

# USC Annenberg

**ASCJ 200: Navigating Media & News in the Digital Age**  
**Fall 2024 T/Th 2-3:20pm, ANN G26 + Required Lab Sections 21910/11, 4 units**

*Professor:*

**Gordon Stables** [stables@usc.edu](mailto:stables@usc.edu) Office hours: T/Th 1-2 pm & by appointment.  
Contact Nancy Ruiz [nruiz@usc.edu](mailto:nruiz@usc.edu) for appointments.

*Lab Instructors:*

Rogelio Lopez (he/him/his) Lab Sections – Tuesday 9:00 am, 10 am and 11 am  
Email: [rogeliol@usc.edu](mailto:rogeliol@usc.edu)  
Office hours via zoom by appointment.

Bryant Lydell (he/him/his) Lab Sections - Wednesday 11am, 12pm and 1pm.  
Email: [bryantsm@usc.edu](mailto:bryantsm@usc.edu)  
Office Hours: by appointment via Zoom

India A. Walton (she/her/hers) Lab Sections - My Wednesday 4pm & Thursday 10am.  
Email: [iwalton@usc.edu](mailto:iwalton@usc.edu)  
Office Hours: by appointment via Zoom | in-person Wednesday from 3pm-3:50pm

## **Course Overview:**

This interdisciplinary cross-school course is designed to engage students as discriminating media and news *consumers* and *contributors* at a time when the digital revolution is spawning an unprecedented daily flood of content. This revolution is transforming notions of journalism as a series of practices designed to produce news as well as supporting the growth of large networked systems which are focused on broader notions of communication. This media environment is evolving rapidly, creating a new set of powerful players and challenging the legitimacy of social institutions. These transitions are taking place around the world and in an entire range of platforms, settings and behaviors.

An important mark of a well-educated person in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the ability to *critically navigate* this contested and integrated terrain: to thoughtfully understand, employ, enjoy and help build and shape the media landscape we now inhabit. Only by understanding our own roles as consumers and producers of media can we begin to make sense of the environment around us.

Democracies relies on enlightened and engaged citizens who can critically analyze the range of information and content disseminated from an equally wide range of sources and platforms. The course will examine new avenues of civic participation and the critical importance of ethical standards in communicating messages. Students will learn how to apply their critical-thinking and analytic skills to a range of media and news production and consumption. The critical thinking skills developed in this course will be applicable to many fields of study, from science to the arts.

## **Course Objectives:**

Every student comes into our class with different abilities, passions, priorities, lived experiences, and ways of learning. We invite you to begin where you are—to listen and learn from course content and discussions, to critically contemplate, question, and critique. To that end, the learning outcomes below are fluid, and work in collaboration and dialogue with our teaching (as well as that of your lab instructors), course content, and class discussions. What students take away will depend on where they start, how they engage, and how they tap into their capacities to learn and grow. The course provides an opportunity for you to challenge yourself

It is our hope that this course provides an opportunity for you to:

- Critical thinking  
develop critical thinking and analytic skills for evaluating the barrage of media, information, and news content we face in this digital age, from advertising, film and television images to news and opinion.
- Critical thinking – Distinguish media genres  
discern and distinguish different types of media and news (e.g., opinion/commentary, news reports, documentary, entertainment, satire, expository/informative), the different media formats and platforms in which they circulate, and the different types of audiences they target.
- Critical thinking - representation  
assess how different groups are represented in media and news and in the content we produce ourselves
- Participate in digital culture  
participate actively in digital culture, traveling beyond the role of passive consumers to emerge as highly engaged critics, thoughtful and ethical citizens, and co-producers of content.
- Production  
produce and manipulate media using various software while taking into consideration the construction of argument, potential implicit bias, and the value in sharing and distribution to a diverse set of audiences.

### **Course Attendance and Participation Policies:**

We design each lecture and lab to provide a unique and meaningful academic experience for students. Students will have the most learning environment when they are able to participate in each lecture and lab setting.

While it is expected that students will make every effort to attend classes, it is recognized that personal circumstances will arise which preclude class attendance. In such circumstances, the student is responsible for obtaining the materials presented in missed classes and for making up missed tests and other assignments. If students have scheduling issues, please contact your instructor to best determine the optimal options and accommodations.

It is expected that students attend class in person as required unless alternative arrangements have been made due to illness, medical reasons, or the need to isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19. Students are expected to be in class, in-person, each day unless and until there are specific approvals from the faculty.

