ASCJ 200

Discover, Deconstruct, Design:
Navigating Media and News in the Digital Age

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<th>Who</th>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Muller, Professor School of Journalism</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alison Trope, Clinical Professor, School of Communication</td>
<td>ANN 406</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samantha Close, Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>Thursdays 3-5:50pm</td>
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<td>Lab/Section Friday 11-11:50</td>
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Office Hours and Contact Information
Judy Muller ([jmmuller@usc.edu](mailto:jmmuller@usc.edu)) Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 and by appointment
Alison Trope ([trope@usc.edu](mailto:trope@usc.edu)) Tuesdays 1-3 and by appointment
Samantha Close ([but.no.cigar@gmail.com](mailto:but.no.cigar@gmail.com)) by appointment

Course Overview and Objective:
This interdisciplinary course is designed to engage students as discriminating media and news consumers and contributors at a time when the digital revolution is spawning an unprecedented daily flood of content. The mark of a well-educated person in the 21st century is the ability to critically navigate this contested terrain: to understand, employ, enjoy and help build and shape the media landscape we now inhabit. The health of our democracy depends on enlightened and engaged citizens who can critically analyze the range of information and content disseminated from an equally wide range of sources and platforms.

Course Objective:
The course is designed at the intersection of theory and practice. Students will

- **develop** critical thinking and analytic skills for evaluating the barrage of media, information, and news content we face in this digital age, from advertising, film and television images to news and opinion.
- **discern and distinguish** different types of media and news (e.g. opinion, news reports, documentary, entertainment, expository/informative) as well as the different media formats and platforms in which they circulate
- **learn** how to become full and active participants in the new digital culture, traveling beyond the role of passive consumers to emerge as highly-engaged critics, thoughtful citizens and co-producers of information.
- **produce** and manipulate media using various software in your Adobe Cloud suite while considering your approach, bias, and modes of sharing/distribution

The course will examine new avenues of civic participation and the critical importance of ethical standards in communicating messages. **Students will learn how to apply their critical-thinking and analytic skills to a range of media and news production and consumption. The critical thinking skills developed in this course will be applicable to many fields of study, from science to the arts.**
**Course Readings:**

All course readings can be found as **PDFs** or via online links on Blackboard. The Blackboard site will also include a list of **useful links and resources** used throughout the term. We will regularly incorporate topics and developments that come up in the popular press and current events to allow for “in the moment” analysis.

**Course Requirements and Attendance:**

Students are required to do all of the reading, attend all classes, complete all assignments, and participate fully in class discussion. Attendance is mandatory and will be taken each class meeting. Attendance grade may be affected by your promptness and level of attention during class lecture. You are allowed two absences without explanation, after which there is a deduction off the final grade for each unexcused absence. If circumstances prevent you from attending class, the instructors should be informed by email or phone.

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Personal computers and wireless Internet are a key part of today’s technological culture, but they also can distract you from the class discussion and dampen participation. We expect you to use computers for note-taking purposes only, and to avoid using other mobile devices during class time. Any deviation will result in laptops being banned from the classroom and participation grades being impacted.

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**Assignments and Grading:**

**All assignments must be completed and handed in on time to avoid a grade reduction.** If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide written documentation that will allow you to be excused, or discuss your situation with us in a timely manner. Do not wait until the end of the semester to sort things out. Remember: this is YOUR responsibility.

You are responsible for the material covered in class and in the reading. You will be evaluated on the following:

1) the level of your engagement with the class materials (as demonstrated in your written work, projects, and class participation)
2) your capacity to explain your ideas and analysis in articulate and well-written forms and/or media
3) your ability to analyze and apply the theories and methodologies of the class

All of your work will be graded on two primary evaluative scales:

1) how well it demonstrates an understanding of the theories and methodologies of the class
2) how well it articulates and structures its argument (in written and media forms)

The final course grade will be based on the following distribution:

- Participation (including regular hashtagging via social media) 15%
- Weekly Blog Posts (approx. 1000 words) + DIY Assignments 40%
- Collaborative Project 20%
- Final Project (including proposal) 25%

Assignments will be detailed in specific prompts distributed during the course of the semester.

