

MMC 2604 Fall 2021 Syllabus
Media, Cultures, and Identity
Journalism, Justice & Community Change
Walsh-Childers / LoMonte

Class meetings: Mondays periods 8-10 (3-6 p.m.) in MAEB 0238

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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 and racial justice, whether positively or negatively. Students will be exposed to relevant mass communication theories such as agenda-setting and framing. Students will engage in analytical writing in ways that help them understand key current issues of race, 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 influences these decisions and how citizens can engage with media and with government 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 citizen engagement can influence them.

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 any 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.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications embraces a commitment to an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We expect each of our courses to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communication in a global society.

People of all backgrounds have important contributions to make to this class. Please be respectful of that. If, at any point, you believe someone in the class – including an instructor – has expressed ideas in inappropriate ways, please say something. Our goal is to make certain everyone feels comfortable participating in and listening to class discussions, and for class discussions to support a diversity of perspectives and experiences and honor your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, abilities, etc.).

If you prefer a name and/or pronouns that differ from those in the official records, please say so. If experiences outside this class are interfering with your performance in the class, please tell an instructor in confidence; we can connect you with appropriate support services. And if you prefer to speak with someone outside the course, Joanna Hernandez, CJC's director of inclusion and diversity, is an excellent resource. You can reach her via email at jhernandez@jou.ufl.edu.

Distractions During Class: As a matter of courtesy to your fellow class members, please turn off or silence all cell phones before class starts. You are welcome to use a laptop for note-taking if you need to, but there is pretty convincing [research](#) that hand-writing your notes increases your likelihood of remembering and understanding the material. If you have your laptop open, you should be using it only for taking notes or for looking up information relevant to class discussion. If you're surfing the web, watching YouTube videos or doing anything else not related to this specific class, you aren't mentally present, and you may be distracting other students. **Do not** *instant or text message during class or attempt to work on assignments for other classes*. Multi-tasking is not [effective](#).

Attendance: Your attendance and *participation* are important to making his class a success. If you find that you have to miss a class due to an emergency, please let one of the instructors know, in advance if at all possible, so that your absence can be "excused." Excessive absences, late arrival or early departure will affect your final class participation score – you can't participate if you aren't here. Note: If you are sick, regardless of what your symptoms are, or if you have been exposed to a COVID-19-positive person, **DO NOT COME TO CLASS**. UF has decided that students who cannot attend face-to-face classes will make up work and get notes just as

they would in any normal semester. Therefore, unless the university provides different guidance, you are expected to be in class.

COVID-19 precautions: Per UF policy, all students are expected to wear face masks whenever they are inside a building on campus. And even if that was not the case, common courtesy requires that you wear a face mask to protect those around you, regardless of your vaccination status. Even if you are fully vaccinated, you can still be infected, and you can transmit the infection to others. You will have no way of knowing whether others in the class have been vaccinated or if they are immune-compromised or regularly interact with immune-compromised people. One goal of this class is to help you learn more about how to be responsible citizens, and during the pandemic, being a responsible citizen requires that you take actions to protect others in the community.

Missing Deadlines or Assignments: If you believe you have an exceptional reason for missing a deadline for an assignment, please discuss it with an instructor *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 paper, does not constitute an acceptable reason for missing a deadline. *All assignments are due at the times 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 me 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.

Recording Lectures: Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty member during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

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 and/or will be available in the course Modules 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.

Plagiarism & Academic Honesty

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: Consult the free Poynter NewsU course called [Avoiding Plagiarism and Fabrication](#).
- Prof. Mindy McAdams also has put together an excellent guide: <http://www.macloo.com/cheat/index.htm>
- If you have questions, ask! There’s no penalty for asking questions, but the penalties for plagiarism are severe.
- Treat Internet sources, including any news articles you read, 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 weekly discussion posts. For discussion posts, you can simply include hyperlinks rather than citations, but for the paper, you will need formal citations, preferably following [APA style](#).
- For the final paper, you will be required to have **interviewed at least one human source**, and although APA style does not require it, you should include this interview in your reference list. Interview references should include the full name of the interviewee,

his/her/their relationship to the story or topic, the date and time the interview was completed and the method – e.g., via email, via Zoom, telephone, etc. You also *must* include contact information for the interviewee, including an email address and telephone number.

- Upload all assignments to the e-learning site; they will be submitted to Turnitin.com to check for plagiarism. Canvas will be set up 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.

ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly discussion posts or quizzes: (10 points per post, 100 points total, with 2 lowest grades dropped)

Most weeks, you will be required either to answer a short quiz (usually 5 questions) OR to write a short post (about three paragraphs) relating to the materials for that week. The first week and the last week will focus on questions that will help us assess how the class has affected your news consumption habits – complete these assignments and you're guaranteed the full 10 points, no matter how you answer.

