

Spring 2025 | Wednesdays | 6-9:20 p.m.

Section: 21375R

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

With a focus on media industries, this course explores the legal principles governing mass communication, including freedom of speech, press rights, defamation, privacy, intellectual property and more. This course uses a combination of seminar and lecture, rather than the Socratic method.

II. OVERALL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will master the fundamentals of defamation and privacy law, develop strategies for legally-sound newsgathering, and learn protocols for handling subpoenas and protecting sources. Although both traditional and digital media landscapes will be discussed, the curriculum emphasizes digital media law, including Fair Use doctrine and content licensing, equipping students with practical knowledge to navigate legal challenges in contemporary publishing environments.

Additionally, in our 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. At the end of each chapter discussed, open-note quizzes will be administered. The quizzes cannot be made up if you are 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 exams 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 must use the I.R.A.C. method on the essays to maximize your score. The exams will be open note and held in-person on campus. The purpose of these exams is to evaluate your knowledge and understanding of media law and to test your ability to express that clearly and succinctly. An I.R.A.C. quicksheet is [HERE](#) via BrightSpace.

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. The purpose is to show 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. Late or noncompliant submissions will suffer penalty. In addition to being in the Content Folder on BrightSpace, you can access past examples [HERE](#) and the grading rubric [HERE](#).

IV. GRADING

For essay questions and the legal report, I use a student benchmark grading system. First, I read through all submissions and assign points based on their content. I then identify the 2-3 highest-scoring submissions, which serve as the benchmark for grading all other work. This method ensures the grading scale reflects what students can realistically achieve based on my teaching, rather than abstract expectations.

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+
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

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

VI. REQUIRED MATERIALS

The only materials you need for this course will be provided for you after each lecture. Should you have questions about any of the topics, please contact me directly.

VII. COURSE SCHEDULE

a. Class Sessions

Any assigned pre-class materials, in-class slides, and in-class conversations will provide the necessary backdrop for class participation as well as for the assignments. **You are expected to come to class prepared and may be questioned during class about the pre-class materials.** As the semester progresses, we will build on legal issues, cases, current events, and other matters previously discussed. As such, attendance is important. By not attending class, you will likely miss out on information relevant to the assignments and bonus point opportunities. If you do not understand what is assigned or have questions about a concept, contact me well before class.

b. Weekly Breakdown

January 2025				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
13 First Day Classes Start	14	15 Legal Basics Chapter 1	16	17
20 Holiday MLK Day	21 Quiz 1 Due by 11:59pm	22 First Amendment Chapter 2	23	24
27 Quiz 2 Due by 11:59pm	28	29 Types of Speech Chapter 3	30	31

February 2025				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
3 Quiz 3 Due by 11:59pm	4	5 Defamation Chapter 4	6	7
10 Quiz 4 Due by 11:59pm	11	12 Defenses Chapter 5	13	14
17 Presidents' Day Holiday	18 Quiz 5 Due by 11:59pm	19 Privacy Issues Chapter 6	20	21
24 Quiz 6 Due by 11:59pm	25	26 IRAC / Review Midterm Prep	27	28

March 2025				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
3	4	5 Midterm Exam Chapters 1-6	6	7
10	11	12 Gathering Intel Chapter 7	13	14
17 Spring Break Recess	18 Spring Break Recess	19 Spring Break Recess	20 Spring Break Recess	21 Spring Break Recess
24 Quiz 7 Due by 11:59pm	25	26 Checking Justice Chapter 8	27	28

April 2025				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
31 Quiz 8 Due by 11:59pm	1	2 Regulation Chapter 9	3	4
7 Quiz 9 Due by 11:59pm	8	9 Obscenity+ Chapter 10	10	11
14 Quiz 10 Due by 11:59pm	15	16 IP + AI Chapter 11	17	18
21 Quiz 11 Due by 11:59pm	22	23 Ethical Issues Special Topics	24	25
28 Quiz 12 Due by 11:59pm	29	30 IRAC / Review Final Exam Prep		

May 2025				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
			1	2
5	6	7 Final Exam Chapters 7 +	8	9 Final Report Due by 11:59 p.m.

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
Jan. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First day of classes
Jan. 31	<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 to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001
Feb. 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the official transcript only. Mark of "W" will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply. Last day to change a Pass/No Pass to a letter grade for Session 001
Apr. 11	<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
May 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last day of classes
May 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> End of session

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 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 (AI)

Unless otherwise stated in writing by the instructor, the work you produce for this course and the work you create to study for this course must **not** be created in whole or in part using AI writing tools. Although AI can be advantageous in many contexts, **AI use is prohibited in this course**. All cases, laws, and other materials relevant to your learning in this course will be provided to you. Should you have any questions, you should watch the class recordings, review the lecture notes, or contact the instructor.

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. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

c. Support Services & Other Matters

Service	Description	Contact
USC Counseling and Mental Health	Free and confidential mental health services, including short-term therapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention	(213) 740-9355 (available 24/7) StudentHealth@usc.edu
988 Suicide and Crisis 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	988 (available 24/7 via phone and text message)
Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP)	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	(213) 740-9355 (available 24/7) StudentHealth@usc.edu
Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX)	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	(213) 740-5086 eeotix@usc.edu
The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)	OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy	(213) 740-0776 OSASFrontDesk@usc.edu
USC Campus Support and Intervention	Assists students in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student	(213) 740-0411 uscsupport@usc.edu

<u>Office of Inclusion and Diversity</u>	Information on events, programs, trainings and initiatives on advancing inclusion & diversity at USC	(213) 740-2101 <u>inclusion@med.usc.edu</u>
<u>USC Emergency</u>	Provides information on emergency assistance and an avenue to report a crime. Consider downloading the <u>LiveSafe Mobile Safety App</u> .	(213) 740-4321 (UPC) (323) 442-1000 (HSC) (available 24/7)
<u>USC Department of Public Safety</u>	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 (213) 740-6000 (UPC) (323) 442-1200 (HSC) Emergency (24/7) (213) 740-4321 (UPC) (323) 442-1000 (HSC)
<u>Office of the Ombuds</u>	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	(213) 821-9556 (UPC) (323) 442-0382 (HSC)
<u>Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice</u>	Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance	(323) 442-2850 <u>info@chan.usc.edu</u>
<u>Annenberg Student Success Fund</u>	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	
<u>Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund</u>	Awards distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses	

X. ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Adrienne J. Lawrence, Esq. is an award-winning author and on-air legal analyst who brings a wealth of legal expertise to her media career. After spending years representing diverse clients at some of the world’s largest law firms, she transitioned into media in 2015, going on to write “[Staying in the Game: The Playbook for Beating Workplace Sexual Harassment](#),” which was named the 2021 International Business Book of the Year. In addition to leading [Bantam Impact Consulting](#), she provides legal commentary for various outlets including NPR and TYT, while also serving as a regular op-ed contributor for [Straight Arrow News](#).

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