Students are required to do all assigned reading, attend all classes (including labs), complete all assignments, and participate fully in class discussion. Students should expect questions during the lectures and they should be prepared to answer drawing upon the readings and out of class assignments.

During lectures we will utilize [Nearpod](#) as an in-course platform to maximize engagement. Each day login at <https://nearpod.com/student/> with a unique code provided at the start of class.

Simply showing up to class does not guarantee a perfect attendance/participation score. Participation grades will begin with an average grade (i.e., C) and then adjusted based on the individual student performance. Students who miss lectures or lab sections without prior and documented excuses will be at risk of lower participation grades.

### **Course Recordings and Transcripts**

All course lecture sessions will be recorded and made available to students throughout the semester. USC ITS has set up Zoom to automatically record and transcribe class sessions, which are then made available to students and faculty for all classes in Blackboard.

These recordings and transcripts are made available to support student learning and are only authorized for sharing or distribution to enrolled USC students. USC SCampus policies regarding class notes (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-c/>) clearly states that students that they are not permitted to create their own class recordings, share this content with non-enrolled students or invite others to class without the instructor's permission. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction, including referral to USC SJACS.

### **Course Readings:**

Course readings can be found on Blackboard, as PDFs/online links. The Blackboard site will also include a list of useful links and resources used throughout the term. We will regularly incorporate topics and developments that come up in the popular press and current events to allow for “in the moment” analysis.

### **Lab Sessions:**

Weekly lab sessions are an **essential** and **mandatory** part of this course. Labs work in conjunction with lecture content and to train you in general design principles and the general use of digital tools so that you are equipped to maintain your WordPress site and complete your digital Media assignments. Additional help is available at the Digital Lounge helpdesk which is providing remote support for Fall 2020. Software tutorials and all of their services can be found on their website: [www.AnnenbergDL.org](http://www.AnnenbergDL.org). You may also look at LinkedIn Learning on USC's IT site for online tutorials on a range of software here <https://itservices.usc.edu/linkedin-learning/>

### **Required Equipment for Labs and Assignments:**

In accordance with the Annenberg mandatory laptop policy, you will need a laptop with the following recommended specs:

- MAC: multicore Intel processor with 64-bit support, MacOS X 10, at least 8GB RAM (16 recommended)
- Windows: multicore processor with 64-bit support, at least Windows 7 with 64-bit service pack. 8GB of RAM (16GB recommended)
- 8GB of available hard-disk space for software installation

You will also need a smartphone with the following specifications to complete your Media assignments:

- Apple: iPhone 5 or higher, must be running iOS 8.1 or later

- Android: Needs to have 1080p for video, must be running Android 4.4
- Storage: 16GB minimum, 32GB recommended

Additionally, you will need at least 10GB of dedicated media storage for this course. An external hard drive is highly recommended. For more information, please visit <http://www.annenbergdl.org/adobe/>

If for any reason you do not have the required equipment or have problems with your equipment during the semester, please get in touch with the instructors ASAP. Accommodations can be made to support you. A selection of digital tools for Media assignments will be discussed in lab and linked on Blackboard.

### **Assignments and Grading:**

All assignment prompts will be distributed via Blackboard. Assignments must be completed via Blackboard on time to avoid a grade reduction. If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide documentation that will allow you to be excused or discuss your situation with us in a timely manner. We all recognize these are very challenging times, please make sure to stay in touch with your faculty as early as possible whenever you are experiencing challenges.

You are responsible for the material covered in class and in the reading. You will be evaluated on the following:

- 1) the level of your engagement with the class materials (as demonstrated in your written work, projects, and class participation)
- 2) your capacity to articulate and explain your ideas and analysis in well-written blog posts and digital media projects
- 3) your ability to analyze and apply the theories and methodologies of the class
- 4) your ability to demonstrate intentional design choices and execution of your projects

Your work will be graded on two primary evaluative scales:

- 1) how well it demonstrates an understanding of the theories and methodologies of the class
- 2) how well it articulates and structures its argument (in written and digital media formats)

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

Lecture Participation and course progress assessments	10%
Includes Posting and Reacting to News Detective (May include quizzes and progress assignments)	
Lab Participation	5%
WordPress site (see below)	5%
Including posting and clear categorization of all assignments	
Media Assignments (2 total, 20% each)	40%
Each Media assignment will have mandatory check-ins worth 5% of assignment grade	
WordPress Writing Assignments (2 total, 10% each, see below)	20%
Final Exam	20%

Students must complete all the assignments to earning a passing grade. Assignments will be detailed in specific prompts distributed throughout the course of the semester. All assignments are due on the date indicated. Each item will be reduced one grade per calendar day late.