You must complete **ALL** of these assignments in order to pass the class. **Failure to complete ONE OR MORE of them will result in an F in the class.**
Course Grading Policy:
Grades will be assigned as follows:

Grades will be assigned as follows:
A outstanding, thoughtful and insightful work and analysis, showing an ability to think beyond the basic course material.
A grade of A+ (97-100) may be given to individual assignments in rare instances where expectations are exceeded.
A-/B+ above average work, demonstrating effort and keen understanding of conceptual ideas
B/B- average work, needs improvement on ideas and argument
C+/C shows little effort, lacks clarity and/or argument
C- and below fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores on the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade as per the scale shown below:

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<td>A+</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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If you have concerns regarding a grade on a given assignment, you must first wait 24 hours (cooling off period) before appealing it in writing, stating the reasons why you feel the grade is inaccurate. All concerns should be addressed within 10 days of receiving the graded assignment. After that, no appeals will be accepted for review and the grade will be considered final.
Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standardshttps://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu/ will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

ESL Students
Please inform the instructors as soon as possible if you require special accommodations based on your understanding of the English language.
PART 1: DECODING

This section of the class will examine and equip students with the basics of media and news analysis. We will discuss narrative form and modes of storytelling, genres and news neighborhoods, point of view and tone.

Week 1  Introduction: Media & News in our Everyday Lives
How do we consume media and news? How do we play roles as producers of media and news content? How are media and news content central to and integrated into our daily lives and habits, constructing our identities and understandings of the world?

Reading
• Justin Lewis & Sut Jhaly, “The Struggle Over Media Literacy”
• Ben Adler, “Streams of Consciousness: Millennials Expect a Steady Diet of Quick-Hit Social-Media-Mediated Bits and Bytes. What Does That Mean for Journalism?” (CJR)

BLOG
• Create a Wordpress blog for the semester.
• 48-hour diary/blog reflection (24 hours everyday use; 24 hours media/news “blackout”)

Week 2  Fundamentals of Literacy and Why It Matters
What are the basic tools of media and news analysis? Focusing on patterns in form, structure and point of view, students will learn how to decipher and deconstruct media and news content and consider the range of meanings (intended, negotiated and oppositional) embedded in them and the ways we respond to them. We will discuss and work to understand the importance of literacy in the context of the fields of communication and journalism.

Reading
• Neil Postman, “Bullshit and the Art of Crap Detection”
• John McManus, excerpts from Detecting Bull: How to Identify Bias and Junk Journalism in Print, Broadcast and the World Wide Web
• Greg M. Smith, excerpts from What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss
• Henry Jenkins et al, “Confronting the Challenges of a Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century,” pp.3-23

BLOG
Find a recent news article about a scientific study and perform the SMELL Test (Sources, Motivations, Evidence, Logic and What’s Left Out) as a blog reflection
**Week 3  Genres and News “Neighborhoods”**

What are the different categories of media and news (e.g. film and television genres, advertising, commentary, propaganda, publicity, citizen journalism, raw information, and transmedia storytelling)? How do they overlap? How are they different? Why are these distinctions important?

**Reading:**
- Greg M. Smith, “Genre Shmenre”
- Jeremy Butler, “Man Men: Visual Style”
- Paul Mihailidis, “Young Citizens and Perceptions of Social Media Use—Integrated Information Landscapes”
- Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, “What’s Here and What is Missing” and “Where Did This Come From?”

**BLOG:**
Choose a recent news story, film, television show, or Internet site, and make a case for the particular neighborhood or genre (or hybrid) it fits. Be specific in citing the characteristics of the neighborhood/genre/space.

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**January 30**    Last day to drop without a “W”

**PART 2: POLITICS**

This section of the class will examine the politics of media and news, stemming from the premise that media, news and digital content are never neutral or objective. We will explore bias, authenticity, appropriation, contested opinions as well as the politics and ethics of representation and identity (e.g. gender, race, sexuality and class).

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**Week 4  The Power of Media and News**

How are meanings and bias constructed in the way media and news are produced and consumed? Is “fair and balanced” a false construct? We will discuss the ideological power of media and the experience and effects of reading, seeing, hearing and partaking in it.

**Reading:**
- McManus, “Detecting Bias in Images”
- Daniel Boorstin, “From News Gathering to News Making: A Flood of Pseudo-Events”
- Todd Gitlin, “Preface” and ”Media Routines and Political Crises”
- John Fiske, “Popular News”

**DIY:**
Iconic image manipulation. Use your Adobe cloud tool kit to rethink and reshape the meaning of an iconic image (see image folder in Blackboard). Post photo on blog and comment on the change in meaning and potential bias resulting from this transformation.
### Week 5  The Politics and Ethics of Representation and Participation

How do facets of our identity, including gender, race, class, and sexuality get constructed by and impact the way we interpret media and understand ourselves and others?

