

**Fall 2024 | Thursdays | 6-9:20 p.m.**

**Section:** 21290

**Session:** 060

**Location:** Online

**Instructor:** Adrienne J. Lawrence (she/her)

**Office/Office Hours:** [By Appointment](#)

**Contact Info:** lawr205@usc.edu / 424-245-5899

## **I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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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**

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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

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

**Quizzes.** At the end of each chapter discussed, open-book quizzes will be administered. The quizzes cannot be made up if you are absent or unavailable. There will be up to 12 quizzes in total over the course of the semester. At the end of the semester, your two (2) lowest quiz scores will be dropped. The purpose of the quizzes is to apply the information you learn during the lecture and from your readings. Opportunities to gain extra (bonus) points may be available to supplement your quiz scores.

**Midterm and Final Exams.** The Midterm and final exam will present you with three types of questions: true/false, multiple choice, and essay. The essay question(s) will be based on a complex fact pattern where you must discuss the legal issues that arise from those facts. You will want to use the [I.R.A.C. method](#) on the essays to maximize your score. The exams will be open book/computer, unless stated otherwise. The purpose of these exams 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 relevant legal issues in 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. The Legal Report will be due by 11:59pm PT the Friday after your final exam (Dec 13). Late or noncompliant submissions will suffer penalty. Details to come.

### IV. GRADING

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As it concerns the essays on each exam and the legal report, I review each submission 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 based on my teaching (*i.e.*, what at least 2-3 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%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

**b. Grading Scale**

Letter grade and corresponding numerical point range		
95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	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, unless otherwise noted. Extra credit (bonus points) may be available to increase your grade above the 4000 points.

Grade	Description
A	Work clearly describes 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 legal rule to 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 legal rules and facts and applying the law to those facts or fails to include several 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**

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Any and all assignments are due on the date specified. Absent prior discussion and written approval from the instructor, late submissions will not be accepted.

**VI. TEXTBOOK AND REQUIRED READINGS**

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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 7<sup>th</sup> edition and/or relying on course lectures, notes, and hyperlinks.

## VII. COURSE SCHEDULE

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### a. Class Sessions

The assigned reading and in-class conversations will provide the necessary backdrop for class participation as well as for the assignments. As the semester progresses, we will build on legal issues, cases, current events, etc. previously discussed. As such, attendance is important—albeit not mandatory. By not attending class, you will likely miss out on information relevant to the assignments and bonus point opportunities. Read the assigned chapter before class so that participation can be full and vibrant. If you do not understand what is assigned, contact me well before class. **You are expected to come to class prepared and may be questioned during class about the readings.**

### b. Weekly Breakdown

August 2024				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
26	27	28	29   <b>Legal Basics</b> Chapter 1	30

September 2024				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2   <b>Holiday</b> Labor Day	3   <b>Quiz 1 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	4	5   <b>First Amendment</b> Chapter 2	6
9   <b>Quiz 2 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	10	11	12   <b>Speech Distinctions</b> Chapter 3	13
16   <b>Quiz 3 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	17	18	19   <b>Defamation</b> Chapter 4	20
23   <b>Quiz 4 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	24	25	26   <b>Defenses</b> Chapter 5	27
30   <b>Quiz 5 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT				

October 2024				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	1	2	3   <b>Privacy Issues</b> Chapter 6	4
7   <b>Quiz 6 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	8	9   <b>Holiday</b> Fall Recess	10   <b>Holiday</b> Fall Recess	11   <b>Holiday</b> Fall Recess
14	15	16	17   <b>Midterm Exam</b> Chapters 1-6	18
21	22	23	24   <b>Gathering Intel</b> Chapter 7	25
28   <b>Quiz 7 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	29	30	31   <b>Checking Justice</b> Chapter 8	1

November 2024				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
4   <b>Quiz 8 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	5	6	7   <b>Regulation</b> Chapter 9	8
11   <b>Holiday</b> Veteran's Day	12   <b>Quiz 9 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	13	14   <b>Obscenity + Indecency</b> Chapter 10	15
18   <b>Quiz 10 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	19	20	21   <b>Intellectual Property + AI</b> Chapter 11	22
25   <b>Quiz 11 Due</b> by 11:59pm PT	26	27   <b>Holiday</b> Indigenous People's Day	28   <b>Holiday</b> Indigenous People's Day	29   <b>Holiday</b> Indigenous People's Day

December 2024				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2	3	4	5   <b>Bonus Session</b>	6   <b>Classes End</b>
9	10	11	12   <b>Final Exam</b> Chapters 6-11	13   <b>Legal Report Due</b> by 11:59p PT