### **WordPress Site**

Students will create blogs (via WordPress.com) at the beginning of the semester that will:

- Serve as a clearly **organized and categorized repository for your assignments** throughout the semester. General categories/menu items should include: “About,” (including a list of 5 news sources and 5 personal interest links), “Writing,” “Media Projects.” ALL posts should be categorized.
- Offer a place for you to create a **public and digital identity** tied to your assignments.
- Demonstrate **intentional design choices** (decisions re: colors, fonts, layout, etc. should be cohesive and align with your assignments and the identity you are trying to convey to your public/audience).

### **Media Assignments and Final Project**

You will have two (2) Media assignments over the course of the semester. All Media projects will offer arguments supported by evidence and analysis and will be accompanied by brief written analysis (250-300 words) that explains design choices and ties to course readings/lectures. Each assignment will also require pre-production exercises and rough drafts in lab section (see schedule). These rough drafts will be part of your assignment grade.

1. Image manipulation
2. Audio OR Video vox pop, remix OR PSA

### **Writing Assignments**

There will be two (2) written blog assignments (approximately 500 words each):

1. Media Consumption
2. SMELL Test /Photo Forensics

Best practices for blogging will be covered in class and you may see some samples on BB, but in general keep the following in mind:

- Use a catchy headline and post title (i.e., not “Blog Assignment”)
- Use a clear opening statement that sets up your position, indicating how you plan to frame your commentary or analysis
- Offer appropriate set-up or context so a reader outside of our class can understand what you are writing about
- Use evidence (analysis of text, direct quotes, photos, etc.) to support your conclusions
- Use succinct, clear, and straightforward prose
- Include compelling images/video to help keep your reader engaged or to illustrate/substantiate the points you are making. Any media you reference should be embedded in your post.
- Include hyperlinks where appropriate to reference other sites and sources. NB: hyperlinks should be descriptive copy, not clickable URLs.
- Proofread for spelling and grammar

A blog in this class is **not** a diary entry or an opinionated rant. It can be casual and somewhat informal (in your own voice, first person), but should adhere to the above criteria.

**Course Progress Activities** – As a way to reinforce course progress in an online setting, we will periodically use diagnostic efforts, such as quizzes or course progress assignments to help students stay on track with course material.

Students should post at least 4 News Detective claims and rank at least 4 claims from other people during the semester. We will discuss and utilize these examples in class. Users move up in rankings based on when the moderator selects your answers as the best, and when other people upvoted your comments and factchecks. Students ranked in the top 10% on News Detective will receive a bonus on their score.

### **Course Grading Policy:**

Grades will be assigned as follows:

“A “Outstanding, thoughtful and insightful work and analysis, showing an ability to think beyond the basic course material. A grade of A+ (97-100) *may* be given to *individual* assignments in *rare* instances where expectations are exceeded.

- “A-/B+” Above average work, demonstrating effort and keen understanding of conceptual ideas
- “B/B-“ Average work, needs improvement on ideas, execution, and argument
- “C+/C” Shows little effort, lacks clarity and/or argument
- “C-“ Fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material
- “D” No understanding of the material and/or does not meet bare minimum criteria
- “F” Failure to meet minimum criteria.

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores on the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below:

A+	= 97-100 (only applicable to individual assignments, NOT course grade)	C	= 76-74
A	= 96-94	C-	= 73-70
A-	= 93-90	D+	= 69-67
B+	= 89-87	D	= 66-64
B	= 86-84	D-	= 63-60
B-	= 83-80	F	= 59-00
C+	= 79-77		

**Grievance Procedure** - Occasionally, students are dissatisfied with evaluation of their work or some other dimension of a course. For concerns with specific grades, students should first provide a written argument in support of their position to the appropriate laboratory section instructor. All grade appeals on specific assignments must be made within one week of the return of the assignment. The laboratory instructor will then review that petition and evaluate its merits. Dr. Stables will consider grade appeals only after this process has been completed. You may, of course, approach any of the instructors with any general concerns.

**Course Contingency planning** - This course has been designed to transition to fully online, should the need arise due to local, state or federal guidelines. If the delivery method is altered, please be assured that the learning goals and outcomes of the course will not change; however, some aspects of the course will change in terms of the mode of delivery, participation and testing methods.