Design Your Ideal News Source Group Project: (150 points, due Oct. 22)

You will work in teams of two or three students to produce a description of what you envision as the ideal *trustworthy* news source. Your news source may focus on a specific topic area (e.g. education, environment, health, etc.), but it must address issues of significance to the general public. That means your news source should not focus primarily on entertainment, sports, cooking or fashion. Come up with a name, a logo, and maybe even a home page mock-up for your site (no HTML required – this can be a PDF document). The description should include:

- A mission statement for the news source, including what topics and levels of government/business your news source will cover. Because this class focuses on state and local government, we'd encourage you to make state/local news the focus of your proposed site.
- What your organization's policies will be for verifying information before publication and for acknowledging/correcting mistakes
- What characteristics of your site will be designed to increase public trust in its content

- How you, as the managers, will ensure that the publication provides fair, equitable coverage of all racial, ethnic, religious, geographic and social class groups
- A discussion of how many staff members you will need, how much these personnel will cost and how you will bring in enough income to cover the organization's expenses. (This isn't meant to be a formal business plan – we just want you to gain an understanding of how much it costs to produce high quality, trustworthy journalism.) Several online sources list average journalist salaries (e.g. [ZipRecruiter](#), [Salary.com](#), [Indeed.com](#), etc.), but remember that organizations also typically cover **benefits**, including health insurance, retirement/pension benefits, etc., which can add up to 50% of the total cost for employees. (So, for instance, an employee paid \$50,000 a year may actually cost the company \$75,000 when benefits are included.)

Journalism & Justice Reflection Essays: (2 of them, 150 points each)

For this assignment, we're going to ask you to follow at least one of a variety of news compilations or podcasts, such as Investigative Reporters & Editors' (IRE) [Local Matters newsletter](#), the [Reveal](#) podcast, or ProPublica's [Local Reporting Network](#), and find a story of some significance that addresses a social justice topic of some kind, whether it's related to housing, education, health care, environmental justice, transportation, criminal justice, or some other topic. Twice this semester – Oct. 8 and Nov. 12 – you'll submit a 3- to 4-page "reflection" essay about a story you selected from one of these sources. For each essay, you must address the first three questions below, as well as at least two of the remaining questions (Nos. 4-8):

1. What makes this story/publication/news source trustworthy? What, if anything, would make it more trustworthy?
2. What is the problem the story focuses on?
3. What state/local policy contributes to the problem?
4. What assumptions are being made in this story? Is there a counter-narrative that isn't fully explored that could have been?
5. Who has power to change the situation, to solve the problem?
6. Who is invested in opposing change?
7. What would need to happen for change to occur / what happens next? How might citizen engagement increase the likelihood that this problem will be solved?
8. What role could this story (and potential follow-up reporting) play in bringing about change?

Story Impact Paper: (300 points total) Due December 13

Each student will select a news story/series, podcast or documentary from a list we will provide; all of them will be examples of high quality journalism that examined an important social issue at the state or local level. 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*. Relatively early in the semester -- Oct. 15 -- you'll submit a proposal for your paper, identifying which story/series/podcast/documentary you wish to examine, what impact you think it had or might have had, and *how you will go about determining how the journalist's or journalists' work affected individuals dealing with the problem the story*

addressed. (These might include impacts on state/local government policy, impacts on business policy, impacts on community engagement and organization, etc.) The proposal will help us see whether you understand the requirements of the project so we can offer advice about how to assess the story's impact. The proposal itself will be worth 50 points. Your progress report, due in mid-March, will be worth another 50 points. The final report will be worth 200 points (20% of your final grade). More information will be provided in separate documents.

Class Participation: (150 points)

Every student is expected to be an active participant in this class. Why? Because research shows that students who participate, who are engaged in the class, [learn more](#) than those who don't. 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. Here's a [how-to](#), in case this is tough for you. Class participation will account for 15% of your final grade. Just showing up will NOT be enough to earn full class participation points. Someone who has perfect attendance but rarely-to-never speaks up or asks questions will earn, at best, 75% of available points.

To encourage everyone to participate, each student is required to sign up for 3 weeks during which you will be a discussion leader. You won't make any formal presentation; this simply means that you're committing to be especially well prepared for class on those days. We'll make a point of calling on the assigned discussion leaders (if necessary) during each class, but of course, you should always feel free to comment or ask questions, regardless of whether you're signed up for that day. Failure to sign up as a discussion leader for 3 weeks and/or not being present and prepared to comment during a week for which you're signed up will lower your participation grade.

