

JOU 4011C Audience Engagement and Analytics
Spring 2026
Tuesdays/Thursdays online at 9:35 a.m. ET

Instructor Information

Adjunct Professor Donesha Aldridge (She/her), Department of Journalism

Contact: d.aldridge@ufl.edu

Office hours: Virtually on Thursdays from 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Appointments are also available upon request.

Course Objectives

The role of journalists goes beyond just sharing stories. The best journalists understand their audiences and know how to craft content and stories that resonate with them directly. This course will teach students the importance of understanding the communities they report on and how social media and analytics are key resources for audience engagement. This class will include discussions about:

- Understanding the importance of an active audience
- Identifying key performance indicators for digital success
- Building trust in communities
- Creating audience personas
- Audience engagement in a mobile-first world
- Lessons from audience-first brands and journalists

Prerequisites

Junior standing and JOU 3101

Textbook

Mobile and Social Media Journalism: A Practical Guide for Multimedia Journalism (2nd edition) is **required** for the course. The book is by Anthony Adornato. The instructor will supplement information from the third edition during class.

Other Materials and Technology

This course is being offered online only. Students will use basic technical skills to navigate this course online.

It's recommended by the instructor for students taking this class to have access to a social media account. Some class discussions will be geared toward trending news topics and online audiences on social media.

Grading Scale

Attendance	10%
Quizzes	20%
General assignments	20%
Course Project	25%
Final Exam	25%

A (93-100), A- (90-92)

B+ (87 – 89), B (83 – 86), B- (80 – 82)

C+ (77 – 79), C (73 – 76), C- (70 – 72)

D+ (67 – 69), D (63 – 66), D- (60 – 62)

E (0-59)

Information on current [UF grading policies can be found here.](#)

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory and is 10 percent of the grade. Students are also expected to participate in class discussions. If a student must miss class, contact the instructor as soon as possible. Excused absences include illnesses, emergencies, and other instances [outlined by the university here.](#)

Reach out to the instructor about any missed quizzes or assignments due to an excused absence.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in the course are consistent with university policies. [See UF Academic Regulations and Policies for more information regarding the University Attendance Policies.](#)

Late Assignments

Please adhere to all deadlines outlined by the instructor. Late assignments will not be accepted unless otherwise noted by the instructor.

Course Project

Students will turn in an audience-based project about news consumption habits.

Through the project, students will explore where people get their news, how often they engage with it and what sources they trust. Methods for conducting the research will be outlined by the instructor.

The project will also include a brief presentation where students share key insights from their findings. This project teaches the skills of listening directly to an audience rather than making assumptions about their behaviors, preferences and experiences.

Course Calendar

	Dates and class objectives	Assignment Due	Homework/General Assignments
Week 1	Jan. 13 Introductions and overview of class <ul style="list-style-type: none">- In class, write a headline and abstract about yourself. We will present them as mini introductions- Syllabus outline- Discussion: How do you consume news?		Read Chapter 1 of the textbook (Forces at the Gate: An Active Audience). We will have a class discussion Thursday.
	Jan. 15 Defining Audience Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Background: Before the world of social media in comparison to now- Why audience engagement is important		Read these Pew Research articles: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- News Fact Sheet- Social Media and News Fact Sheet
Week 2	Jan. 20 Class lecture on news consumption, Pew Research findings <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Breakout sessions: Consumption, impact		Read Chapter 2 of textbook (Navigating Change: The mobile-first newsroom)
	Jan 22 A mobile-first environment <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mobile-first/digital-first models- Social listening/crowdsourcing		Find an online example from a news outlet that displays the "mobile first model." Write an assessment about what you found (<i>continued on next page</i>)