## Daily Lecture and Lab Schedule

Date	Lecture	Lab	Assignments	Registration
27-Aug	Introduction to the Class	Intro to WordPress, constructing online identities	ASSIGNED: Create a WordPress site for the semester.	
29-Aug	Landscape of our Media		ASSIGNED: Blog #1: Media Consumption Diary and 500-word blog post on your consumption habits.	
3-Sep	Media in our Everyday Lives (add smell test intro)	Basic skills assessment. Design basics and what does it mean to be “intentional”?		
5-Sep	How Media Functions			
10-Sep	Visual Primacy in Media	Taking pictures, setting frames, making meanings (framing, cropping, and what gets left out, composition, rule of thirds, etc.)	Due by 11 pm pst 9/5 WordPress URL + Blog #1	
12-Sep	Rise of Video Platforms		Assigned: Blog #2 SMELL Test	Last day add or drop w refund (9/13)
17-Sep	Media Platforms	Photo editing—making meaning + commentary through altering form (color, lighting, saturation, contrast)		
19-Sep	Global Dimensions of Platforms		Due by 11 pm pst 9/19 Blog #2 SMELL Test	
24-Sep	Validating Information & Problematic Information	Making meaning through manipulation; incorporating the recognizable, iconic, conventional with intention (layering, mixing, etc.)	DUE IN LAB - WordPress check-in during lab section	
26-Sep	Managing Information Credibility		DUE IN LAB - Photo manipulation rough draft during lab section	
1-Oct	Privacy and Technologies of Media Literacy	Photo manipulation rough draft during lab section		
3-Oct	Regulating Media: Free Speech and Free Expression		Due by 11 pm 10/3 Media #1 Photo Manipulation	
8-Oct	Regulating Media: Public and Private Dimensions	Using data to think about representation and normalized		

Date	Lecture	Lab	Assignments	Registration
10-Oct	No Class - Fall Recess	ideas (mapping/wire framing information, design and readability, telling a story and keeping it simple). WP check-in/answering partner activity. Examples of Remix Media8	Assigned Media #2 Video/ Audio Remix or PSA	Last day change to P/NP or drop without a W (10/11)
15-Oct	Economic Models of News and Media	Media Editing Basics— what's the story? how does editing help storytelling? How can editing shape and/or manipulate meaning?	Media #2 Check in during lab	
17-Oct	Generative AI			
22-Oct	Media Frames – Mainstream vs. Extreme			
24-Oct	Representation and Witnessing as News and Information			
29-Oct	Data Literacy	Finding good sources - weaving found footage. Pre-production checklist	Media #2 Check in during lab	
31-Oct	News Literacy & the Implications of Lost Credibility			
5-Nov	Media Literacy and Political Process	Open critiques	Due in LAB - Media #2 Rough Draft (Stage 1)	
7-Nov	Algorithmic Literacy			
12-Nov	Algorithmic Literacy – TikTok	Open critiques	Due in LAB - Media #2 Rough Draft (Stage 2)	Last day to withdraw (11/15)
15-Nov	Everyday Literacies			
19-Nov	Our News and Information Routines	Open critiques	Due Media #2. 11/21 Audio/Video Remix or PSA	
22-Nov	Introduction to Civic Literacies			
26-Nov	Civic Literacies: Public Interest	Exports, write up, citing sources	WordPress Check-ins	
28-Nov	No Class – Thanksgiving			
3-Dec	Recent Trends & Developments - Regulatory and Economic Models	Final course summary and exam review	Due by 12/5 at 11 pm pst - WordPress Due	



Date	Lecture	Lab	Assignments	Registration
5-Dec	Course Conclusion and A Look Ahead			
12-Dec	Final Exam Due by 4 pm pst			

## Tentative Daily Lecture Schedule (open to revision)

*Reading/assignments are all due on the specified day*

### August 26 (Day 1) – Introduction to the Class

- Welcome to the class
- Introduce your faculty
- Overall philosophy of the class
- Our expectations for this semester

### August 28 (Day 2) – Landscape of our Media

- What was media?
- What is media now?
- What are the evolving trends?
- How are the business models changing?
- What are the implications for individuals?

#### Readings

- Kavanagh, Jennifer and Michael D. Rich, *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. Chapters 1-2.

### September 3 (Day 3) – How we use Media in our Everyday Lives

- How do we produce and consume media and news?
- How are media and news content central to and integrated into our daily lives and habits, constructing our identities and understandings of the world?
- How is the emerging volume of information influencing trends of production and reception of facts, data, opinion? How are these trends influencing institutional legitimacy?
- How do we decipher, deconstruct and respond to media and news content, focusing on the range of meanings (intended, negotiated, and oppositional)?

