USCAnnenberg

CMGT 568: INFLUENCER STRATEGIES
Spring 2025 | Section 21786 | 4 Units

Instructor: Freddy Tran Nager (fnager@usc.edu)
Time: Wednesdays 6-8:50pm
Classroom: ANN 210
Office Hours:
- on-campus by appointment:
  Tuesdays & Wednesdays 1-5 pm
- online by appointment:
  Fridays 1-5 pm

NOTE: YOU MUST ATTEND THE FIRST CLASS MEETING TO STAY ENROLLED IN THE COURSE OR TO BE ADDED TO THE WAIT LIST.

Contents:

I. Course Description

From royalty to rebels, religious leaders to reporters, influential individuals have shaped culture and commerce throughout history. Today, social media enables virtually anyone to develop and exert influence. The new wave of influencers includes a diverse array of creators, experts, even AI-powered virtual characters.

Taking advantage of this trend, marketers and agencies are employing influencers to ideally reach niche segments, cut through the clutter, enhance their brands, and achieve organizational goals.

The challenges, however, are substantial. Fraud permeates the industry, with such vanity metrics as "followers" and "likes" widely purchased and otherwise manipulated. Even agencies and platforms are complicit in the deception. Consequently, communication managers must first distinguish the truly influential — those who shape beliefs and behavior — from the merely popular and the outright fraudulent.

Managers must also identify individuals who have little to no online presence yet exert more influence than many social-media stars. (Indeed, social-media stars comprise just part of this course.) In addition, campaign success hinges on evaluating target audiences and networks of influence, planning customer journeys, and complying with both platform and government regulations, all while analyzing data and adjusting tactics on the fly.

On the flip side, many individuals aspire to increase their personal influence, whether online or simply at work. This requires expressing their expertise with personality, perspective, and a persuasive level of emotion.

Note: this is not a course on how to become popular on social media. This course covers influencer campaign management and personal influence enhancement, both with an emphasis on critical thinking and creative expression.

II. Learning Outcomes

This course is divided into two parts:
1. You will learn how to enhance your personal influence through hands-on, real-world application of concepts and methods.
2. You will learn how to plan an influencer-based campaign in collaboration with teammates.

By the end of this course, you will acquire expertise and experience in the following:
A. Conducting in-depth qualitative and quantitative assessments of true influence (not just popularity), communities of interest (not stereotypes), and mission-based impact (not "engagement").
B. Planning influencer campaigns that meet organizational goals, and analyzing relevant data to gauge campaign effectiveness.
C. Applying frameworks (such as the AIDA customer journey) to plan which influencers, media, and messages to employ at each stage of a campaign.
D. Building personal brands and influence through expertise, expression, and expansion tactics.
E. Identifying and addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in the influencer economy, including how algorithms and the concept of "popularity" impact equity.

III. Your Instructor

Freddy Tran Nager is a Clinical Associate Professor and the Associate Director of the M.S. in Digital Social Media program at Annenberg, where he has taught since 2012. Beyond the classroom, he has worked with creators and influencers for over three decades as a marketer and creative professional. In 1994, he served as editor of one of the world's first entertainment websites, *AMP: MCA Records Online*, which involved collaborating with musicians, managers, record executives, and radio programmers. He subsequently joined ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi as a senior creative for interactive media. Freddy currently runs the creative-strategy consultancy Atomic Tango LLC, where he advises executives and entrepreneurs, and he serves on the National Industry Advisory Board of the creator organization Reach. A second-generation Trojan, Freddy received his MBA from USC and his undergraduate degree from Harvard. He welcomes connections on LinkedIn at FreddyNager.com.

IV. Course Notes

This graduate-level course requires extensive reading (anticipate 100-200 pages per week), in-depth primary and secondary research, quantitative and qualitative analysis, strategic planning and implementation, and creative development and content creation. There are multiple overlapping assignments, both individual and team. Attendance is required for all class sessions, which will consist of lectures, discussions, guest speakers, and hands-on application of concepts and methods. In addition, this course is web-enhanced, with mandatory discussions on Brightspace. Students will also use ChatGPT or other AI apps to complete projects. For each unit of in-class contact time, the university expects 2 hours of out-of-class student work; consequently, prepare to invest at least 8 hours per week outside of class into course-related work.

USC computing support:
- USC Computing Center Laptop Loaner Program
- Zoom information for students
- Brightspace help for students
- Software available to USC Campus

V. Required Media

In addition to the following publications and videos, articles from academic journals and news publications will be assigned and discussed. See the Lecture Schedule for details.

