LAW & JUSTICE IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Schedule: Monday/Wednesday 10am-11:50am
Classroom: ANN 209

WHAT’S THE PURPOSE OF THIS COURSE?

Course Description

College-aged students are the most frequent and savvy users of social media. Although they are likely aware of the personal consequences of misusing social media, they often have a limited understanding of the laws surrounding their social media usage. From privacy rights to defamation issues to copyright infringement, social media has a robust legal landscape that its users must regularly navigate. Not being able to do so can have drastic consequences – social media postings have caused people to disseminate fake news, lose their jobs, and even face criminal charges. Thus, this course is designed as a “Know Your Rights” primer, equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary to use social media responsibly in both personal and professional contexts.

As this course explores students’ individual rights, it challenges them to understand how social media impacts broader questions of law and communication. For example, we will consider how fundamental principles that are often taken for granted, such as freedom of speech, have come to be reassessed in an Internet communication world dominated by Facebook and Twitter. We will also investigate how social media users are quick to share information that they believe will have legal outcomes, such as the “Making a Murderer” petition following the release of a Netflix documentary series, without knowing how the criminal justice system operates. Ultimately, this course teaches students to dissect the complex relationship between social media and law; doing so will help them better understand an online world many believe they already mastered, and empower them to think twice before they click once.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester students in this course will be able to:

(1) Explain their individual rights, as they pertain specifically to social media and more broadly to the U.S. Constitution;
(2) Describe ways new and emerging communication technologies have reshaped, and continue to impact, the U.S. legal landscape;
(3) Critique how social media, Internet television, and other communication technologies have affected their own understandings of law and justice;
(4) Classify legal issues companies from different industries can face when integrating social media into their business practices;
(5) Recognize the potential positive and negative ramifications of their personal online media presence.
HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED?

Grading

Grading is a necessary evil and should never be your primary concern. That being said, I strive to ensure that my grading processes are objective and clear. You will never receive a grade that does not have sufficient justification. Moreover, I am always available to discuss assignments and grades in depth. However, I ask that you take the time to fully understand why you received the grade you did and think critically about how you would improve upon the assignment. Any discussions about grades on one assignment must occur before the next assignment is due. Percentages will be calculated by taking the total points earned in the course (assignment point breakdown provided below) and dividing by total possible points (500).

A: 93.6 – 100  
A-: 89.6 – 93.5  
B+: 86.6 – 89.5  
B: 82.6 – 86.5  
B-: 79.6 – 82.5  
A-: 89.6 – 93.5  
C+: 76.6 – 79.5  
C: 72.6 – 76.5  
C-: 69.6 – 72.5  
D+: 66.6 – 69.5  
D: 62.6 – 66.5  
F: Under 59.5

The relative weight of assignments in this course is divided as follows:

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<tr>
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<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Know Your Rights” Primer Drafts</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Social Media Self-Assessment</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>January 24</td>
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<td>Chapter 2: In-Depth Platform Analysis</td>
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<td>Chapter 3: Legal Considerations</td>
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<td>Chapter 4: Business Considerations</td>
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<td>Chapter 5: Building Your Brand</td>
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<td>Midterm Presentation</td>
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<td>March 19/21</td>
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<td>Final Primer &amp; Reflection</td>
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<td>In-Class Work</td>
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<td>Individual Meetings</td>
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<td>Introductory Meeting</td>
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<td>Mid-semester Meeting</td>
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<td>School &amp; Community Events</td>
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*Note: Each assignment has individual guidelines and grading criteria. These will be available on Blackboard well in advance of the respective deadline.
“Know Your Rights” Primer (250 points): Creation of your own “Know Your Rights” primer is the central assignment for this course. The purpose of the primer is for you to create and have a document that communicates how to effectively safeguard your rights in virtual and real-world contexts. The primer will be of use to you throughout this course and well into your academic and professional futures.

You will build the primer chapter by chapter during the semester. For each chapter, you will write 5 pages, double-spaced (the finalized primer will be 25 pages, double-spaced). Often, the chapters will have links to research resources that help you understand your rights. Or, you may choose to include images to explain a certain right. Although you should always include these links and images in the chapters (after all, the purpose is for you to return to the primer as a reference guide), they are not part of the total page count.

