

MMC 2604 Mass Media and You

Fall 2020

INSTRUCTOR: Steven Specht, Esq.

NOTE: This syllabus is a guideline. The professor may make changes from time to time and will announce them via email.

OFFICE HOURS AND COMMUNICATION: Because this is a virtual course, a dedicated office time can be unwieldy. Please consider the course to have a virtual open-door policy. Reach out to as necessary and you will receive a timely response. If there is an issue that requires immediate attention, please text or call. If your issue is less urgent, please use the canvas messaging system.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY: I think of this course as the journalism equivalent of Defense against the Dark Arts. Media can be used to inform and enlighten as well as deceive and incite. For future journalists, we will look at the concept of best practices. For those taking this course as an elective, you will emerge as more informed consumers of media who understand how to identify manipulative content.

Text: There is no official text but there will be assigned readings. The professor may email additional readings as needed.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Per the Course Catalogue "Examines roles and effects of contemporary mass media on modern societies. Considers rights, responsibilities and ethics of media, explores relationships between governments, audiences and media companies and reviews economic, political and social determinants of media content."

PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS: There are no prerequisites. Experience with social media whether through Facebook or a personal blog will be helpful but not necessary.

COURSE GOALS AND OR OBJECTIVES: By the end of this course, students 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.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS: The course will consist of reading assignments, quizzes, lectures, and written assignments.

**ATTENDANCE:** As this is an online course, attendance will be marked by participation in discussion boards and other weekly assignments.

**DEADLINES:** All listed deadlines are based on the Eastern Time Zone. I will have zero tolerance for late assignments due to foreseeable events. The sole exceptions to this are an illness that extends five days in duration and technical issues with the course website. I respect that there are life events, health issues, family concerns, and a host of other reasons why an assignment might be late. However, deadlines are laid out ahead of time and there is ample time to plan ahead. Whether you wind up as an attorney, journalist, or something else, you will find my deadline to be one similar to those you will face after graduation.

For technical issues with the website, you must receive a ticket number from the UF Computing Help Desk when the problem was reported. The ticket number will document the time and date of your issue. This ticket number must be emailed to me within 24 hours of the issue for you to make up a late assignment due to a technical issue.

**DIVERSITY STATEMENT:** In discussing the history of mass media and the country, we will expose some painful truths. We must take into account all of our history, not just the parts that make us feel comfortable.

To that notion, I will seek to be inclusive as reasonably possible. Please reach out to me if you feel like I have not been inclusive to ideology, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or any other classification.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION:** I don't offer a specific percentage of my grade for participation, but the small amount of writing assignments should take only an hour or two a week. They make up 10-percent of the class grade

## UF POLICIES

**UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACCOMODATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive; therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

**ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:** I will have a zero-tolerance policy for academic misconduct. Do your own work.

Hint: I also have access to the internet and I know a copy-paste when I see it.

Read the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student---conduct---honor---code/>

Read this information on plagiarism: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

NETIQUETTE: As noted in the previous section, I expect common courtesy in emails and discussions. An inability to maintain respect and decorum in all class-related communication will affect your DB grade.

Please read the following UF Policy: <http://teach.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/NetiquetteGuideforOnlineCourses.pdf>

## ASSISTANCE

For issues with technical difficulties, please contact the UF Computing Help Desk at:

- [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu)
- (352) 392---HELP—OPTION 2
- <https://request.it.ufl.edu>

As noted, make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from LSS when the problem was reported. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem.

Other resources are available at <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting---help> for:

- Counseling and Wellness resources
- Disability resources
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- Library Help Desk support

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student---complaints> to submit a complaint.

## ASSIGNMENTS:

DISCUSSION BOARD POSTS and WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: I use Discussion Board Posts to discuss current events. They are graded as a writing assignment. You are responsible for reviewing the current events of your classmates as there will be some current event questions on the midterm and final quiz. All writing assignments (including these current events in DB Posts need to be in a paragraph format with some form of citation. If using an online source, I prefer at least a hyperlink.

QUIZZES: Quizzes will be intermittently given throughout the course to assess your understanding of the material. Quizzes will not be cumulative in nature and should only take a few minutes. In general, quizzes will be multiple choice.

FINAL PROJECT: The final project will be an analysis of issues discussed in the course. You may discuss historical issues or emerging events.

You may do a traditional term paper consisting of an 8-10-page paper. If you are in advertising, broadcasting, public relations, or some other major and wish to do a multimedia project, you may present your idea for approval.

We live in interesting times as the issue of unfettered anonymous speech and foreign incitement have had an effect on our institutions. Novel presentation and creative legal analysis will reflect well in your final grade.

You must have sufficient citations to support your original work.

#### Project Timeline

Idea Deadline: I want your project ideas by Sunday, October 25, 2020. This assignment will consist of 100 words about your subject. You can change your idea as we progress through the semester, but you need to have something down in writing by this time. You should consider skimming upcoming coursework for more ideas.

Citation List: A preliminary list of citations RELEVANT TO YOUR PROJECT will be due Sunday, November 1, 2020. The minimum requirement is five court cases and two news articles.

