Spring 2020 - COMM 400: Seminar in Communication
Trust and Distrust in News Media

Instructor: Rachel E. Moran, PhD Candidate – Annenberg School
Day/Time: Tuesday/Thursday 11:00-12:20pm
Location: ANN 211
Office Hours: By appointment – contact rachelm@usc.edu

Course Description
Fake news, deep fakes, the “failing New York times”—the news media in the US is under attack from both outside and within, and trust in the news media is shakier than ever. But what really is to blame for these feelings of distrust? Are journalists really the enemy of the state, or are they just trying to do good work in increasingly difficult working conditions? This course explores the origins of distrust in the news media and seeks to examine potentials for its future renewal. The course begins with an exploration of the foundations of the modern news media ecology, including the history of partisan press, the emergence of a “legacy” press and the explosions of digital communications technologies that have resulted in a new networked digital news media. Following this, we will look at the changing norms of journalism, questioning the place of objectivity, professionalism and transparency in modern newsmaking. We will then turn to look at external threats to the work of journalists such as “fake news”, deep fakes and social media algorithms in order to question how digital journalism can thrive while also being dependent on social media and search engines for visibility and profitability. Finally, taking on a more positive angle, we will explore proposed solutions to newsmaking distrust such as “engaged” journalism, feedback platforms like Hearken and fact-checking. Students will then be asked to propose their own (small) solutions to improving journalism.

The Best Way to Get An “A” in this Class
The semester will go quickly as always so please try to keep up! I have endeavored to set a reasonable amount of reading and writing across the weeks we will spend together. I am here to help you get the best possible grade you can and, more importantly, get the best learning experience from this course. We will spend our hours together mostly discussing, so please come ready to share your thoughts, opinions and questions.

Assignments

Participation (100 points)
Please come to class ready and willing to participate. Participation means different things to different people, so there will be plenty of opportunities to engage in class time whether you’re more introverted or extroverted.

Feature Article (150 points) – DUE WEEK 4
Write a feature article (in a journalistic style) on the history of fake news, the partisan press or the legacy press. Explore how the phenomenon began and spread, and how it is manifested in journalism today. Articles should be 500 words long, written in a journalistic style, and should use hyperlinks rather than APA citation. Due before class time on Wednesday of Week 4

Digital News Outlet Case Study Presentation (200 points) – DUE WEEK 7
Pick a digital news outlet (it can exist or have already failed), research its origins, how its financed (and who owns it), what kind of content it produces, how popular it is, and how trusted you think it is based on all of
this. Presentation should be between 7-10 minutes, feel free to produce slides (NO PREZI!) or speak without them.

Comment Section Review (100 points) – DUE WEEK 11
Read an online news story on a new site that has comment sections. Review the comment section; talk about whether comments were substantive and added to the conversation. Were any comments negative? Were any of the commenters rude? Do you feel differently about the article having read the comments? Reflect on how the comments add, detract or stray away from the original article.
Papers should be 3-5 pages double spaced, 12-point font. Due before class time on Wednesday of Week 11.

Fake News Analysis (100 points) – DUE WEEK 13
Find a fake news story from between 2015-now (look especially around the 2016 election time). Analyze the story – what was it about? What makes it believable? Was it obviously fake? Explore how it travelled online – where was it reported? Did people share it on Twitter? What do you think was its intention? Talk about how people could have spotted it was fake news, what tell tale signs could you look out for, did any fact-checking outlets dispute it? Papers should be 5-6 pages double spaced, 12-point font. Due before class time on Wednesday of Week 13.

Final Presentation (150 points)
Your final presentation should address the topic “The future of journalism is…” Drawing on some of the proposed solutions to news media distrust, create a presentation that provides what you think should the solution of journalism. Potential topics include; “fact-checking”, “radical transparency”, “citizen journalism”, “niche news.” Presentations should be between 7-10 minutes, feel free to produce slides (NO PREZI!) or speak without them.

Final Reflection (200 points)
Your final paper should address the topic “The future of journalism is…” Drawing on some of the proposed solutions to news media distrust, create a presentation that provides what you think should the solution of journalism. Potential topics include; “fact-checking”, “radical transparency”, “citizen journalism”, “niche news.” Papers should be a minimum of 7 pages, double spaced, 12 point font, APA referencing. *Final date TBD*

How your course grade will be calculated
Your grade will be calculated as a percentage of 1,000 points and your letter grade will follow the following grading scheme.