- **Chapter 1: Social Media Self-Assessment (40 points)**
  - This chapter focuses on a self-assessment of your current social media presence. You will undertake an in-depth review of each of your social media platforms, distinguishing between those you have used in your personal life and those you have used in your professional life. As you assess your social media footprint, consider the following questions:
    - (1) Which platforms have I used the most frequently? For what purposes?
    - (2) In light of who I am today, would I edit or remove any of my previous posts, tweets, photos, etc.?
    - (3) Thinking to the future, how may I want to engage differently with social media?

- **Chapter 2: In-Depth Platform Analysis (40 points)**
  - This chapter requires you to select one of the most widely-used social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and investigate its purpose in-depth. You will build on chapter 1 by not only thinking about your own interactions with that platform, but also researching how others (i.e., both people you know and additional internet users) utilize that platform in their personal and professional lives. As you assess the far-reaching power of a singular platform, consider the following questions:
    - (1) What is the history of this platform and how has it changed with time?
    - (2) How have my interactions with this platform resembled the ways others (e.g., peers, family, influencers/celebrities) have used it? Who/what has influenced me to use the platform this way?
    - (3) How have my interactions with this platform differed from the ways others (e.g., peers, family, influencers/celebrities) have used it? What can I learn from these different patterns of use?

- **Chapter 3: Legal Considerations (40 points)**
  - This chapter focuses on the most important legal considerations when using each major social media platform. Starting with the platform you focused on in chapter 2, review its terms of use, privacy policies, data use policies, etc. Provide an overview of these legal guidelines and policies that is digestible for you as a
consumer. Then, following this same format, repeat this process for **at least four more social media platforms** that you use frequently (or intend to use in the future). As you create these overviews, consider the following questions:

- (1) Why do social media platforms have these legal guidelines and policies? What’s at stake for them as businesses?
- (2) What are the similarities and differences among these social media platforms’ policies?
- (3) Have I ever (unintentionally) violated one of the platforms’ policies?

**Chapter 4: Business Considerations (40 points)**

- This chapter requires you to shift your focus from personal platform use to professional platform use. Keeping in mind what you learned in chapter 3 about the guidelines for social media usage, you can now think more broadly about how businesses can use social media appropriately. Social media is a major part of businesses in many different industries, including entertainment, food, health & beauty, education, travel, finance, etc. Whatever your chosen career path, it is likely that you will use social media in some capacity. Therefore, in this chapter, you select a business (that you have either worked for in the past or would like to in the near future) and analyze, and improve upon, their social media presence. As you assess the company’s social media arm, consider the following questions:
  - (1) What social media platforms does the company rely on to reach their audience/consumers? Are these the most effective ones?
  - (2) If you were working for this company today, what would you change about their social media usage?
  - (3) Does the company’s social media presence ultimately enhance, or detract from, its brand?

**Chapter 5: Building Your Brand (40 points)**

- This chapter focuses on how you would like to alter your current social media presence. We often think about businesses as having a certain ‘brand,’ without realizing that we as individuals do too. Whether you’re cognizant of it or not, the way you communicate ultimately impacts your presence, personal brand, etc. Your social media presence is a massive part of that communication process. Thus, it is imperative that you think critically about how what you put on social media impacts your personal brand. Thinking about all that you have learned through creating this primer, the final chapter is your chance to explore what parts of your social media presence you want to retain, and what parts you want to alter, in order to positively alter your brand. As you create this future you, consider the following questions:
  - (1) How can I separate my private and professional selves in the social media world?
  - (2) Has my perspective on social media changed between ‘Chapter 1: Self-Assessment’ and now?
  - (3) How do I want to be perceived by my peers, potential employers, and the public at large?
Midterm Presentation (50 points): In recent years, new media has contributed to a surge in popularity of law and justice stories. From online television series to podcasts, the world of law fascinates laypeople with its true crime narratives. This includes individual people’s experiences with the criminal justice system, such as Adnan Syed from the “Serial” podcast or Steven Avery from the “Making a Murderer” Netflix series, or a larger profile of the criminal justice system, such as Filmmaker Ava Duvernay’s “13th” Netflix documentary.

