

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course on law relevant to media and the contemporary practice of reporting. This is not a typical law course using Socratic teaching methods. The course will combine both lecture and seminar practice.

II. OVERALL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will learn about their legal rights and obligations as journalists. The course will educate students on how to publish information without violating defamation and privacy laws, how to gather information to avoid legal and/or ethical trouble, how to deal with subpoenas and more. We will also examine how to navigate the digital space of contemporary journalism and focus on Fair Use, and other laws, policies, and best practices in using content (*e.g.*, photographs, trademarks, etc.).

Additionally, in an ever-evolving fast and competitive digital space, the course also will explore the temptations of sloppy and unethical practices and the consequences of giving into those temptations. We will explore the impact of the internet on the practice of journalism and other creative fields and how new communications technologies are and should be regulated today. We also will touch upon legal issues surrounding Artificial Intelligence (AI), as the science becomes more prevalent in this is a rapidly changing and complex legal environment for journalists and other creative entrepreneurs.

This is not a course to prepare you to practice law. This course will teach you how to identify the fuzzy and the bright lines—and when to call on legal help. Our goal is to keep you and your (future) employers out of trouble. Overall, this course will aim to give students the essential legal framework of their rights and responsibilities as journalists. Come prepared to think, discuss and participate.

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify contemporary legal issues and define basic legal terminology relevant to journalism
- Explain the basic workings of the U.S. justice system
- Articulate and defend legal rights and responsibilities for journalists under U.S. law
- Explain claims of defamation and invasion of privacy and apply to situations in journalism
- Identify situations in which journalists should seek legal counsel
- Use copyrighted and other works within legal limits and ethical best practices, including equity
- File FOIA requests, and access court records and legal resources
- Understand best practices to avoid claims of defamation, invasion of privacy, and IP violations

III. DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Students will be graded on the following assignments in accordance with Section IV.

Quizzes. Quizzes will be administered at the end of each class. Each quiz will be based on that day's lecture. Quizzes are closed book/computer. They cannot be made up if you are absent or unavailable. There will be 12 quizzes in total over the course of the semester. At the end of the semester, your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped. The purpose of the quizzes is to apply the information you learn during the lecture. The quizzes can also be helpful in boosting your grade by adding extra credit.

Exams. The mid-term and final exam will present you with one or more complex fact patterns. You will be required to discuss the legal issues that arise from those facts. The exams will be closed book/computer, unless stated otherwise. The purpose of the examinations is to evaluate your knowledge and understanding of media law and to test your ability to express that knowledge and understanding clearly, precisely, and succinctly.

Legal Report. The Legal Report is an opportunity to showcase your knowledge, research abilities, creativity, and command of the course materials—on your own terms! You will take a current news story with elements relevant to our in-class conversations and, in the medium of your choice, reflect on the legal issues surrounding the subject of that news story, articulating those legal issues in an intelligent and informative manner. Show me you can apply what you've learned and can communicate your knowledge in a way that makes others smarter. And use any medium you would like – *i.e.*, a paper, TikTok video, IG stories/live, YouTube video, website... *any* form of media. The Legal Report will be due by 11:59pm PT the Friday after your final exam. More details will be provided after the midterm.

IV. GRADING

I review each submitted assignment and assign points based on its content, then I determine which submissions amassed the highest number of points. Those submissions set the standard from which the other submissions are graded. This approach allows me to grade based on what is *actually* possible (*i.e.*, what at least 1-2 students show they can do), rather than what I think *could* be possible.

a. Weight of Assignments

Assignment	% of Grade
Weekly Quizzes	25%
Exam #1 (Midterm)	25%
Legal Report	25%
Exam #2 (Final)	25%
TOTAL	100%

b. Grading Scale

Letter grade and corresponding numerical point range		
95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+ (D plus)
90% to 94%: A- (A minus)	77% to 79%: C+ (C plus)	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+ (B plus)	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D- (D minus)
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C- (C minus)	0% to 59%: F

c. Grading Standards

The quizzes, midterm, and final will be graded based on ability to provide correct answers and clear explanation of applicable legal rules.

Grade	Description
A	Work clearly describes the relevant facts, parties, and legal rules, the key question or issue, and the correct history of the issue, case, or lawsuit, and contains only minor organizational problems or minor errors in describing the facts and legal rules, applying the legal rules to the facts, and includes all of the required number of required sources/research materials
B	Work requires more than minor reorganization or fails to adequately explain one legal rule or fails to include one required sources/research materials
C	Work requires major reorganization and misstates more than one legal rule or misapplies the legal rule to the facts several times and fails to include more than one of the required sources
D	Work has excessive organizational problems and numerous errors in describing the legal rules and facts and applying the law to those facts or fails to include several of the required sources
F	Work demonstrates significant confusion and errors in describing the legal rules and facts and applying the law to those facts, or all of the above

V. ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION POLICY

Any and all assignments are due on the date specified. Absent prior discussion and written agreement with the instructor, late papers will automatically be given a grade of F.

