



USC Annenberg

**COMM 400: Speech and Digital Communities:
Privacy and Democracy in the Digital Age**

Course Syllabus

Section: 20614R

Semester: Fall 2014

Meeting Times: T/Th 3:30-4:50 pm

Classroom: ANN 210

Instructor: Michael Robinson, Ph.D.

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Office/phone: ASC 121D/213-821-7852

Office hour: Tues. 1:30-2:30 pm and by appt.

Introduction

Self-expression is arguably the cornerstone of democracy. The right to free speech is protected by the First Amendment to the US Constitution, and political self-expression, in the form of the franchise, is a key obligation of citizenship. In the wake of the digital revolution and the surveillance technologies it made possible, however, silence, not speech, is taking on increasing importance. The citizen has the right and obligation to speak, but does she have the right *not* to be heard? What is meant by the “right to privacy”?

Consider the growing role of surveillance in modern life. The National Security Administration documents released by Edward Snowden (the NSA contractor-turned-leaker) speak of secret court rulings regarding government spying, bulk collection of “meta-data” about private phone conversations between unsuspecting Americans, secret spying operations (“Boundless Informant”), and even of “roving bugs” (cell phones turned on remotely by the NSA to spy on their unwitting owners). The operations’ proponents say that they are necessary to fight terrorism. Critics have raised alarms about civil rights violations. To what extent are such programs compatible with democracy?

The digital revolution has also introduced new questions concerning the *obligation* (as opposed to the right) to speak. The so-called digital divide, for example, could mean that new inequities may negatively impact democracy as more information and services move online. What populations are potentially affected in this way by the digital divide, and what solutions, if any, exist?

Course Description

This course will explore the impact of the digital revolution on privacy and democracy. How has the advent of digital technology changed what it means to speak, in public and private? What does privacy mean in the digital age? How is the digital divide affecting not only citizens’ access to information but also the participation of citizens in their democracy? Finally, how has the digital revolution changed our collective notions of speech when it relates to citizenship and belonging?

Student Learning Objectives

Class discussion, presentations, readings, and optional field work will enable you to explore the impact of digital media on 1) **privacy** and, more specifically, the value of privacy to individuals and communities, 2) **political speech** and, more specifically, the value and role of speech in democracies, and 3) **citizenship** and, more specifically, notions of the citizen’s right and obligation to engage in

political speech. A substantial **researched project** will give you the opportunity to explore the digital revolution's impacts on private and public speech in relation to their own research interests.

Course Texts (available from me as PDFs)

Greenwald, Glenn, *No Place to Hide* (excerpts)

Roberts, Alasdair, *Blacked Out* (excerpts)

McChesney, Robert, *Digital Disconnect*

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish* (excerpt)

Mill, J. S., *On Liberty* (excerpts)

Goldman, Emma, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (excerpt)

Bobbio, Norberto, *Liberalism and Democracy* (excerpts)

+ articles and excerpts from a number of other texts (see schedule below for titles)

Assignments

On a weekly basis, you will be asked to publish **short blog posts** (300-600 words) designed 1) to make in-depth, written engagement with the course concepts routine and 2) to encourage dialogue and engagement with your classmates. The **final project** (a 20-pp. **seminar paper**) is designed to prompt you to produce a potentially publishable piece of writing while allowing flexibility in terms of topic and approach. Prior to turning in the final project, you be asked to submit a detailed **research proposal/bibliography** (2 pp.) and to give a **multimedia presentation** on your research to the class (5-min. minimum).

Seminar Paper. You will have latitude in choosing your topic and approach, and the project timeline breaks down the paper into manageable chunks. Along the way, you will receive feedback from me and your classmates.

Timeline:

Week 5: provisional topic due

Week 8: annotated research bibliography due

Week 9: seminar paper introduction due

Weeks 12-13: seminar paper draft workshops

Week 15: project presentations

December 16: final draft due

Privacy and Democracy Blog. You can find the blog on the course home page on Blackboard. This is where your short pieces are to be published (see the course schedule below for the due dates). You are free to reflect on the course readings and discussion topics, write more formal entries that unpack and analyse the texts, or to summarize and/or critique the reading. (Note: I welcome your proposals for other uses of the blog posts that you think would help you engage with the course material.) Think of the blog as a kind of practice field where you can train for the seminar paper, and feel free to comment constructively on your classmates' posts. (Tip: decide on a final project topic early, and use the short pieces to draft sections of it.) Unless otherwise noted, the short pieces are due on or before Friday at midnight each week. The first post is due by Friday, 9/5, at midnight. Points will be deducted for late postings. The only other factors I will take into account in grading the blog will be their number, length, and relevance to the course.

Requirements and Class Policies

All students are required to do all the reading, attend all classes, complete all assignments, bring all required materials to class, and participate fully in class discussions. Attendance is mandatory and will be taken each class meeting. Tardiness (both late arrivals AND early exits) will be tracked along with absences. **Students who miss more than two class meetings will lose points and risk failing the course. Please note: there will be a deduction of half a letter grade from the final grade for each unexcused absence.**

Participation. The participation grade will also be determined by your level of attention during class. *Filling a seat does not constitute participation.* Good participation can take non-verbal as well as verbal forms, and I understand that some students will be more overtly involved than others. That said, I expect all students to find ways to contribute within the classroom by being supportive listeners, thoughtful speakers, and respectful peers.

Laptop Policy. USC Annenberg requires that you own a laptop. I do not require that you bring your laptop to class. But I do require that you bring the required reading assignment to class with you each day. You may feel free to print out the reading or access it on a laptop or tablet in class (but not a phone).