#### Readings

- Renee Hobbs, *Create to Learn*, chapter 1 + 7 “Create to Learn: Consider Your Identity as a Digital Author” and “Blogs and Websites” (3-14, 107-121)
- Vivek Murthy, *The New York Times*, June 17, 2024. [“Surgeon General: Why I’m Calling for a Warning Label on Social Media Platforms”](#)

- John McManus, “The SMELL Test”

### **September 5 (Day 4) – How Media Functions**

- What is the (ideological) power of media and news?
- How are these ideologies shaped by our institutions and technologies?
- How do we construct content to convey meaning, truth, credibility, authenticity, etc.?
- What role does advertising play in the construction of our media?

#### Readings:

- Greg M. Smith, Chapters 1, 2, 4 from What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss

### **September 10 (Day 5) – Visual Primacy in Media**

- Why do certain images have power; how do they become iconic; why do they spread or go viral; how are they appropriated for different uses and practices?
- How do images function in our visual culture?
- How is meaning visually constructed in an age of traditional photography as well as an age of remix and reuse?

#### Readings

- Robert Harriman and John Louis Lucaites, “The Borders of the Genre: Migrant Mother and Times Square Kiss” (excerpt)
- Renee Hobbs, Create to Learn, “Images” (p. 139-153)

### **September 12 (Day 6) – Rise of Streaming Video Media**

- How has video changed to become a dominant form of media?
- How has the rise of streaming video disrupted other media properties?
- What are the primary content and economic models?
- What are the implications for literacy of video’s popularity?

#### Readings

- Jack Benjamin, The Media Leader, October 23, 2023. “[How the rise of TikTok has impacted YouTube.](#)”
- Nico Grant & John Koblin, The New York Times, July 20, 2024, “[How YouTube Became the Most Popular Streaming Service on TVs.](#)”
- Tomad Kucera, The Geeky Leader, March 23, 2024. “[Why People Stopped Reading: Unraveling the Decline of a Book-Loving Culture](#)”

### **September 17 (Day 7) - How do media platforms function?**

- How is media and information distributed and how do we receive it as consumers?
- How do platforms shape the way we see and digest content?
- What power do Facebook, Google, and other platforms have in our daily lives?

#### Readings

- Peter Hoskins & Fan Wang, BBC News, July 29, 2023, “[WeChat: Why does Elon Musk want X to emulate China's everything-app?](#)”
- Gita Jackson, The Verge, Mar 9, 2023, “[How a social network falls apart.](#)”

### September 19 (Day 8) – Global Dimensions of Platforms

- How is media and information distributed and how do we receive it as consumers?
- How do platforms shape the way we see and digest content?
- What power do Facebook, Google, and other platforms have in our daily lives?
- How are these platforms informing different social change around the world?

#### Readings

- Adam Satariano and David McCabe, The New York Times, March 4, 2024. “[Forced to Change: Tech Giants Bow to Global Onslaught of Rules.](#)”
- Russell Brandom, Rest of World, June 22, 2023 ”[The promise and peril of Brazil’s Fake News law.](#)”
- Fiona Kelliher, Coda, “[When Meta suspends influential political accounts, who loses?](#)” July 26, 2023.
- Kian Vesteinsson, Just Security, June 24, 2021, “[Nigeria’s Twitter Ban Is a Bellwether Case for Internet Freedom](#)”

### September 24 (Day 9) – Validating Information & Problematic Information

- How do media engender trust?
- How do news publishers convey or erode trust?
- What is the role of transparency?
- What do we look for and how are we shaped as consumers?

#### Readings

- Clay Shirky, “Truth Without Scarcity, Ethics Without Force,” chapter 2 of “The New Ethics of Journalism: Principles for the 21st Century.” SAGE/CQ Press, 2013.
- Carolyn Jack, “Lexicon of Lies: Terms for Problematic Information.”

### September 26 (Day 10) – Managing Information Credibility

- How does the process of fact-checking work?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of fact-checking?
- What do we learn by the exercise of fact-checking?

#### Readings

- Peter Cunliffe-Jones and Lucas Graves, The Conversation, January 8, 2024, “[Misinformation: how fact-checking journalism is evolving – and having a real impact on the world.](#)”
- Review [News Detective Instructions](#) and [introductory video](#) and start using the platform.

## October 1 (Day 11) - Privacy and Technologies of Media Literacy

- What is personal (autonomy) and data privacy?
- How do technologies play a dual role as tools of convenience and efficiency as well as conduits for in surveillance and tracking of our everyday experiences (especially in the age of wearables)?
- How are our participation and actions as consumers and producers monitored?

