

Science in a “Post-Truth” Era
GESM 131, Seminar in Social Analysis
Fall 2018
Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:00 pm – 1:50 pm
ASC 331

Instructor

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:30 – 5:30PM, or by appointment

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Course Description

Public and policy debates about climate change and global warming; the dissemination of flat-earth theories in pop culture; the growing market of genetic ancestry technologies alongside white nationalist theories about racial biology; and many more—these issues suggest that competing claims about “fake news” or “alternative facts” are not unique to political content in journalism and mass media. Rather, they demonstrate how the sciences have also constituted another site for contesting knowledge. From a cultural studies approach, this course analyzes and interrogates examples of scientific consensus and disagreement, engaging with both expert and lay narratives to examine the social and historical underpinnings of fact-finding or truth-making. In each case, students will closely and carefully study how reality, or the ways we talk about it, mediate and become inseparable from power, culture, and social identity.

Borrowing from humanistic approaches in the discipline of communication, this course equips you with strategies of argumentation in the analysis of scientific knowledge, past and present. You will develop interpretive skills in discourse analysis and visual analysis, demonstrating them through essays, reading responses, and class discussions exploring the political nature of scientific knowledge production and the ideological uses of evidence within and outside of scientific circles. Engaging with contemporary and historical examples of contested knowledge in the life, medical, and computational sciences, you will learn how to make and support sound claims through the language of course texts, which cultivate an understanding of science communication on two levels: (1) the ways scientists communicate their work to themselves and to the wider public; and (2) the social and cultural attitudes that shape scientific practice and its reception.

In this course we will commit ourselves to learning, discussing, and deploying various concepts, theories, models and paradigms in the study of study of science and technology, including feminism, critical race theory, political economy, disability studies, and more. We will also explore distinct units/subfields of study—genomics, the environment, big data, human evolution, and others—as individual case studies of cultural analysis.

In a context of growing public distrust in science and expertise, it is important to enrich our understanding of the complex interplay between facts and social values. By carefully examining scientific and technical claims about social and political identities and about the natural, human, and virtual environments those identities move through, this course will strengthen your capacity to approach scientific evidence critically without overlooking the material or empirical world.

Required Texts for the Course

- All Readings on Blackboard (BB)

Course Requirements

Students are required to attend class regularly, to contribute to class discussions, and to do weekly reading. Attendance in lecture is important: there is significant material covered in lecture that is not in the reading and you cannot pass the course if you do not attend most of the lectures. There are several writing assignments for this class, and because the lectures, reading assignments, and course assignments are all vitally linked, it is critical that you keep up with the schedule.

Students who miss more than **three lectures** will have their grades reduced and risk failing the course. Attendance will be taken during lectures, and you will lose an entire letter grade from the final grade for every unexcused absence. This means that if your final grade is an A-plus and you miss four lectures, your final grade will drop to a B-plus. An excused absence is one where you inform the professor *beforehand* that you will not be able to make it to class for a valid and documented medical or legal reason. If you have an unforeseen emergency that prevents you from attending class, inform the professor as soon as possible and provide written evidence of the reason of the emergency (e.g. doctor's note). Office hours are for clarifying questions concerning assignments, grades, and lecture materials, and not for repeating any lectures that a student may have missed.

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

- Ten reading responses, total 20%
- Four papers, each 15% (total 60%)
- Class participation, 15%
- Pop quizzes, 5%

Reading responses: There are 10 reading responses due in this class. Each response should be 300-400 words long, checked for grammar and spelling. For each response, you are asked to address readings for **one** meeting from each of any 10 weeks in this 15-week course—so, you are not required to submit a response every week, and which weeks and which readings to which you would like to respond are entirely your choice. This assignment is designed to have you develop strategies of close reading and of summarizing succinctly and in your own words the arguments of course texts. Each response must do the following:

1. In 2-3 sentences, state the author's argument.
2. Give 1 or 2 examples in the reading that supports, shows, or exemplifies the argument.

3. Write down any questions you have about the reading, or anything about the reading that surprised you and why.

Each response is due in class on the same day for which the readings were assigned, or via email before lecture begins. There are no late responses accepted. Altogether, the ten reading responses are worth 20% of your final grade.

Papers: There are four papers due in this class. Each paper should be 4-6 pages long, checked for grammar and spelling, with proper citation practices. The details of each paper will be given in a prompt approximately one week before the papers are due (**due dates are noted in the syllabus**). Papers are due in class (not as an email attachment), and there are no late papers accepted. If you have an emergency that impacts your ability to turn your paper in on time, you need to contact the professor before the paper is due. Each paper is worth 15% of your final grade.

Class Participation: The participation grade will be determined by contribution to class discussions in the form of questions, comments, and/or critique.

Pop Quizzes: Pop quizzes will be assigned periodically in this course. The purpose of these quizzes is to make sure you are keeping up with the readings.

ALL of your work will be evaluated on the following:

- 1) the level of your engagement with the class materials (as evidenced in your written work and participation)
- 2) your capacity to explain your ideas and analysis in articulate and well-written forms structured around a clearly stated argument
- 3) your ability to creatively explore and apply theories and methodologies from class readings, lectures, media, and discussions

Course Grading Policy: Grades will be assigned as follows

A	outstanding, thoughtful and engaging work; a grade of A+ <i>may</i> be given to <i>individual</i> assignments in <i>rare</i> instances where expectations are exceeded
B+/B	above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	needs improvement on ideas, argument and follow through
C and below	fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material

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 (approximately 1 page), stating the reasons why you feel the grade is inaccurate, taking specific written comments into consideration. 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.