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Late Submission
Unless there is a valid, documented medical / family reason communicated prior to the assignment due date you will be penalized for late submissions. One partial letter grade will be subtracted for every 24 hours the assignment is late.
Attendance + Class Policies
Please do not (unless you really, truly have to) miss classes. Attendance is not mandatory, but do not expect to gain full points for participation if you miss more than three classes. Remember to participate in class you first need to be there.

Email Policy
I will answer all emails within 24 hours. If you email after 5pm on Friday I will answer you Monday am. Please mark your emails with COMM400 in the subject line. I expect some level of formality in your emails, full sentences at the least. Please refer to me either as Rachel or Ms. Moran if you wish to be formal. I am not yet a Professor so Prof is not required!

Laptop policy
Everyone is allowed, and encouraged, to bring laptops to every class. Please try to stay off of social media and all other distracting sites while in class. I shouldn’t have to ask this but I’ve had to numerous times in the past, but please refrain from wearing headphones during class.

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
dsp.usc.edu
Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710
uscsa.usc.edu
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101
diversity.usc.edu
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu
Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu
Non-emergency assistance or information.
Class Meeting Schedule

Section One: The State of Trust in News Media

Week One
Seminar One: History of Fake News

Seminar Two: History of Partisan Press

Week Two
Seminar One: The State of Trust in the News Media Today

Seminar Two: Trust in Journalists – News Personalities – Radio and TV

Week Three
Seminar One: Trust in Journalists – New Wave of Digital Media Stars
- BUST, How Shaun King Combines Writing and Activism. Bust Magazine. [https://bust.com/books/194253-shaun-king-interview.html](https://bust.com/books/194253-shaun-king-interview.html)
Seminar Two: Trust in Journalists – Journalistic Failure

Week Four
Seminar One: Trust in News Outlets – Establishment of the “legacy” press
- WATCH one of these (free at USC library)
  - The Post (2018)
  - The Newsroom (2012) Ep 1 : “We Just Decided To”
  - All the President’s Men (1976)
  - Spotlight (2015)

**FEATURE ARTICLE ASSIGNMENT DUE (200 points)**


Week Five
Seminar One: Trust in News Outlets – Digital Explosions and rise of online networked news (I)

Seminar Two: Trust in News Outlets – Digital Explosions and rise of online networked news (II)

Week Six
- WATCH: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FdEOxKpk70

Seminar Two: Trust in News Outlets – Rise of Citizen Journalism – Online News – Blogs and Video

Week Seven
Seminar One: Presentation Week - Digital News Case Study (I)

Seminar Two: Presentation Week - Digital News Case Study (II)

Section Two: Normative Boundaries of Trusted Journalism

Week Eight
Seminar One: Trust in Journalism – Objectivity versus Partisan Subjectivity

Seminar Two: Trust in Journalism – Objectivity versus False Equivalency

Week Nine
Seminar One: Trust in Journalism – Professionalism versus Institutionalism
- Singer, J. B. (2003). Who are these guys? The online challenge to the notion of journalistic professionalism. Journalism, 4(2), 139-163.

Seminar Two: Trust in Journalism – Transparency
- Moran, R.E. (2019) Subscribing to Transparency: Rannt Media’s Use of Slack to Increase Trust. new media & society

Section Three: How to (1) Measue and (2) Increase News Media Trust

Week Ten
Seminar One: Measuring Trust – Deep Engagement Methods

Seminar Two: Measuring Trust – Shallow Engagement through Clicks

Week Eleven
Seminar One: Risks of Audience Engagement for Individual Journalists

COMMENT SECTION REVIEW ASSIGNMENT DUE (150 points)

Seminar Two: Risks of Audience Engagement for Outlets (Comment Sections + Incivility Online)


**Week Twelve**

Seminar One: Threats to Trust – Misinformation and Fake News


Seminar Two: Threats to Trust – Technology – Deep Fakes


**Week Thirteen**

Seminar One: Threats to Trust – Technology – Platforms and Algorithms – Social Media


Seminar Two: Threats to Trust – Technology – Platforms and Algorithms – Google and Search Engines


**Week Fourteen**

Seminar One: Ways to Increase Trust – “Engaged” Journalism


- Check out www.hearken.com

Seminar Two: Ways to Increase Trust - Fact Checking + NewsGuard
- Check out www.NewsGuard.com

Week Fifteen
Seminar One: Presentation Week – Final Papers (I)

Seminar Two: Presentation Week – Final Papers (II)

FINAL: Date TBD