Books
- **Trish Hall, *Writing To Persuade: How To Bring People Over To Your Side*, 2020 Liveright.** The former editor of the *New York Times* op-ed page provides principles and practices for persuasion.
- **Robert V. Kozinets, et al, *Influencers & Creators: Business, Culture And Practice*, 2023 Sage.** USC Annenberg Prof. Kozinets and colleagues provide an overview of the influencer marketing ecosystem.
- **David H.P. Shulman, *The Presentation Of Self In Contemporary Social Life*, 2016 Sage** (free online through the USC Library). Prof. Shulman adapts Erving Goffman's 1959 book, *The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life*, for 21st century media.

Long-Form Videos
- *Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened*, Netflix
- *Fyre Fraud*, Hulu
- *The Inventor: Out For Blood In Silicon Valley*, HBO-MAX

Sites:
- **Influencer Marketing Hub**, https://influencermarketinghub.com — be critical as you read this content, as it relies on popular practices instead of scientific research.
- **USC Reach**, https://www.uscreach.com — the official creator club of USC.

VI. Assignments

Assignment	% of Grade
Personal Influence Plan	20
Personal Influence Expressions	20
Personal influence Analysis	5
Op-Ed Analysis + Writing	5
Team Campaign Pitch	20
Quizzes (two x 5 points each)	10
Reading Evaluations	10
Class Participation	10
TOTAL	**100%**

The following are brief summaries; complete instructions will be posted on Brightspace.

- **Personal Influence Project (3 parts = 45% combined):** For this project spanning the entire semester, you will apply influence strategies to enhance your personal brand related to your professional aspirations in communication. Your goals should involve changing beliefs or behaviors in your field, not becoming popular on social media. (Learning Outcomes: A, B, C, D)
    - **Plan (20%):** Based on both self-reflection and extensive in-depth research, describe your influence niche, target audience, goals, and guidelines for expertise, expression, and expansion. This plan will guide your creative expressions for the rest of the course.
    - **Expressions (20%):** Create at least 3 complete expressions in the media of your choice (blog, video, podcast, etc.) and post them in a public forum. The first one will be shared on Brightspace

for feedback from classmates and your instructor. Your work will be graded on production quality, creativity, and application of influencer strategies.
- o **Analysis (5%):** Quantitatively and qualitatively assess the performance of your expressions. Your grade will be based on your analysis, not your level of "success."

- **Op-Ed Analysis + Writing (5%):** This assignment draws from Trish Hall's *Writing To Persuade*, and includes two parts. (Learning Outcomes: A, D)
  - o **Op-Ed Analysis:** Evaluate an op-ed in your field from the *NY Times*, *LA Times*, or *WSJ*.
  - o **Personal Op-Ed:** Write an op-ed for that publication to enhance your perceived expertise in your niche. You will use AI to help write the first draft.

- **Team Campaign Pitch (20%):** In a 15-minute video, your team will pitch an influence campaign to a client (to be announced). The campaign includes setting SMART goals and KPI's, analyzing a target community of interest, selecting and rationalizing the selection of at least 3 influencers, planning the media and messaging, and integrating them into the customer journey. (Learning Outcomes: A, B, C, E)

- **Quizzes (10%):** Two multiple-choice quizzes will test your comprehension of the readings and lectures.

- **Reading Evaluations (10%):** This entails two requirements on Brightspace.
  - o **Assigned Readings:** In 100-300 words, evaluate assigned course readings by responding to discussion questions and classmates' posts in your own writing (no AI).
  - o **Weekly News Evaluations:** You must stay atop news related to influencers and the creator economy. Every week, you will share on Brightspace a relevant recent article from the *L.A. Times*, *New York Times*, or *Wall Street Journal*, and express your opinion about it in approximately 100 words (no AI). You may be selected to present your evaluation during class.

- **Class Participation (10%):** Attendance in every class is required, since sessions are not recorded, and learning involves discussing and applying concepts, not just consuming lectures and readings. Since discussions are an essential element of this course, attendance alone won't earn participation points. Whether in class or with your team, you must converse, ask questions, and debate respectfully. Staying silent is unacceptable, especially in the company of guest speakers, since it conveys disengagement. If you remain silent, you may be "cold called" to respond to a question or issue. To prepare for discussions, review past lectures, complete assigned readings, research additional materials, and apply theories to personal experiences. Here is how your class participation is evaluated:

  - o Is it relevant to the discussion and respectful of others?
  - o Does it address ideas offered by the readings, lectures, guests, or classmates?
  - o Does it increase everyone's understanding or merely repeat facts?
  - o Does it support views with data, third-party theories, and research?
  - o Does it test new ideas and challenge assumptions, or just "play it safe"?

Half of your participation grade will be based on your contributions to your team assignment. At the end of the project, team members will confidentially rate each other on a scale of 1-5 based on the value of their contribution throughout the term. Students will receive an average of their ratings.

Note: the following behaviors might result in loss of participation points:

- o Unexcused absences (2.5 points per occurrence for the first two absences; 3 or more unexcused absences will result in a course grade of D or lower).
- o Lateness or leaving early without permission.
- o Unauthorized use of phones and computers in class, which distracts others in the room, as well as yourself. In addition to a 1 participation point deduction per incident, you might be asked to leave the classroom and recorded as absent.