**Reading:**
- Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, “Critical Media Literacy, Democracy and the Reconstruction of Education”
- Lillie Chouliaraki, “Distant Suffering in the Media”
- Thomas Patterson, “The Democracy Problem”
- Greg Smith, “Role Models and Stereotypes: An Introduction to the “Other”
- Carrie James, “Morality, Ethics and Digital Life” (1-17)

**DIY:**
*Critical Media Project* contribution. Choose a recent media or news artifact that features an underrepresented group and annotate with description and discussion questions to provoke critical thinking (following the format on [www.criticalmediaproject.org](http://www.criticalmediaproject.org)).

### Week 6  Comedy, Satire and the New News of “Truthiness”

How are the lines between news media and entertainment blurred? We will examine more traditional coverage as well as the popularity and role satirical news media can play in our understanding of the political and public sphere.

**Reading:**
- Jeffrey Jones, “Fake News vs. Real News: The Case of *The Daily Show* and CNN”
- Ethan Thompson, “*Onion News Network* Flow”
- Farhad Manjoo, “Truthiness Everywhere”

**BLOG**
After watching Jon Stewart segment on CNN’s coverage of the Boston Marathon and the Navy Yard shooting, consider the potential pitfalls of “being first, but not necessarily right” in the competitive atmosphere of 24-hour news cycles.
PART 3: GATEKEEPERS

This section of the course will explore the gatekeepers and powerbrokers that define what media and news we see and how we see it, while also considering the role individuals have to produce and share content, thereby disrupting traditional structures of production and distribution. We will discuss industrial and institutional structures of production and distribution as well as their impact on First Amendment issues, free press and free speech, privacy, and net neutrality. We will explore the tensions between and values that underlie public and private interest and the role media and news play in the context of democracy and corporate capitalism.

Week 7  Top Down: Behind the Scenes in Media and News Industries
What economic imperatives play a role in the production and distribution of media and news? This week will offer a broad overview of industries and conglomerates and their infrastructures as a way to understand the impact they have on what we have access to and how content comes to us.

Readings:
• Philip Napoli, “Media Economics and the Study of Media Industries”
• Mike Ananny, “Critical News Making and the Paradox of DIY News”
• Tim Wu, “One Billion Hearts Bleeding As One” (New Republic)
• Anne Helen Peterson, “Entertainment Tonight: Tabloid News”

BLOG:
• CHOICE #1: Reflect on the Comcast merger and its potential impact on the economics and creative products produced by media and news industries. Use the infographics from Free Press to consider the key issues and bias of various stakeholders (including “Free Press”).

• CHOICE #2: Reflect on the way economic imperatives of media and news industries impact the content and priorities of traditional news outlets. How has the diminishing allocation of resources to global news reporting led to an increased need for freelance reporters (who remain vulnerable as they are not safeguarded by mainstream organizations)?
Week 8  Bottom Up: Changing Roles of Citizens and Consumers in a Participatory Culture
How have citizens and consumers become producers? What do we produce and how does our participation challenge traditional business structures and the production and availability of content?

Readings:
• Howard Rheingold, “Participation Power”
• Henry Jenkins and Nico Carpenter, “Theorizing Participatory Intensities: A Conversation about Participation and Politics”
• Dan Gilmor, “Entrepreneurs Can Save Journalism and You Could Be One of Them”
• “On Skepticism, News Literacy, and Transparency: An Interview with Dan Gillmor” (Henry Jenkins blog)
• Steven Johnson, “How Twitter Will Change the Way We Live” (Time)
• Dominique Brossard and Dietram A. Scheufele, “This Story Stinks” (NY Times)

DIY:
Two-minute trailer/promo for this class (answering the question: why is media/news literacy important?). Use a smart phone camera and tools from Adobe Cloud.

Week 9  How We See, It, Communicate It and Live It
How does the changing landscape of digital distribution impact the way we see and partake in media and news? We will explore topics including platforms and interfaces, mobility and portability, disposability, wearable technologies, etc.

Readings:
• Chuck Tryon, “Pushing the (Red) Envelope: Portable Video, Platform Mobility, and Pay-Per-View Culture”
• Tarleton Gillespie, “The Politics of Platforms”
• Mike Ananny, “Creating Proper Distance through Networked Infrastructure: Examining Google Glass for Evidence of Moral, Journalistic Witnessing”

COLLABORATIVE PROJECT ASSIGNED
Now that you’ve learned to be critical CONSUMERS, you will become PRODUCERS. Working in teams, you will produce your own news or media outlets, with a mission statement, intended audience, outline of suggested content and an ethics policy to govern the content.