Final Draft: Your final draft will be due Wednesday, December 9, 2019.

If you are writing a traditional term paper, I expect 8-10 pages of double-spaced, Times New Roman, Size 12. The format of this paper will consist of identifying the current issue. Outlining the history that brings us to the present, an opinion on how things should be and a prediction of how a court will view the issue. Citations must be in Bluebook format and must be in the form of endnotes.

Multimedia presentations tend to be a video or podcast. Recordings should be between 12 and 20 minutes and a bibliography must be included separately in Bluebook format.

GRADING METRICS:

WRITING/DB POSTS	30%
QUIZZES	35%
FINAL PROJECT	35%

GRADING SCALE: I will grade in accordance with University Policy on grade values as follows:

A:	100-93
A-:	92-90
B+:	89-87
B:	86-83
B-:	82-80
C+:	79-77
C:	76-73
C-:	72-70
D+:	69-67
D:	66-63
D-:	62-60
E:	59 and below

## COURSE TIMELINE:

Week 1: August 31-September 6

Subject: Course Introduction and Self-Assessment

### Goals

- Read Syllabus
- Understand how personal bias may affect news consumption

### Material

- Media Bias Chart Methodology Summary <https://www.adfontesmedia.com/how-ad-fontes-ranks-news-sources/>
- Political Coordinates Test <https://www.idrlabs.com/political-coordinates/test.php>
- Listen to the Parable of the Six Blind Men and the Elephant <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJVBQefNXIw>

### Assignments

- DB Post: Write a brief introduction about yourself by September 13 at 11:59 p.m.
- Complete writing assignment by September 13 at 11:59 p.m.

Week 2: September 7-13

Subject: "Fake News"

### Goals

- Understand that fake news is not a new phenomenon but that the ability to share rapidly through email makes it more dangerous than ever.

### Materials

- Read "Yellow Journalism: The 'Fake News' of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/yellow-journalism-the-fake-news-of-the-19th-century>
- Read "We tracked down a fake-news creator in the suburbs" <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/11/23/503146770/npr-finds-the-head-of-a-covert-fake-news-operation-in-the-suburbs>
- Read "What makes Snopes a reliable resource?" <https://www.snopes.com/faq/makes-snopes-reliable-resource/>

- Read “Skepticism Beats Snopes as an Antidote to Fake News” Provided by the Professor or at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/skepticism-beats-snopes-as-an-antidote-to-fake-news-1528497662> if you have a Wall Street Journal Subscription
- Read “How to Fine Tune Your Bullshit Detector” <https://www.fastcompany.com/3068589/how-to-fine-tune-your-bullshit-detector>

#### Assignments

- Quiz

Week 3: September 14-20

Subject: The Inciting Headline

#### Goals

- Learn how big data can trigger an emotional response from the reader and feed into biases

#### Materials

- Read This Is How Your Fear and Outrage Are Being Sold for Profit <https://medium.com/@tobiasrose/the-enemy-in-our-feeds-e86511488de>
- Read How SEO Undermines Original Reporting <http://www.stevenspecht.com/2019/10/how-search-engine-optimization-undermines-original-reporting/>

#### Assignments

- Current Event Writing Assignment

Week 4: September 21-27

Subject: Verification Tools

#### Goals

- Learn about tools that can help inform the reader.

#### Materials

- Read “Every Single Cognitive Bias in Existence,” Visual Capitalist <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/every-single-cognitive-bias/>
- Watch 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/>
- Read 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/Chapter 3](https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/why-should-i-tell-you-a-guide-to-less-extractive-reporting/Chapter%203)

- Skim <https://www.tylervigen.com/spurious-correlations>

#### Assignments

- Writing Assignment
- Quiz

Week 5: September 28-October 4

Subject: Mass Ad Campaigns

Goals: Consider the role of mass ad campaigns in society and their effectiveness

#### Materials:

- Read Got Milk? Got Fired: 5 Valuable Lessons That All Executives Must Heed [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/got-milk-got-fired-5-valu\\_b\\_4938176](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/got-milk-got-fired-5-valu_b_4938176)
- Read "Inside the Long War to Protect Plastic" <https://publicintegrity.org/environment/pollution/pushing-plastic/inside-the-long-war-to-protect-plastic/>
- Read "Are You Being Fooled by Sugar" <https://www.truthinadvertising.org/is-corn-sugar-really-the-same-thing-as-sugar/>
- Read "The Clean Coal Smoke Screen" <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/news/2008/12/22/5324/the-clean-coal-smoke-screen/>
- Read "Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods face a new 'fake meat' foe with long, controversial history" <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/06/beyond-meat-impossible-foods-face-new-powerful-fake-meat-foe.html>

#### Assignments

- Writing Assignment
- Quiz

Week 6: October 5-11

Subject: Hypertargeting, Retargeting, and How It Affects What You See

Goals: Consider the ideological divide created by targeted ads and bespoke media

#### Materials:

- Read the first 10 pages of Hypertargeting, Limited Attention, and Privacy: Implications for Marketing and Campaigning <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1dec/2382d56c8c4e0f64488a8bac3fc7b66b6c84.pdf>