### Readings

- Ian Fried, Axios, July 7, 2022, "[Apple's "lockdown mode" highlights security tradeoffs.](#)"
- Julia Angwin, "[Interview with Danielle Citron – The Right to Intimate Privacy.](#)" The Markup, December 2, 2022.
- Ross Anderson, "[China Is the First Surveillance Superpower](#)" The Atlantic, September 2020.

## October 3 (Day 12) - Regulating Media: Free Speech and Free Expression

- What are the prominent forms of media regulation?
- What does "freedom of the press" mean in a world controlled by platforms? What does it mean in a world where anyone can publish anything?
- How does our understanding of free speech and free expression need to evolve with technology? Is it freedom to speak or freedom to be heard?
- Are there limits to free speech/free expression?

### Readings

- Adam Liptak, The New York Times, June 26, 2024, "[Supreme Court Rejects Challenge to Biden Administration's Contacts With Social Media Companies.](#)"
- Sara Morrison, Vox, February 23, 2023. "[Section 230, the internet law that's under threat, explained.](#)"
- Aja Romano, Vox, May 5, 2021, "[The second wave of "cancel culture."](#)"

## October 8 (Day 13) - Regulating Media: Public and Private Dimensions

- What are the primary forms of public regulation?
- What are common forms of private regulation?
- What is content moderation and what roles does it play?

### Readings:

- Nicole Narea, Vox.com, August 6, 2024. "[A historic ruling against Google could change the internet as we know it.](#)"
- Jon Porter, The Verge, February 16, 2024. "[The EU's tough new moderation rules are about to cover a lot more of the internet.](#)"
- Sara Morrison, Vox, August 1, 2023, "[Meta and Google are blocking links to news in Canada. The US might be next.](#)"
- Eric Hellerstein, Coda, June 7, 2022, "[From Brazil to Texas, politicians are trying to throw out platforms' ability to moderate content.](#)"

## October 10 – Fall Recess – No Class

### October 15 - (Day 14) - Economic Models of News and Media

- What economic imperatives play a role in the production and distribution of media and news?
- How do industries and conglomerates and their infrastructures inform content and access to content?
- How does the shape of the business dictate the content we receive?
- How do these trends manifest as local and national levels?

#### Readings:

- Christopher Mims, Wall Street Journal, July 28, 2023, “[How Netflix's Algorithms and Tech Feed Its Success.](#)”
- James Ball, The Atlantic, June 1, 2023, “[Online Ads Are About to Get Even Worse: Big Tech is struggling to evolve beyond a flawed model, and generative AI isn't helping.](#)”
- Murtaza Hussain, The Intercept, February 13, 2021, “[How to Understand the Rage Economy](#)”

### October 17 (Day 15) – Generative AI

- What is generative AI?
- How does data inform generative AI? What are hallucinations? What is drift?
- How does data inform the future of generative AI?
- How can generative AI influence media?

#### Readings

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- Karen Weise and Cade Metz, May 9, 2023, The New York Times, “[When A.I. Chatbots Hallucinate.](#)”
- Alison Snyder, Axios, July 27, 2024. “[This is AI's brain on AI.](#)”
- Josh Zumbrun, Wall Street Journal, “August. 4, 2023, “[Why ChatGPT Is Getting Dumber at Basic Math.](#)”

### October 22 (Day 16) - Media Frames – Mainstream vs. Extreme

- What does normalization mean and what role do media and news play in creating and perpetuating norms?
- How do ideas and ideologies get normalized through our daily communication and sharing of information?
- How does new/digital media play a role in crafting what is normal and what isn't, and how has that changed over time?
- How do we define ‘mainstream’ and ‘extreme’ or ‘conspiratorial’ frames?

#### Readings

- Wesley Lowery, June 23, 2020, The New York Times. “[A Reckoning Over Objectivity, Led by Black Journalists.](#)”
- Sadie Graham, October 5, 2018, Vice. “[#MeToo, a Movement Reliant on Reporting, Reveals the Limits of Journalism](#)”

- D.M. McLeod & James Hertog, “Social Control, Social Change and the Mass Media’s Role in the Regulation of Protest Groups”

### **October 24 (Day 17) - Representation and Witnessing as News and Information**

- What does it mean to engage media?
- How is witnessing an act of representation?
- How does witnessing make visible what is often otherwise invisible or unheard?
- How can witness testimony be used/abused?
- How do facets of our identity, including gender, race, class, and sexuality get constructed by and impact the way we interpret media, tell stories, and understand ourselves and others?