VI. TEXTBOOK AND REQUIRED READINGS

The textbook for this class is:

The Law of Journalism and Mass Communication, Victoria Smith Ekstrand, Caitlin Ring Carlson, Erin Coyle, Susan Dente Ross, Amy Reynolds Susan (8th ed.; SAGE Publications, Inc. (US), 2023.)

You can purchase this textbook online or at the USC Bookstore. If you have concerns about costs, you may be able to succeed with the 7th edition and/or relying on course lectures, notes, and hyperlinks.

VII. COURSE SCHEDULE

a. Class Sessions

The assigned reading and in-class conversations will provide the necessary backdrop for class participation as well as for the quizzes, paper, and exams. As the semester progresses, we will be building on legal issues, cases, current events, etc. discussed in prior sessions, as such, attendance is very important. Read the assigned reading before class so that participation can be full and vibrant. If you do not understand what is assigned, contact me well before class. You're expected to come to class prepared.

b. Weekly Breakdown

Class	Date	Assigned Reading
0	Jan. 10	Class Overview (Virtual via Zoom)
1	Jan. 17	The Rule of Law Chapter 1
2	Jan. 24	First Amendment Chapter 2
3	Jan. 31	Speech Distinctions Chapter 3
4	Feb. 7	Defamation + Emotional Distress Chapters 4
5	Feb. 14	Defamation Defenses Chapters 5
6	Feb. 21	Protecting Privacy Chapters 6
7	Feb. 28	Pre-Midterm Review Chapters 1 - 6
8	Mar. 6	MIDTERM EXAM
9	Mar. 13	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK (March 10-17)
10	Mar. 20	Gathering Information Chapter 7
11	Mar. 27	Access to the Courts Chapter 8
12	Apr. 3	Electronic Media Regulation Chapter 9
13	Apr. 10	Obscenity + Indecency Chapter 10

14	Apr. 17	Intellectual Property + Artificial Intelligence Chapter 11
15	Apr. 24	Pre-Final Exam Review Chapters 7 - 11
16	May 1	FINAL EXAM

*This syllabus is subject to change—and probably will change—
based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.*

VIII. REGISTRATION CALENDAR

Date	Event
Jan 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last day to register and add classes for Session 001 Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W” (except for Monday-only classes) and receive a refund for Session 001 Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or audit for Session 001 Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for spring
Feb 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last day to withdraw without a mark of “W” on transcript and receive a refund Last day to change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001
Apr 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last day to drop with a mark of “W,” which will appear on student record and STARS report, and tuition charges still apply

IX. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

a. Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

i. Academic Conduct & Integrity

USC’s Unifying Value of integrity is a foundational principle that inspires the community to match its values to its actions. Academic integrity is ultimately the sole guarantor of the legitimacy of one’s education, and therefore, is vitally important not just for oneself, but for the entire USC community. The value of all USC degrees is negatively impacted by violations of academic integrity. In the classroom, general principles of academic integrity 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.

Academic Integrity violations (academic dishonesty) include, but are not limited to:

- The submission of material authored in whole or in part by another person and/or Artificial Intelligence (AI) but represented as the student’s own work, whether that material is

- paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.
- Re-using any portion of one’s own work (essay, term paper, project, or other assignment) previously submitted without citation of such and without permission of the instructor(s) involved.
 - Improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers, including drafts. Also, all students involved in collaborative work (as permitted by the instructor) are expected to proofread the work and are responsible for all particulars of the final draft.
 - Acquisition of academic work, such as term papers, solutions, or other assignments, from any source and the subsequent presentation of those materials as the student’s own work, or providing academic work, such as term papers, solutions, or assignments that another student submits as their own work.

Please also see the USC Student Handbook for information on academic conduct:
https://policy.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/USC_StudentCode_February2023.pdf

ii. Artificial Intelligence

Unless otherwise stated in writing by the instructor, the work you produce for this course must not be (1) created in whole or in part using AI writing tools, (2) created in whole or in part by another person, and/or (3) previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab. Violating this policy is a violation of the academic integrity policy and may warrant failure of the course.

iii. USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

https://catalogue.usc.edu/preview_entity.php?catoid=16&ent_oid=3459

“Since its founding, the School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism.”

b. Students and Disability Accommodations

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

c. Mental Health and Other Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group

counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273- 8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

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.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

X. ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Adrienne J. Lawrence is an award-winning attorney, [author](#), and on-air legal analyst who also serves as an educator in professional spaces. Before transitioning from law into journalism in 2015, she represented an array of clients as an advocate and litigator at some of the world's largest law firms.

Lawrence holds a B.A. from Cal State Sacramento, an M.A. from John Jay College, a J.D. from The George Washington University Law School, and an M.A. from USC Annenberg (Specialized Journalism).