	*Quiz on Chapter 1 of textbook		
Week 3	<p>Jan. 27 Positive Audience experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Breakdown of loyalty, returning audiences 		<p>Continue working on" Mobile first" model assessment</p> <p>Read Trusting News articles before class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Today's trust tip: Make your contact information truly accessible - Charlotte newsroom case study - 21% have spoken to journalists
	<p>Jan. 29 The Burden of trust and audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mistrust in news discussion - Trusting News exercise: Engage and Listen to Build trust <p>*Quiz on Chapter 2 of textbook</p>	Mobile First assessments are due	<p>Trusting news exercise: Draft responses to comments.</p> <p>Read chapter 9 in textbook (The spread of fake news)</p>
Week 4	<p>Feb. 3 The term 'fake news'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 2016 election cycle - Class discussion on examples of the term being used - Misinformation and disinformation 	Exercise about responses to comments due	<p>Come to class next week prepared to discuss the following from Trusting News</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talking to people who don't trust news - Watch video on explaining sources -
	<p>Feb. 5 The Burden of trust and sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trusting News: How students can earn trust with sources - Trusting News: Trust research <p>*Quiz on chapter 9 of textbook</p>		<p>Read news examples given in class.</p> <p>Be prepared to work in groups next week for X-ray exercise.</p>
Week 5	<p>Feb 10 Trusting News X-ray reading exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Breakout group discussions 		<p>Read these Pew Research articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How the US public and experts see AI - Negative effects on news. journalists

	Feb. 12 AI in Journalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good usage vs. bad usage (Trusting news exercise) - CMS integration - Breakout sessions: Practice in groups 		
Week 6	Feb. 17 Continue Discussion AI in Journalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective prompts - Practical examples - AI distrust - Journalists tools 		To boost your AI literacy. Do at least one module using Poynter's interactive tool. Read chapters 3 and 4 in textbook (Your Social Media brand: Who do you want to be; Social Newsgathering)
	Feb. 19 Branding on Social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your brand and your audience: content that works - Crowdsourcing, finding stories your audience wants, social newsgathering - Social listening through breaking news event 		
Week 7	Feb. 24 Social media discussion continues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examples from effective journalists - Listening to the audience 		Read Chapter 7 (Social media and audience engagement)
	Feb 26 Analytics and online engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media optimization - Engaging social media posts - What works on each platform <p>*Quiz on Chapters 3 and 4</p>		
Week 8	March 3 The power of Google <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEO/Google discover - Google Trends overview - Serving our audiences 		Use Google trends explorer. Select three key terms and analyze the data. Write a summary about your findings.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the content they want - Breakout sessions using Google trends tool 		
	March 5 Present Google Trends exercise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Breakout groups: Social media strategies exercises 	Turn in Google trends exercise	Begin Google trends/audience journals
Week 9	March 10 Analytics/tools used in newsrooms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examples from journalists 		
	March 12 Analytics discussion continues (Web) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding, unique visitors, bounce rates, page views, source data - Go live: interacting on YouTube, Instagram and Facebook 	Google trends/audience journals due	Read The Linfest Institute's toolkit on audience personas
Week 10	SPRING BREAK - NO CLASSES (March 16-March 20)		
Week 11	March 24 Audience personas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are they? - Understanding target audiences - How they are used in news and research - Course Project overview *Quiz on analytics information Chapter 7 of textbooks		Begin working on course project
	March 26 Audience insights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examples of work from journalists 		Read Chapter 6 (Writing mobile friendly web stories)
Week 12	March 31 Keeping the audience first in reporting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the audience's shoes - Mobile audience prioritization - Breakout sessions: You the Viewer discussion 	Course Project Check-in (Part 1)	
	April 2 Editor's hat exercise		(Continues on next page)

	*Quiz on Audience persona background, chapter 6 of book		Read Chapter 8 of textbook (Social media ethics and policies)
Week 13	April 7 Ethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audience reactions and response - Corrections and backlash 	Course Project Check-in (Part 2)	
	April 9 When things go awry exercise		
Week 14	April 14 Project presentations	Full Course Project due	
	April 16 Continue project presentations		
Week 16	April 21 Final exam review		
	April 23 Reading Day (No Class)		

**Please note the course calendar is subject to change.*

****The final exam for this course is set for April 27, 2026 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.**

Academic Integrity

The University's Honesty Policy regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc.:

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [See the UF Conduct Code website for more information.](#) If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

AI Use

Students are only permitted to use AI tools for research purposes (similarly to how one would use Google search functions) or during class instruction time when given explicit permission from the instructor (We will have a lesson and class discussions about AI in Journalism during class). All other uses are not permitted. If there are any questions about usage, please contact the instructor.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

Any student who has unique learning needs can make the instructor aware of the situation. Accommodations can be made for anyone registered with the Disability Resource Center. Visit [UF's Disability Resource Center for more on accommodations.](#)

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways:

- The email they receive from GatorEvals,
- Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or
- The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>

Additional resources and UF policies

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at [352-392-4357](tel:352-392-4357) or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

[Read UF's academic policies and resources here.](#)