Working in groups of 3-4, you will deliver a 20-minute presentation on one of these real-world law and justice stories. Your presentation will offer your audience the following: (1) an overview of the core legal and justice issues in the narrative; (2) an analysis of whether the medium used to deliver the narrative (e.g., online television versus podcast) is the most effective; and (3) an assessment of social media’s impact on that specific law case or the broader justice issue.

Final Project (100 points): Your final project consists of two components:
- Finalized “Know Your Rights” Primer (75 points): Update each of your five chapters and submit to me a finalized version of your “Know Your Rights” primer. Each chapter should be updated in light of: 1) your own critique, (2) my feedback, and (3) the new skills and/or information you’ve learned in the course since creating that chapter.
- Reflection (25 points): Along with the finalized primer, submit a 2 page, double-spaced reflection of your project. This reflection is your opportunity to succinctly explain how social media has impacted your world, and why knowing your rights is crucial to your future personal and professional identities.

In-Class Work (100 points): In-Class Work is a crucial part of our course and consists of two components:
- Active Participation (50 points): Please keep in mind throughout the semester that this course is designed around, and dependent on, your active participation. In all class sessions, you will speak, collaborate, ask questions, debate, and/or present. Successful participation includes: (1) engaging with your classmates and contributing to class discussions in lively and productive ways; (2) reading the assigned material beforehand and thinking critically about both what you will contribute, and what you hope to gain, from each session; (3) actively listening whenever your colleagues are presenting or speaking. This last point is of particular importance – even more so than when I’m lecturing, you must show each other the utmost respect.
- In-Class Assignments (50 points): Most class sessions will include short in-class assignments which can’t be completed if you aren’t present. In some circumstances, absences due to illness, religious observance, or university-sanctioned activities (e.g., sports, band, academic competition) may be excused without penalty, on the condition that students provide me with written documentation at least 48 hours prior to missing class (or, in the case of illness, a note from a health care professional afterwards). However, I understand that life is messy, and exceptions to this rule are permitted; remember that communication is key.
**Individual Meetings (40 points):** You will have at least two individual meetings with me during the semester:

- **Introductory Meeting (15 points):** Each of you will schedule and have an introductory meeting with me before the end of the third week of classes. The meeting will last 10 minutes and will give us the opportunity to get to know each other outside of the classroom context. Come to the meeting prepared to discuss: (1) your previous social media experience; (2) your goals for the course; (3) anything else relevant to improving your skills.

- **Mid-semester Meeting (25 points):** Each of you will schedule and have a mid-semester meeting with me after week seven but before the end of the ninth week of classes. The meeting will last 15 minutes. Come to the meeting prepared to discuss: (1) your progress thus far; (2) your (revised) goals for the course; (3) anything else relevant to your performance in class.

**School & Community Events (10 points):** Throughout the semester, you will attend two school or community events relevant to new and emerging communication technologies. In the class meeting following the event, you will give a one-minute speech overviewing the event and its relevance to our course. Although I will suggest events periodically, the purpose is for you all to take charge of this assignment. Find and share events that you think each other will benefit from attending. Whenever you share an event, make sure you include the: (1) date and time; (2) location; (3) RSVP info/link (if applicable). Moreover, if there is an event that is of interest to everyone, we can attend it together. We will keep a Google Doc updated with the events and their relevant info; please contribute to it.

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**WHERE DO I FIND THE COURSE READINGS?**


**Blackboard:** The currently listed course readings are available either through the primary text or on Blackboard. However, this course is what I consider ‘live’ – it changes based on the background, goals, and progress of each student. Thus, it is imperative that you check Blackboard regularly for any changes to the syllabus. Most importantly, if there are new readings for a certain week, they will be posted to Blackboard by Friday at 5pm the week before.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN EACH CLASS?**

**Week 1: Overview of the Social Media Landscape**


**Week 2: Cultivation Theory from a Historical & Contemporary Perspective**

**Week 3: Netflix, Podcasts, & More – Law & Justice Stories that Dominate New Media**

**Week 4: The First Amendment & Social Media**
- Chapter 1 of course text: Henderson, J.J. *The Boundaries of Free Speech in Social Media*. 