*The syllabus (including the weekly breakdown) is subject to change based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability. Any changes will be announced in-class or via Brightspace.*

**VIII. REGISTRATION CALENDAR**

Date	Event
<b>Aug 26</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First day of classes</li> </ul>
<b>Sept 13</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last day to register and add classes for Session 138</li> <li>• Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W" (except for Monday-only classes) and receive a refund for Session 138</li> <li>• Last day to change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 138</li> </ul>
<b>Oct 11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last day to withdraw without a mark of "W" on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade</li> </ul>
<b>Nov 15</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last day to drop with a mark of "W," which will appear on student record and STARS report, and tuition charges still apply</li> </ul>
<b>Dec 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last day of classes</li> </ul>
<b>Dec 18</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End of session</li> </ul>

## **IX. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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### **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 advance written 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.

#### **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**

"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." See [Annenberg School of Journalism Catalogue](#).

**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](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

**c. Support Services & Other Matters**

Service	Description	Contact
<a href="#">USC Counseling and Mental Health</a>	Free and confidential mental health services, including short-term therapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention	<b>(213) 740-9355</b> (available 24/7) <a href="mailto:StudentHealth@usc.edu">StudentHealth@usc.edu</a>
<a href="#">988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline</a>	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	<b>988</b> (available 24/7 via phone and text message)
<a href="#">Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP)</a>	Free and confidential help and advocacy available 24/7 in response to situations of gender- and power-based harm, including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, harassment and stalking	<b>(213) 740-9355</b> (available 24/7) <a href="mailto:StudentHealth@usc.edu">StudentHealth@usc.edu</a>
<a href="#">Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX)</a>	In addition to providing assistance regarding violence, harassment, bias, microaggressions, or discrimination, this office provides information about the rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants	<b>(213) 740-5086</b> <a href="mailto:eeotix@usc.edu">eeotix@usc.edu</a>
<a href="#">The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)</a>	OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy	<b>(213) 740-0776</b> <a href="mailto:OSASFrontDesk@usc.edu">OSASFrontDesk@usc.edu</a>
<a href="#">USC Campus Support and Intervention</a>	Assists students in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student	<b>(213) 740-0411</b> <a href="mailto:uscsupport@usc.edu">uscsupport@usc.edu</a>



<a href="#"><u>Office of Inclusion and Diversity</u></a>	Information on events, programs, trainings and initiatives on advancing inclusion & diversity at USC	<b>(213) 740-2101</b> <a href="mailto:inclusion@med.usc.edu">inclusion@med.usc.edu</a>
<a href="#"><u>USC Emergency</u></a>	Provides information on emergency assistance and an avenue to report a crime. Consider downloading the <a href="#"><u>LiveSafe Mobile Safety App</u></a> .	<b>(213) 740-4321</b> (UPC) <b>(323) 442-1000</b> (HSC) (available 24/7)
<a href="#"><u>USC Department of Public Safety</u></a>	DPS, which is responsible for providing public safety services to the university community, operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and is committed to maintaining a safe and secure environment conducive to learning.	Non-Emergency <b>(213) 740-6000</b> (UPC) <b>(323) 442-1200</b> (HSC)  Emergency (24/7) <b>(213) 740-4321</b> (UPC) <b>(323) 442-1000</b> (HSC)
<a href="#"><u>Office of the Ombuds</u></a>	A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a USC Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage concerns	<b>(213) 821-9556</b> (UPC) <b>(323) 442-0382</b> (HSC)
<a href="#"><u>Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice</u></a>	Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance	<b>(323) 442-2850</b> <a href="mailto:info@chan.usc.edu">info@chan.usc.edu</a>
<a href="#"><u>Annenberg Student Success Fund</u></a>	Donor-funded financial aid available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities	
<a href="#"><u>Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund</u></a>	Awards distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses	

## **X. ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR**

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Adrienne J. Lawrence, esq. is an award-winning attorney and on-air legal analyst. Before jumping into journalism in 2015, Ms. Lawrence represented an array of clients as a litigator at some of the world's largest law firms. She 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 another M.A. from USC Annenberg.

Ms. Lawrence is the author of the 2021 International Business Book of the Year [\*Staying in the Game: The Playbook for Beating Workplace Sexual Harassment\*](#). In addition to commentating for outlets such as *NPR* and *TYT*, she is a regular op-ed contributor on *Straight Arrow News*, where each week she argues positions opposite the 50<sup>th</sup> Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich.