arises in which you think something you're contemplating MIGHT constitute one of these types of academic dishonesty, ASK BEFORE YOU DO IT. Apologies after the fact will never resolve the problem for anyone. We consider it part of our duty as professors and journalism educators to report academic dishonesty to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs.

ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly quizzes: We'll begin most weeks (see syllabus) with a brief quiz that will include questions about the content discussed the previous week – especially the material meant to help you understand how state and local governments work and how their work affects citizens. In addition, each quiz will include questions drawn from the articles, documentaries or podcasts assigned as reading for that day's discussions. If you read the assigned articles (or watch/listen to documentaries and podcasts) and attend class, you should have no difficulty with these quizzes. The average score on these quizzes (with the lowest two scores dropped) will account for **30%** of the final grade in the course.

Story Impact Group Project: You will work in teams of three/four students to examine the impact of one of the stories discussed over the course of the semester. (A team may propose an alternative story to evaluate; however, we caution you to choose carefully. The original story or series/podcast/documentary must have been published/broadcast/streamed at least three years ago, must reflect high quality reporting, and you must be able to identify specific types of effects the story could reasonably have had. The purpose of this assignment is to help you see how high quality journalism affects citizens' lives and the operation of state/local government, beyond the function of simply informing people. Each team member is expected to make a significant contribution, and you will be required to document the work each team member did. The written project report will be worth **20%** of your final grade.

Story Impact Presentation: In addition to the written report, the team will present the findings of their report to the class. Each team will have 10-15 minutes to present their report findings. Including audio/video from interviews with the journalists or with citizens who made use of the stories in their interactions with government is not required but is strongly encouraged. The presentation will be worth **15%** of your final grade. Each team member is expected to make a significant contribution, and you will be required to document the work each team member did. We don't want more than one team focusing on any given story/series/podcast, so your team should choose a couple of options, in case another team already has "claimed" your first choice.

Story Impact Reflection Paper: Each student will complete an individual 5- to 7-page paper in which you reflect on one of the presentations made by another team. What did you learn from the presentation about how trustworthy journalism is produced? What impressed you most about the way the reporters/producers put this story or series together? What did the presentation teach you about what citizens should expect from journalists? What did you learn about the impact good journalism can have on state/local government policy and/or practices? Who do you think would benefit the most from reading/hearing/watching this story? How might you be able to use what you learned from the presentation as a citizen? Your score on this paper will be worth **20%** of your final grade.

Class Participation: Every student is expected to be an active participant in this class. That means showing up on time, having read or listened to or watched the required materials, asking good questions, respectfully offering your opinions and thoughts on the information presented,

etc. In addition, **to get full credit for class participation, each student will be required to subscribe to a free newsletter, <https://bit.ly/2PZEBqU>, and to present to the class – before the first of April – something you learned about or found interesting from the newsletter.** We don't want everyone presenting in a rush on the last day. So as soon as you see something that interests you, email us and ask to be scheduled for a time to present. If someone else has already asked to talk about that item, you'll need to choose something else. However, you'll always be welcome to comment on or add to another student's discussion of these newsletter items. Class participation will account for **15%** of your final grade.

Here are the topics and assignments we plan to cover, with the caution that you should regularly check Canvas for changes, as we may revise the lineup based on news events, the pace of progress in the class, or the availability of guest speakers.

WEEK 1: Jan. 6

Overview and brief, high-level discussion of key concepts about issue framing and messaging, and their relationship to power and justice

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “The Way of Skeptical Knowing: The Tradecraft of Verification,” excerpt from “Blur: How to Know What’s True in the Age of Information Overload,” Bill Kovach & Tom Rosenstiel [excerpt provided by instructor]
- “We tracked down a fake-news creator in the suburbs,” *NPR All Tech Considered* <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/11/23/503146770/npr-finds-the-head-of-a-covert-fake-news-operation-in-the-suburbs>

WEEK 2: Jan. 13

Centers of influence: How media interacts with institutions of governance, and how to evaluate the credibility of research

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- Journalists Resource, “Academic research and studies and how they work” <https://journalistsresource.org/tip-sheets/research/introduction-studies-academic-research-journalists/>
- “Copy, Paste, Legislate,” *USA Today* <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2019/04/03/abortion-gun-laws-stand-your-ground-model-bills-conservatives-liberal-corporate-influence-lobbyists/3162173002/>

NO CLASS Jan. 20, MLK HOLIDAY

WEEK 3: Jan. 27

Verification tools and skills

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “Every Single Cognitive Bias in Existence,” *Visual Capitalist* <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/every-single-cognitive-bias/>
- First Draft News suite of verification tools (2 short video lessons)

<https://firstdraftnews.org/en/education/curriculum-resource/2-photo-manipulation/>
<https://firstdraftnews.org/en/education/curriculum-resource/2-learning-look-clues/>

- “Why Should I Tell You? A Guide to Less Extractive Reporting,” UW Center for Journalism Ethics
<https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/why-should-i-tell-you-a-guide-to-less-extractive-reporting/>