+++++++++++++++++++++SPRING BREAK+++++++++++++++++++++
**Week 10: Whose Media? Free Speech, Ratings, and Censorship**

How do government entities, regulators, citizens, and whistleblowers play a role in defining what we see and have access to? What is potentially at stake in a reporter or storyteller’s desire to uncover and share information? How is the public interest being served by our media and news outlets?

**Reading:**
- Helen Nissenbaum, “A Contextual Approach to Privacy Online”
- Jennifer Holt, “Platforms, Pipelines, and Politics: The iPhone and Regulatory Hangover”

**Week 11: Surveillance, Algorithms, and Data Mining**

How are our participation and actions as media consumers and producers constantly monitored and taken into account? Are we performing free labor for media industries? Can we maintain any semblance of privacy? How is the content we view curated and potentially limited?

**Readings:**
- Mark Andrejevic, “Exploiting Youtube: Contradictions of User Generated Labor”
- Taina Bucher, “Want to be on Top? Algorithmic Power and the Threat of Invisibility on Facebook”
- Joe Turow, *A Guide to the Digital Advertising Industry That’s Watching Your Every Click* (*The Atlantic*)
- Carrie James, “Privacy: Tagged, Found out on Facebook”

**COLLABORATIVE PROJECT DUE**

**BLOG OR DIY:**

“Reverse Surveillance”: Catalogue the ways you are surveyed or your data is mined on a daily basis. This can be a written or an audio-visual cataloguing.
PART 4: MAKERS

This section of the course will further explore our participation and engagement in media and news production, authorship and ownership. We will take a balanced approach that examines the potentially positive and negative implications tied to our increasing participation and “presumption”—how they impact our identities, our relationships, and the nature of public discourse.

Week 12  Sharing as Participation: The Power of Social Media
What do we share? With whom? And why? We will explore the intentions and values tied to sharing, identity making, self-branding in the digital age, taking stock of our roles as digital citizens.

Reading
- danah boyd, “Are Today’s Youth Digital Natives?” and “Searching for a Public of Their Own”
- Sherry Turkle, excerpt from Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other
- S. Marche, “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?” (The Atlantic)
- Eric Klinenberg, “Facebook Isn’t Making Us Lonely…And Americans Aren’t That Lonely Either: Refuting the New Atlantic Cover Story” (Slate)
- Alice Marwick, “Self-Branding: The (safe for work) Self”

DIY:
Tweeting as an Art Form. Take a breaking story and rework it as a series of 10 tweets, distilling the essential message and including key quotes and images.

Week 13  DIY, Appropriation and Remix
What does it mean to “do it yourself”? What are the tools and strategies at our disposal? What are the motives and goals behind this work? Who sees it, and can it have impact?

Reading
- Henry Jenkins, “Why Heather Can Write”
- Carrie James, “Property: The Wikipedian’s Dilemma”
**Week 14 Making Social Change**
*What are the avenues for civic engagement and possibilities for social change in the digital age? What tools can we use (old and new) to encourage change and create impact?*

**Reading:**
- W. L. Bennett, “Changing Citizenship in the Digital Age”
- Gabriella Coleman “Hacker Politics and Publics”
- Melissa Brough, “Fair Vanity': The Visual Culture of Humanitarianism in the Age of Commodity Activism”
- Heather Hendershot, “Parks and Recreation: The Cultural Forum”

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**Week 15 “Spreadability”: Gains and Losses**
*What do we gain and lose in the age of “spreadability” given the fast pace of information dissemination in the digital age?*

**Reading**
- Joseph E. Uscinski, “Where Can We Go? Consuming Responsibly”
- Howard Rheingold, “How (Using) the Web (Mindfully) Can Make You Smarter”
- Paul Mihaildis, “Media Literacy Education in Digital Culture: Bridging the Disconnect”

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**May 12: FINAL PROJECT DUE**
Design a multimedia project that explores, critically analyzes and constructs an argument about an event or story as it has unfolded in social media (suggestions will be provided). You will turn in a proposal during week 11, indicating topic, tentative argument and media you plan to use. You must use two of the following (text, audio, video, photos) to analyze and deconstruct your event or story (traditional news, entertainment/satire, public relations campaign, social/political advocacy (PSA) etc.), thereby constructing your own story and meaning. Final projects will be published on your blog AND presented to the class during final exam period.