ASSIGNMENTS BY WEEK

Week 1, August 23: The importance of local and state government; why this course matters
READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.

- FiveThirtyEight: [Local News Coverage Is Declining — And That Could Be Bad For American Politics](#)

Week 2, August 30: Why local and state news matters
READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.

- Pew Center After the Fact podcast: [The loss of local news – the impact](#)
- *USA Today/Arizona Republic*: [Copy, Paste, Legislate: You elected them to write new laws. They're letting corporations do it instead.](#)

NO CLASS SEPTEMBER 6, LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

Week 3, September 13: How to know what's trustworthy; Why everyone needs a trusted and *trustworthy* news source (or several)
READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.

- “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 (pdf available in Canvas module)
- News Literacy Project: [10 questions for fake news detection](#)
- *Forbes*: [Research shows how to spot fake news about coronavirus](#)
- *Columbia Journalism Review*: [As election looms, a network of mysterious ‘pink slime’ local news outlets nearly triples in size](#)

WEEK 4, September 20

Changes in the way news is being delivered

- Ken Doctor: [Newsonomics: What was once unthinkable is quickly becoming reality in the destruction of local news](#)
- [Radiolab: Right to Be Forgotten](#)

PROPOSAL DUE FOR FINAL PAPER, 3 P.M. MONDAY, SEPT. 20

WEEK 5, September 27:

School safety

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- Snap Judgment podcast: [No one calls me shooter](#)
- *The Oregonian*: [Targeted](#)

Week 6, October 4:

Equity issues in education

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: [“Lessons Lost”](#)
- This American Life: [“The Problem We All Live With”](#)

FIRST “JOURNALISM & JUSTICE ESSAY” DUE, 3 P.M. MONDAY, OCT. 4

Week 7, October 11:

Housing equity issues

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- WBEZ-Chicago: [Where banks don’t lend](#)
- *High Country News*: [The housing policy that’s turning back gentrification](#)

WEEK 8, October 18:

Mental health policy

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- Health News Florida: [Committed: Florida’s children victims of dysfunctional Baker Act system](#)
- *Boston Globe*: [The Desperate and the Dead: Solutions -- San Antonio became a national leader in mental health care by working together as a community](#)

- *Boston Globe*: [*The Desperate and the Dead: Community care -- mental hospitals were closed to give people with mental illness greater freedom*](#)
[Recommended but not required]

“IDEAL NEWS SOURCE” GROUP PROJECT DUE 3 P.M. MONDAY, OCT. 18

WEEK 9: October 25:

The health care industry, health policy and social justice

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- MLK50/ProPublica: [Methodist Le Bonheur Makes Millions, Owns a Collection Agency and Relentlessly Sues the Poor](#)
- MLK50/ProPublica: [Methodist Le Bonheur erases debts of more than 6,500 patients it sued](#)
- Georgia Health News: [Race and COVID: Stark disparities in rural Georgia](#)

WEEK 10: November 1

Race, policing and criminal justice

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- ProPublica / *Times-Union*: [“Walking While Black”](#)

PROGRESS REPORT ON STORY IMPACT PROJECT DUE 3 P.M. MONDAY, NOV. 1

WEEK 11: November 8

Bias in the courts

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- American Public Media: [In the Dark, Season 2](#) (Episodes 1, 7, 8 and 14)

WEEK 12, November 15

Environmental (in)justice

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- *West Virginia Gazette-Mail*: [Stirring the Waters: In Southern WV, days without water are a way of life](#)
- Southerly: [The rural South’s invisible public health crisis](#)
- *Montgomery Advertiser*: [In rural Africa, lessons for the U.S. South about eradicating poverty-related diseases](#)

SECOND “JOURNALISM & JUSTICE ESSAY” DUE 3 P.M. MONDAY, NOV. 10

WEEK 13, November 22

Workplace safety and employee rights

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.:

- Reveal News podcast: [Catching Amazon in a lie](#) (stop podcast at 34:15)
- Tampa Bay Times: [Poisoned, Part 1: The factory](#)
- Tampa Bay Times: [Poisoned, Part 1: The failures](#)

WEEK 14, November 29

Voting rights

READINGS, PODCASTS, ETC.

- *Washington Post*: [A turning point for voting rights \(podcast\)](#)
- The Current: [Redistricting -- How it works, how you can help](#)

WEEK 15, December 6: No class meeting, but instructors hold “Zoom office hours” during class time to consult with anyone with questions about the final paper

STORY IMPACT PAPER DUE 5 P.M. MONDAY, DEC. 13