

Public Controversies – Spring 2016

Professor Emma Frances Bloomfield

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Mon/Wed 12:00pm – 1:50pm

ANN 211

Course information:

From political scandals to conspiracy theories, from sports and entertainment to health and medicine, this course addresses public controversies around a variety of topics. Why do controversies emerge? Why do some gain public attention while others are quickly forgotten? What elements of communication are involved and how can we intervene? The course engages historical and contemporary in/famous controversies and also incorporates new examples as they arise during the semester. The course focuses on using evaluation tools, understanding alternative frameworks, and creating productive spaces out of controversy. This course embraces the potential of controversies to offer alternatives and resistance to create change.

The goal of this course is to familiarize students with foundational theories about argumentation and controversy, through theory and practice. An understanding of these theories will help students address and potentially predict, analyze, and respond to controversy. Students will be empowered to engage their own critical thinking and support their positions.

Course assignments:

- *Group Presentation (20%)* – Students will report on one controversy during class time with a partner or in a group of three. Students will brainstorm controversies in the beginning of the course and get topics approved by Prof EFB. In class, students will present their controversy, its history, and its stakeholders in class for ten minutes. This will roughly occur when the relevant topic areas are discussed. After the overview, the presenting students will be in charge of arguing for one side or stakeholder and their solution. The presenting students will split the class into groups that represent the sides of the controversy and

facilitate discussion about the arguments for each side, evaluation of the perspectives, and potential solutions or new alternatives. The students will be graded on their presentation of the topic and discussion facilitation.

- *Final Exam (20%)* – Students will complete short answer questions and a longer essay prompt that asks them about course information and how to synthesize it to address controversies. Students will be asked to compare two types of controversy, their elements, and their aspects that were covered in class. Students may also be asked about the importance of topic area in addressing controversies. Students will also be given a controversy that was not covered in class and asked to describe its elements and propose a unique solution in a longer essay: What are the argumentative elements in the controversy? What are its consequences and potential opportunities? How would you respond to the controversy?
- *Short Essay Assignments (15%)* – Students are required to complete 3 short essay assignments of their choice throughout the semester. Choices vary weekly based on the topic area. Choices vary among viewing movies, attending events on campus, reading blogs or websites, but all include writing 3 page reflective papers about observations and connections to course material. Depending on events and emerging controversies, weekly assignments may change. Students completing more than 3 will be eligible for extra credit at the professor's discretion. Turn in required short essay assignments within 2 weeks of finishing that topic's week. Extra credit assignments above the required three must be turned in by the advocacy paper deadline.
- *Advocacy Plan (15%)* – Students will write up a 3-5 page report integrating readings with an advocacy project that could be performed on campus. Students will explain the importance of the advocacy project, the controversy that the project addresses, as well as the history of the controversy and how the advocacy project intervenes.
- *In-Class Assignments (10%)* – Students will be asked to complete essays, activities, and other assignments in-class that will count towards the final grade. Students missing class (without an authorized excused absence) cannot make up these activities.
- *Weekly Posts (10%)* - Students will complete weekly discussion boards by Monday night to Blackboard about the readings for that week. The post will encompass two parts:

- Questions about the readings or parts that are confusing
- Description of a controversy example that relates to this week's readings that students are interested in discussing
- *Participation (10%)* – Student will be graded for their frequency of participation in course conversation and discussion. Students missing excessive, unexcused classes will have their grade penalized. This course requires engagement with the material in class and through conversation with classmates.

Grade breakdown:

- 20% - controversy presentation and discussion facilitation
- 20% - final exam
- 15% - short essay assignments
- 15% - advocacy plan
- 10% - in-class assignments
- 10% - weekly posts
- 10% - participation

A+ = 97-100	A = 94-96	A- = 90-93	B+ = 87-89	B = 84-86	B- = 80-83
C+ = 77-79	C = 74-76	C- = 70-73	D+ = 67-69	D = 64-66	D- = 60-63

Course materials:

Course readings will be posted to Blackboard or disseminated via online links. Readings about relevant controversies by students beyond what is listed below is expected. Films for short essay assignments are available in Leavey Library, LA Public Libraries, or online databases. If there is interest, we can hold screenings together for some films. Prof. EFB reserves the right to change or adjust readings and short essay assignments.

Students should download the free app, “Socrative Student,” an educational app that allows for in-class quizzes and real-time feedback. The app is available on the Google Chrome browser web store, Apple iTunes app store, and Windows/Android Google Play app. If you are unable to download the application, I will provide an alternative for in-class assignments.

Weekly Course Themes:

1. Controversy
2. Public Spheres
3. Power and Protest
4. Identity and the Body
5. Race and Ethnicity
6. Gender and Sexuality
7. Sports and Entertainment
8. Health and Medicine
9. Politics and Privacy
10. Spring break!
11. Science and the Environment
12. Religion
13. Education
14. Student’s Choice
15. Technology
16. Avenues for Advocacy

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 Standards*<https://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.