#### Readings

- Allissa V. Richardson, Vox, April 21, 2021. “[We have enough proof: What’s the purpose of sharing violent police videos anymore, other than to traumatize Black communities?](#)”
- Sarah Banet-Weiser, January 27, 2018 and March 30, 2018. “Popular Feminism: #MeToo” AND “Popular Feminism: Structural Rage” LA Review of Books.

### **October 29 (Day 18) - Data Literacy**

- How do we read and communicate with data?
- How are data design and visualization are important to strategic communication and a key part of visual literacy?
- What is data journalism and how should we evaluate it? Does it provide a sound basis for conveying “truth”?
- How do these principles and practices manifest in the public communication regarding COVID-19?

#### Readings

- Renee Hobbs, Create to Learn, “Infographics and Data Visualization” (155-168)
- Christos Makridis & Joel Thayer, The Wall Street Journal, July 31, 2023, “[Data Is the New Currency.](#)”
- The class discussion will prominently discuss excerpts from W.E.B. DuBois’s Data Portraits Visualizing Black America: The Color Line at the Turn of the Century

### **October 31 (Day 19) - News Literacy & the Implications of Lost Credibility**

- How have norms of media and consensus functioned throughout society?
- How does the business behind media determine the news we receive?
- We will discuss the ideological power of media, the construction of alternative facts, and the evolving of separate “realities” based on ideological differences.

#### Readings

- Alicia Wanless, Lawfare, May 8, 2023. “[There Is No Getting Ahead of Disinformation Without Moving Past It.](#)”
- Donovan Schaefer, Nieman Lab, July 2022, “[Buying into conspiracy theories can be exciting! And that’s what makes them dangerous.](#)”

## November 5 (Day 20) – Media Literacy and Political Process

- How are emerging news and information norms influencing political participation?
- What are the global dimensions of transitions?
- What are the short-term and long-term concerns for current media literacy trends?
- How do changing notions of media literacy inform the electoral process?

### Readings:

- Kavanagh, Jennifer, et al, Truth Decay, p. 191-222 (Chapter 5)
- Renée DiResta, The New York Times, June 25, 2024, “[What Happened to Stanford Spells Trouble for the Election.](#)”
- Gretel Kahn, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. March 27, 2024. “[How Latinos became a key target for misinformation in the U.S. election.](#)”

## November 7 (Day 21) - Algorithmic Literacy

- What is algorithmic bias and why should we care?
- How do these biases affect us?
- What regulations are most appropriate for internet and media platforms?
- What are the issues and implications of the restrictions on TikTok and WeChat?

### Readings

- The Wall Street Journal, April 17, 2023, “[How Spotify Knows What You Want to Hear Next](#)” (Video)
- Jane Bambauer, Lawfare, May 8, 2023, “[The Misbegotten War Against Curation](#)”
- Safiya Noble, “[Google Has a Striking History of Bias Against Black Girls](#)” March 26, 2018, Time Magazine.

## November 12 (Day 22) - Algorithmic Literacy – TikTok

- What is algorithmic bias and why should we care?
- How do these biases affect us?
- What regulations are most appropriate for internet and media platforms?
- How do algorithms influence the development of social media platforms?
- What are the issues and implications of the restrictions on TikTok?

### Readings

- Chris Stokel-Walker, The Guardian, August 16, 2021, “[TikTok is the new Facebook – and it is shaping the future of tech in its image.](#)”
- Mark Scott, Giovanna Coi And Giulia Poloni, Politico, May 7, 2024, “[Anatomy of a scroll: Inside TikTok’s AI-powered algorithms. Israel or Palestine? What users see in their social media feeds related to the Middle East crisis and other global political events is determined by opaque AI-powered online content curation systems.](#)”
- Russell Brandom & Niles Christopher, Rest of World, February 6, 2023, “[What the U.S. can learn from India’s TikTok ban: A permanent split with Chinese apps was less disruptive than many expected.](#)”

## November 15 (Day 23) - Everyday Literacies

- Consider the role technologies play in our everyday lives, how we use them, and how they shape us.
- We will specifically think about ethics and civility, cancel culture, and how we behave and perform in digital spaces.
- What does it mean to be responsible and ethical when producing media and news?