**Week 5: Moving Beyond Free Speech – What Are Your Individual Rights?**
- Chapter 3 of course text: Hartzog, W. *Privacy and Terms of Use*. 
- Chapter 4 of course text: Olson, K.K. *Intellectual Property*. 
Week 6: Facebook & Twitter

Week 7: Instagram, & Snapchat, & WhatsApp

Week 8: Midterm Presentations

Week 9: Reddit, Musically & YouNow

Week 10: Tumblr, Pinterest, & Flickr
Week 11: LinkedIn, Google+, & YouTube

Week 12: Public Shaming & Cyberbullying
- Chapter 8 of course text: Sanders, A.K. *Obscenity, Sexting, and Cyberbullying*.

Week 13: Social Media in the Real World – Business & Entrepreneurship Case Studies
- Chapter 11 of course text: Hall, H.K. *Social Media Policies for Advertising and Public Relations*.

Week 14: Social Media in the Real World – Law & Courtroom Case Studies
- Chapter 9 of course text: Packer, K. *Social Media Use in Courtrooms*
- Levy, A. (Aug. 5, 2013). *Trial by Twitter: After high-school football starts were accused of rape, online vigilantes demanded that justice be served. Was it?* The New Yorker. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/08/05/trial-by-twitter

Week 15: The Way Forward

*Note: This schedule is subject to revision throughout the semester.

**WHAT ABOUT MY LAPTOP/SMARTPHONE/TABLET/APPLE WATCH/ETC.?**

Various forms of technology will be incorporated into class activities when appropriate. However, unless prior approval is granted, you are not allowed to use laptops or wireless connections. Cell phones must always be on silent; we will build in time to check them. To better understand the reasons for this policy, consider the following: (1) a study called “Why you should take notes by hand – not on a laptop” (http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop); (2) a New Yorker piece called “The Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom” (http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/elements/2014/06/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom.html); (3) the studies of the late Stanford University Professor (and USC Annenberg School graduate) Cliff Nass that show the dangers of multitasking (http://www.npr.org/2013/05/10/182861382/the-myth-of-multitasking).

**HOW DO I FIND MY PROFESSOR OUTSIDE OF CLASS TIME?**

(1) **Office Location & Office Hours:** ASC G6 (Ph.D. Offices are in the basement below the West Lobby, which is the small lobby that has no TVs). Office hours are by appointment.

(2) **Email Policy:** Email is the easiest and fastest way to contact me. If your email is received during standard business hours (Monday through Friday, 9am-5pm), I will usually respond within 48hrs. If your email is received after standard business hours, please allow additional time for a response.

**WHAT ELSE SHOULD I BE FAMILIAR WITH?**

**Academic Integrity**

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.
Special Accommodations

(1) Disability Services
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 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.

(2) English as a second language
Please notify me if English is not your primary language and you therefore need accommodations to ensure your optimal performance.

(3) Other accommodations
Please notify me if you have any other unique situation that needs to be accommodated in order to ensure your optimal performance.

Sexual Assault Policy & Resources
The University of Southern California is committed to fostering a safe campus environment for all members of the university community, free from sexual coercion, violence, and sexual intimidation. The university’s sexual misconduct and sexual assault policies have been developed to reaffirm these principles and to provide recourse for individuals whose rights have been violated (the policy is available in SCampus, section E: http://scampus.usc.edu/e-integrity-of-the-academic-community/). To learn more about your reporting options and your rights, or to speak with a counselor confidentially, contact the USC Sexual Assault Resource Center/Center for Women and Men [sarc.usc.edu] at 213-740-4900, or contact Student Counseling Services at 213-740-7711. For more information and resources, including off-campus resources like the Rape Treatment Center, visit the USC Sexual Assault Resource Center website at https://sarc.usc.edu/resources/. Also, remember you can contact a campus cruiser at 213-740-4911 for a safety escort.

Stress Management
Students are under a lot of pressure. If you start to feel overwhelmed, it is important that you reach out for help. A good place to start is the USC Student Counseling Services office at 213-740-7711. The service is confidential, and there is no charge. Moreover, they offer drop-in workshops throughout the semester on managing stress and maintaining mindfulness.

Additional Support
Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. Visit equity.usc.edu or contact at 213-740-5086.

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions can be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

**Student Support and Advocacy**
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student Visit studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa or contact at 213-821-4710.

**Diversity at USC**
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. Visit diversity.usc.edu

**Academic Support**
A number of campus resources exist to support you academically. Contact the Center for Academic Support (http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/). Contact at 213-740-0776 or study@usc.edu.