WEEK 4: Feb. 3

Race, policing and criminal justice equity issues

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “Walking While Black,” *ProPublica / Times-Union*
<https://www.propublica.org/series/walking-while-black>
<https://www.jacksonville.com/walkingwhileblack>
- “The House I Live In,” *PBS Independent Lens*
<https://houseilivein.vhx.tv/>

WEEK 5: Feb. 10

Equity in the justice system: Indigent defense and judicial fairness

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “Bias on the Bench,” *Sarasota Herald Tribune*
<http://projects.heraldtribune.com/bias/>
- “In The Dark, Season 2,” *American Public Media*, Episodes 1 and 7
<https://www.apmreports.org/in-the-dark/season-two>

WEEK 6: Feb. 17

Opioids, heroin, and the role and responsibilities of the pharmaceutical and medical communities

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “Drug firms poured 780M painkillers into WV amid rise of overdoses,” *Charleston Gazette-Mail*
https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/legal_affairs/drug-firms-poured-m-painkillers-into-wv-amid-rise-of/article_99026dad-8ed5-5075-90fa-adb906a36214.html
- “How Drug Companies Flooded West Virginia With Opioid Pills,” *W.V. Public Broadcasting* interview with Eric Eyre
<https://www.wvpublic.org/post/how-drug-companies-flooded-west-virginia-opioid-pills#stream/0>

WEEK 7: Feb. 24

Priority-setting in public health, maldistribution of resources, policing of abusive providers

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “Wasted Medicine: Squandered Health Care Dollars,” *ProPublica*
<https://www.propublica.org/series/wasted-medicine>
- “Deadly Deliveries,” *USA Today*

<https://www.usatoday.com/deadly-deliveries/interactive/how-hospitals-are-failing-new-moms-in-graphics/>

- “The curious case of the \$629 Band-Aid,” *Vox/The Impact* podcast
<https://www.vox.com/the-impact/2017/10/16/16387298/band-aid-er-bill-truth-american-health-care> (Make sure you listen to the podcast – don’t just read the introduction.)
- “Still forgiven,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*
<http://doctors.ajc.com/>

NO CLASS March 2, SPRING BREAK

WEEK 8: Mar. 9

Mental health: Childhood trauma, and institutionalization policies and practices

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “The Desperate and the Dead,” *Boston Globe* Spotlight team
<https://apps.bostonglobe.com/spotlight/the-desperate-and-the-dead/>
<https://www.pulitzer.org/finalists/jenna-russell-maria-cramer-michael-rezendes-todd-wallack-and-scott-helman>
- “Suffering in Secret: Illinois hides abuse and neglect of adults with disabilities,” *Chicago Tribune*
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/investigations/ct-group-home-investigations-cila-met-20161117-htmlstory.html>
- “From generation to generation: An epidemic of childhood trauma haunts Milwaukee,” *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*
<https://projects.jsonline.com/news/2017/3/23/epidemic-of-childhood-trauma-haunts-milwaukee.html>
- (Recommended): “The black robe effect,” *Vox/The Impact* podcast,
<https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/vox/the-impact/e/52357019>

WEEK 9: Mar. 16

Housing and evictions: What data tells us about housing equity and supply

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “The Evicted,” PBS “Public Works?” documentary
<https://www.pbs.org/show/public-works-cost-our-aging-infrastructure/episodes/season/2/>
- “Shadow Campus,” *Boston Globe* Spotlight team
<https://www3.bostonglobe.com/metro/specials/shadow-campus/?arc404=true>
- “First-Ever Evictions Database Shows: ‘We’re In the Middle Of A Housing Crisis,’” *NPR Fresh Air*
<https://www.npr.org/2018/04/12/601783346/first-ever-evictions-database-shows-were-in-the-middle-of-a-housing-crisis>

WEEK 10: Mar. 23

School safety: Tradeoffs between privacy and security

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “Targeted,” *The Oregonian*
https://www.oregonlive.com/news/erry-2018/06/75f0f464cb3367/targeted_a_family_and_the_ques.html
- ““No one calls me shooter,” Snap Judgment” podcast with Bethany Barnes
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/snapjudgment/episodes/snap-1012-no-one-calls-me-shooter>

WEEK 11: Mar. 30

Race and equity issues in education: Access, cost, mission

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- “Failure Factories,” *Tampa Bay Times*
<https://projects.tampabay.com/projects/2015/investigations/pinellas-failure-factories/>

WEEK 12. Apr. 6

Environmental justice: Lessons from Flint

ASSIGNED MATERIALS

- Shorenstein Center’s report and podcast about media coverage of Flint water crisis
<https://shorensteincenter.org/environmental-justice-unjust-coverage-of-the-flint-water-crisis/>
- “The Blackest City in the U.S. Is Facing an Environmental Justice Nightmare,” OneZero
<https://onezero.medium.com/the-blackest-city-in-the-u-s-is-facing-an-environmental-justice-nightmare-788e0fb5c6b9>
- “Flood Thy Neighbor: Who Stays Dry and Who Decides?” *Reveal & ProPublica*
<https://www.revealnews.org/article/flood-thy-neighbor-who-stays-dry-and-who-decides/>

WEEK 13: April 13

Class Group Presentations

WEEK 14: April 20

Social Media: What’s Next / Course Wrapup