### Readings

- Ryan Milner, Whitney Philips, Vice, November 20, 2018, [“The Internet Doesn’t Need Civility; It Needs Ethics”](#)
- Elizabeth Bruenig, The Atlantic, July 18, 2021, [“Modern Porn Education is Totally Unprepared for Modern Porn”](#)
- Char Sampel, TechTarget, February 23, 2024. [“4 virtual reality ethics issues that need to be addressed.”](#)

## November 19 (Day 24) - Our News and Information Routines

- What do we mean by news and information?
- What are our current news and information routines?
- What are our personal and professional news and information needs?

### Readings

- Nic Newman, June 14, 2023, [Overview and key findings of the 2023 Digital News Report](#),“ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Alex Hern, May 10, 2021. [“Smartphone is now ‘the place where we live’, anthropologists say”](#) The Guardian.
  - This cites an original report, [“The Global Smartphone: Beyond a youth technology”](#) by UCL Press, published in 2021. This report is not required reading, but you may find it interesting, especial chapter 2.

## November 22 (Day 25) - Introduction to Civic Literacies

- What is civic media, and what are the avenues for civic engagement, participatory politics, and possibilities for social change in the digital age?
- What tools can we use (old and new) to encourage change and create impact?

### Readings

- Sangita Shrestova & Henry Jenkins, “From Voice to Influence: An Introduction”
- Mike Ananny, [“Probably Speech, Maybe Free: Toward a Probabilistic Understanding of Online Expression and Platform Governance.”](#) Knight First Amendment Institute, August 21, 2019.

## November 26 (Day 26) - Civic Literacies: Public Interest

- How do notions of free speech inform digital civic literacies?
- What is public interest in the context of the internet?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of public interest media?



## Readings

- Vicktor Pickard & Timothy Neff, “[Op-ed: Strengthen our democracy by funding public media](#)” June 2 2021, Columbia Journalism Review.
- Danny O’Brien, Electronic Frontier Foundation, May 6, 2021 “[Introducing the Public Interest Internet](#)”
- Erin Doherty, Axios. May 4, 2023, “[Mix of politics and COVID crush students' history scores.](#)”

**November 28 – Thanksgiving – No Class**

**December 3 (Day 27) - Recent Trends & Developments - Regulatory and Economic Models**

**December 5 (Day 28) - Course Conclusion and A Look Ahead**

**December 12 – Final Exam due by 4 pm pst**

## Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### a. Academic Conduct

#### *Plagiarism*

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 “Integrity and Accountability: Student Community Expectations” in the [USC Student Handbook](#) (page 11).

The design of this course encourages us to consider ways in which students can learn to best utilize digital media competencies. To that end, the course views generative AI as an addition to USC’s digital literacy tools that students are encouraged to experiment with and use inside and outside the classroom. Students may use generative AI tools such as Chat GPT to help complete their class assignments but must disclose such use in the bibliography section. Students are solely responsible for the accuracy of their documents, regardless of whether they were completed with the aid of generative AI. You are encouraged to ask any questions in advance prior to using generative tools for your assignments.

#### **Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy**

Generative AI (such as ChatGPT, Bard, Claude and many others) is a tool which offers opportunities and raises concerns. As students of communication and journalism, we need to be thoughtful and ethical consumers/users of the technology. For our class, there may be times when it is appropriate to use AI, such as for brainstorming topic ideas. But please keep in mind some important notes when using generative AI:

1. You must **give credit** to the specific AI used in your assignment. Check Blackboard and the specific assignment instructions for information about how to do that appropriately. Failing to cite AI use is an academic integrity violation and will be treated as such, with potentially serious consequences. There will also be instances where the use of AI tools are explicitly not allowed.
2. Generative AI often is incorrect and gives **misinformation**. You cannot rely on AI output; you must check for accuracy. You are held accountable for the work you turn in.

3. The **quality and nature of the prompts** shapes the quality of the output of generative AI. As these tools develop, our skills in “conversing” with them will need to change and grow too.

4. AI should never be a substitute for your own **thoughtful, critical contributions** to the subject matter. *Expressing oneself through writing is an important part of learning, refining thought, and demonstrating understanding that cannot be ceded to AI tools.*

These are just a few of many considerations that are important for us to collectively ponder and consider. If you have questions or thoughts on any of these policies, please share them.

Please see [USC’s Using Generative AI in Research](#) for information on citations, limitations and warnings and ethical considerations.

## **b. Support Systems**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call [studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)*  
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. Students can schedule appointments directly using the student health portal MySHR (<https://usc.edu/myshr>)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://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) 740-935 (WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call [studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](https://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](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://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](https://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](https://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 [uscса.usc.edu](http://uscса.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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu)*

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenberг.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

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.

*Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]*

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.