Annenberg School for Communication Academic Integrity Policy:

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and may be dismissed as a major.

In addition to the formal academic integrity policy, our pedagogical policy is based on mutual respect; all students are encouraged to use the classroom as a space in which to speak and to voice their opinions. Our expectation is that you will respect not only the professors but also your fellow classmates when they are participating in discussion.

Effective Fall 2014, all undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors will be required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the Annenberg [Virtual Commons](#) for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's [Information Technology Services](#) website. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that **use of computer in the classroom is a privilege**. You may use a computer in the classroom ONLY for taking notes or for class presentations. If you abuse this privilege by checking email or going on the Internet, updating Facebook profiles, IM-ing friends, or playing solitaire, you will be marked as absent for that class period. All other electronic devices (cell phones, MP3 players, etc.) must be turned off and put away during class time. If this kind of activity gets to be a problem, laptop computers will not be allowed in the classroom.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Plagiarism: 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.

All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as Communication school administrators. In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

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 Title IX office describes reporting options and other resources. See <https://titleix.usc.edu/reporting-options/>

Writing Support

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.

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.

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.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP)

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) is located in Engemann, Suite 356 <http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>. In case of an emergency or if you need immediate assistance, please call (213) 740-4900 (after hours, press zero "0" to speak to an on-call counselor). RSVP on-call counselors aid in discussing medical options, reporting options and provide crisis support and advocacy. Student Counseling Services is a separate place that also offers confidential counseling and support groups on a variety of other topics. To schedule an appointment with Student Counseling Services, call (213) 740-7711 between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays or visit the Engemann Student Health Center on the University Park Campus.

ESL Students

Please inform me as soon as possible if you require special accommodations based on your understanding of the English language.

Schedule of Readings & Assignments

Week 1: Introduction

- Monday, August 20

- No readings. We will be discussing the syllabus and course requirements.
- Wednesday, August 22
 - Sidney Ross, “Scientist: The Story of a Word.”

Week 2: Scientific Vision

- Monday, August 27
 - Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, “The Image of Objectivity.”
- Wednesday, August 29
 - Lisa Cartwright, “A Microphysics of the Body: Microscopy and Cinema.”

Week 3: Networks

- Monday, September 3 – LABOR DAY, NO CLASS
- Wednesday, September 5
 - Bruno Latour, “Centers of Calculation.”
 - Annemarie Mol, “Coordination.”

Week 4: Capital and Biopolitics

- Monday, September 10
 - Nikolas Rose, “Biopolitics in the 21st Century.”
- Wednesday, September 12
 - Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby, “A Clinical Labor Theory of Value.”
 - Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby, “The Historical Lineages of Clinical Labor.”

Week 5: Nature, Ecology, Environment

- Monday, September 17
 - Nancy Leys Stepan, “Picturing Tropical Nature: Introduction”
 - Timothy Morton, “Natural History Lessons.”
- Wednesday, September 19
 - Donna Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936.”

Week 6: Climate

- Monday, September 24 – PAPER 1 DUE
 - Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, “The Denial of Global Warming.”
- Wednesday, September 26
 - Nick Mirzoeff, “It’s not the anthropocene, it’s the white supremacy scene, or, the geological color line.”

Week 7: Binaries: Nature/Culture

- Monday, October 1
 - Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.”
- Wednesday, October 3
 - Susan Bordo, “Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body.”

Week 8: Race

- Monday, October 8
 - Dorothy Roberts, “Separating Racial Science from Racism.”
- Wednesday, October 10
 - Harriet Washington, “The American Janus of Medicine and Race.”
 - Dorothy Roberts, “Embodying Race.”

Week 9: Sex

- Monday, October 15
 - Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Dueling Dualisms.”
- Wednesday, October 17
 - Sarah Franklin, “Sex.”

Week 10: (Dis)Ability

- Monday, October 22 - PAPER 2 DUE
 - Tobin Siebers, “Disability in theory: From social constructionism to the new realism of the body.”
 - Margaret Price, “The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain.”
 - Margaret Price, “Defining Mental Disability.”
- Wednesday, October 24
 - Alison Kafer, “Feminist, Queer, Crip: Introduction”
 - Alison Kafer, “The Cyborg and the Crip.”

Week 11: Binaries: Technological Determinism/The Social Construction of Technology

- Monday, October 29
 - Donald McKenzie and Judy Wajcman, “The Social Shaping of Technology.”
 - Sheila Jasanoff, “The Idiom of Co-production.”
- Wednesday, October 31
 - Langdon Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?”
 - David Edgerton, “The Shock of the Old: Introduction.”

Week 12: Algorithms

- Monday, November 5
 - Safiya Noble, “Searching for Black Girls.”

- Wednesday, November 7
 - Alondra Nelson, “Reconciliation Projects: From Kinship to Justice.”
 - Ramya Rajagopalan and Joan Fujimura, “Making History via DNA, Making DNA from History.”

Week 13: Artificial Life

- Monday, November 12
 - Stefan Helmreich, “The Word for World is Computer.”
- Wednesday, November 14 - PAPER 3 DUE
 - Claudia Springer, “Electronic Eros.”

Week 14: Human-Computer Interaction

- Monday, November 19
 - Sherry Turkle, “Personal Computers with Personal Meanings.”
- Wednesday, November 21 – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week 15: Surveillance

- Monday, November 26
 - Kelly Gates, “Facial Recognition Technology from the Lab to the Marketplace.”
- Wednesday, November 28
 - Deborah Lupton, “Know Thyself: Self-Tracking Technologies and Practices.”

PAPER 4 DUE TBD