- Read "Facebook has a prescription: More pharmaceutical ads"  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/03/03/facebook-pharma-ads/>
- Read "'Weaponized Ad Technology': Facebook's Moneymaker Gets a Critical Eye"  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/16/technology/facebook-microtargeting-advertising.html>
- Read "Here's Why Retargeting Versus Prospecting Is Dead"  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2018/10/22/heres-why-retargeting-versus-prospecting-is-dead/#5cf9d5855287>

Week 7: October 12-18

Subject: QAnon, Conspiracy Theories, and More

Goals: Understand how modern mass media heightens the stakes of misinformation with disastrous results

Materials:

- Read "Broadside on the 'Pig-faced Lady' "<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/broadside-on-the-pig-faced-lady>
- Read "LSD Users Stare at Sun" <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/blinded-by-the-light/>
- Read "You Know About Needle Boy, Right?" provided by professor
- Read "Finding Truth on Net Can Be Like Looking for Needle in Payphone"  
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1998-12-17-9812170225-story.html>
- Read "QAnon, Pizzagate conspiracy theories co-opt #SaveTheChildren"  
<https://www.politifact.com/article/2020/aug/12/qanon-pizzagate-conspiracy-theories-co-opt-savethe/>
- Read "QAnon Was a Theory on a Message Board. Now It's Headed to Congress"  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/15/opinion/qanon-marjorie-greene-congress.html>

Assignments

- Discuss the dangers of "I don't know if it's true but it can't hurt to pass it on" in the context of modern society and information warfare

Week 8: September October 19-25

Subject: Media and the Judicial System

Goals

- Understand how the legal system is affected by the consumption of mass media

Materials

- Read "The McDonald's Hot Coffee Case" <https://www.caoc.org/?pg=facts>

- Read "How the Media Fuels the Frivolous Lawsuit Myth"  
<https://attorneyatlawmagazine.com/how-media-fuels-frivolous-lawsuit-myth>

#### Assignment

- Current Event Post

Week 9: October 26-November 1

Subject: Media in the World

Goals: Understand how to compare and contrast US media with other countries and to identify how foreign media affect the US market

#### Materials

- Explore the Press Freedom Map <https://rsf.org/en/ranking#>
- Read "Media Censorship in China" <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/media-censorship-china>
- Read "Russia profile - Media" <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17840134>
- Read "What is Russia Today?"  
[https://archives.cjr.org/feature/what\\_is\\_russia\\_today.php](https://archives.cjr.org/feature/what_is_russia_today.php)
- Read "Some Canadians who received unsolicited copy of Epoch Times upset by claim that China was behind virus" <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/epoch-times-coronavirus-bioweapon-1.5548217>

#### Assignments

- Beginning with the Press Freedom Map, chose a country other than your own and write a profile of conditions for journalists in that country. You must have at least five sources for this assignment and one of the five can be from rsf.org

Week 10: November 2-8

Subject: Fear and Reality

Goals: Understand the gap between what is actually dangerous and what we fear to be dangerous

#### Materials

- Read "Many Americans Are Convinced Crime Is Rising In The U.S. They're Wrong"  
<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/many-americans-are-convinced-crime-is-rising-in-the-u-s-theyre-wrong/>
- Read "More Dangerous Than Sharks"  
<https://www.greaterclevelandaquarium.com/more-dangerous-than-sharks/>

## Assignments

- Complete Writing Assignment on Fear
- Quiz

Week 11: November 9-15

Subject: Stop and Frisk, Broken Windows, and A Nation Locked Up

Goals: Understand the results of the “tough on crime” movement

## Materials

- Read/Listen to “How a Theory of Crime and Policing Was Born, and Went Terribly Wrong” <https://www.wbur.org/npr/500104506/broken-windows-policing-and-the-origins-of-stop-and-frisk-and-how-it-went-wrong>
- Skim "Stop and Frisk Data" <https://www.nyclu.org/en/stop-and-frisk-data>
- Skim ""Highest to Lowest-Prison Population Total" [https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-total?field\\_region\\_taxonomy\\_tid=All](https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-total?field_region_taxonomy_tid=All)
- **Read** “Targeted” [https://www.oregonlive.com/news/erry-2018/06/75f0f464cb3367/targeted\\_a\\_family\\_and\\_the\\_ques.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/news/erry-2018/06/75f0f464cb3367/targeted_a_family_and_the_ques.html)  
**or Listen** to ““No one calls me shooter,” Snap Judgment” <https://soundcloud.com/snapjudgment/snap-1012-no-one-calls-me-shooter>

## Assignments

- Complete Writing Assignment

Week 12: November 16-November 22

Subject: Undetermined

Goals: To be determined based on a student poll in early November

Materials: To be determined based on a student poll in early November

Assignments: To be determined based on a student poll in early November

Week 13: November 23-29—Thanksgiving Week No Assignments

Week 14: November 30-December 6

Subject: No new material

Assignments: Finish Final Project