Policy on competing media. While in class, you are expected to be fully present. This means in part that you must turn off your cell phone when class begins, music players should not be used, and, if using a laptop or tablet for classwork, you should take pains to avoid extraneous Web-surfing, doing other coursework, or otherwise allowing your computer to distract you (or others) during class.

Grade Breakdown

Total points = 1000

-Required work (800 pts):

Final Project = 400 (included: bibliography & rough draft)

Final Project Presentation = 100

Class Participation = 100

Blog Posts = 100

Workshop Participation (submission and feedback) = 100

-Choose among the following (up to 20 pts):

Radio Essay or Story (presented to class, 3 min.+) = 200

Video Essay or Story (presented to class, 3 min.+) = 200

Out-of-class Talk, Workshop, or Reading Group = 200

Public Service Campaign (thoroughly drafted or drafted/executed) = 200

New researched Wikipedia entry on topic related to class = 200

Local High School Teach-in (recorded if possible) = 200

Detailed Lesson Plan for Above (incl. activities, discussion q's, readings) = 100

Thematically Appropriate Work of Art (e.g., short film, animation, comic, story, song) = 100

Other (cleared with me in advance) = 100 or 200, depending

Publication/Presentation Option

Students are encouraged to publish or present publicly something they will have written for the course. Students may submit work for publication on the course Web site, hosted by the Annenberg School. Other possible venues include: USC's *The Rumpus*, *Literal Latte*, or an online publication featured on a site such as *Poets & Writers*.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

Course Schedule (may be subject to change)

Please note: reading assignments are listed next to the days that they are due for discussion in class. All readings will be available on Blackboard (as either PDFs or links) in the "Course Readings" folder (found under "Content"), unless otherwise noted.

*Unless specified (as in the case of Web links), the entirety of the reading will be due in the case of a given author. For example, on 8/28, the entire PDF by Aristotle (an excerpt from the *Politics*) will be due. In the case of Hobbes (a Web link on Blackboard), you are being asked to read certain chapters of a text online.*

Unit 1: Historical/Theoretical Background

Week 1

Tuesday, 8/26: course overview, syllabus, introductions

Thursday, 8/28: Aristotle (1.1252a-1255b, 1.1259a-1260b in the *Politics*), Hobbes (ch. 16-18 in *Leviathan*), Williams (from *Keywords*), Mann ("Praxistemology")

No blog post due this week

Week 2

Tuesday, 9/2: *Declaration of Independence*, *Bill of Rights*, Mill (ch. 1-3 of *On Liberty*)

Thursday, 9/4: Bobbio

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 9/5, at midnight

Week 3

Tuesday, 9/9: Foucault (from *Discipline and Punish*)

Thursday, 9/11: Bentham (Letters I-VIII, XVI, XVII, XIX, XX, XXI), Arendt

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 9/12, at midnight

Unit 2: Privacy at Home (Gender, Sexuality, Familial Dynamics)Week 4

Tuesday, 9/16: Rossler, MacKinnon

Thursday, 9/18: Goldman (ch. 2, "Majorities and Minorities"), Greenhouse

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 9/19, at midnight

Week 5

Tuesday, 9/23: Boling (ch. 4, "Problems with the Right to Privacy," pp. 85-111), Semple,
-Provisional research topic due today

Thursday, 9/25: Bilton, Toews

-Discussion of research practices and the use of USC resources with Chimene Tucker

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 9/26, at midnight

Week 6

Tuesday, 9/30: Sandel

Thursday, 10/2: Boyd

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 9/27, at midnight

Unit 3: (New) Media and Mass SurveillanceWeek 7

Tuesday, 10/7: Greenwald (pp. 90-169), Snowden

Thursday, 10/9: Greenwald (pp. 170-247)

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 9/28, at midnight

Week 8

Tuesday, 10/14: Roberts (pp. 1-50)

Thursday, 10/16: Roberts (pp. 51-106)

-Annotated research bibliography due in class

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 9/29, at midnight

Week 9

Tuesday, 10/21: Roberts (pp. 107-149)

Thursday, 10/23: Roberts (pp. 150-230)

-Final project introduction due in class (5 pp.)

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 10/24, at midnight

Week 10

Tuesday, 10/28: McChesney (pp. 1-62)

Thursday, 10/30: McChesney (pp. 63-129)

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 10/31, at midnight

Week 11

Tuesday, 11/4: McChesney (pp. 130-171)

Thursday, 11/6: McChesney (pp. 172-232)

-Presentation sign-up for final presentations, radio essays, video essays, artwork (as applicable)

-Final project rough draft workshop sign-up

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 11/7, at midnight

Unit 4: Everyday Surveillance

Week 12: Work

Tuesday, 11/11: Libbenga, Cohen

-Rough draft due in class for workshop (10 pp.)

-In-class workshops begin

Thursday, 11/13: Cole

-Workshops continue as needed

Blog post due: on or before Friday, 11/14, at midnight

Week 13: Public Space

Tuesday, 11/18: Koskela, Richtel

-Workshops continue as needed

Thursday, 11/20: Bakir excerpt (e-book on sousveillance in war)

-Workshops continue as needed

No blog post due this week.

Week 14: Biopolitics

Tuesday, 11/25: Film screening: *Gattaca*

Thursday, 11/27: Thanksgiving break (no blog post due this week).
Week 15

Tuesday, 12/2: Graham & Marvin on public space (excerpt)
-Presentations begin

Thursday, 12/4: **presentations continue**

No blog post due this week.

Seminar paper due: 12/16 via e-mail by midnight