VII. Grading

The instructor will provide written evaluations of your assignments within two weeks of submission. Should you wish to dispute a grade, you must contact your instructor within one week of receiving it.

Scale

94% to 100%: A	84% to 86%: B	74% to 76%: C	64% to 66%: D
90% to 93%: A-	80% to 83%: B-	70% to 73%: C-	60% to 63%: D-
87% to 89%: B+	77% to 79%: C+	67% to 69%: D+	0% to 59%: F

Grades are assessed using 0.5-point increments. At the end of the course, the total score is rounded up to the nearest whole number. For example, if your point total for the semester is 89.5, it will be rounded up to a 90 (course grade A-).

Standards

Grade	Description
A	**Excellent:** A's and A-minuses must be earned by "going the extra mile" to produce professional-caliber work that could be submitted to a client, supervisor, or investor. A-level work features high production quality with minimal if any errors, draws on in-depth research of authoritative sources, reflects comprehensive understanding of course fundamentals, and demonstrates superlative creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills. Recommendations are provided on request **only** to students who earn a solid A (not A-) in the course.
B	**Good:** B's are for graduate-school caliber work featuring in-depth research of authoritative sources, critical thinking, and solid if not thorough understanding of course fundamentals, with only minor shortcomings. The ideas and/or production quality need to be stronger for a professional context.
C	**Fair:** C's are for undergraduate-level work, reflecting insufficient research, only basic understanding of course fundamentals, a need for stronger critical thinking, and/or low production quality. The ideas are unimaginative and commonplace (similar to what AI might produce without detailed prompting). Note that for graduate students, a C- is equal to failing.
D	**Marginal:** D's are for amateurish work featuring insufficient research, many errors, incomplete assignments, and/or superficial analysis. The work demonstrates only rudimentary understanding of course fundamentals. Note that three or more unexcused absences will also result in a D or lower.
F	**Failing:** F's are for work that's incomplete, not researched, carelessly executed, and/or plagiarized. Plagiarism may also result in disciplinary measures. The work demonstrates little to no understanding of course fundamentals.

Rubric

Assignments will be graded on the following criteria without fixed percentages, since unacceptable quality in any one area (writing, research, etc.) can undermine an entire project. Conversely, exceptional quality in one area may contribute to an overall positive evaluation.

- **Critical Thinking:** The influencer ecosystem is filled with fraud and faulty definitions (such as "engagement"), which could bias research and results. In addition, so-called "best practices" for one entity might fail for another — or even for the same entity at another time. Consequently, you should not just answer the questions, you should also question the answers, including methods and data. (Academic journal articles are not immune from critical analysis.) Assignments are not just reports; they must describe "why" and "how," not just "what," and will be evaluated on the quality of the reasoning.

- **Creativity:** Your work should feature original ideas, not just "best practices," and should NEVER consist of copied or AI-generated work (see "Academic Integrity" in this syllabus). Creativity is expected for both content ideas and market strategies. You may certainly be "inspired" by others, including AI, as long as you properly credit the sources, but most of the thinking and execution should be yours, and higher grades are awarded to work that is innovative and imaginative. The goal is to distinguish yourself — after all, "outstanding" literally means "standing out."

- **Production Quality:** Your work should feature professional production values in terms of writing, design, and (as applicable) video and audio content. Treat your work as a submission to a client, supervisor, or investor. Eliminate all errors by proofreading meticulously, using Microsoft editing tools, AI apps, and/or Grammarly.com (strongly recommended). For help with fluency or simply polishing your writing, contact Annenberg's Graduate Writing Coach (http://cmgtwriting.uscannenberg.org/). For design tips, read *Presentation Zen* (available via USC library).

- **Research Quantity and Quality:** Support your work with research from multiple authoritative sources, including academic journals, major news publications, and credible experts — no guessing, generalizations, or stereotypes (such as "Gen Z").

    o Start with the USC online library and our librarians, who have prepared Research Guidelines for departments throughout the university (https://libguides.usc.edu).
    o Search Google Scholar (https://scholar.google.com/) before searching regular Google.
    o Never cite Wikipedia; rather, refer to the sources listed in the Wikipedia article.
    o Cite every use of AI tools (please see https://libguides.usc.edu/generative-AI/citing-generative-ai).
    o Avoid company blogs (unless they are companies you are researching) and superficial news sites like the 3F's (*Forbes*, *Fortune*, and *Fast Company* are not authoritative).
    o Conduct direct primary research, such as focus groups, surveys, and interviews, particularly of subject-matter experts like professionals and professors.
    o Within the body of papers, include reference notes, either parenthetical, such as (Lee 2017), or in the form of footnotes or endnotes.
    o Bibliography entries must include COMPLETE source information, not just a URL. You may use any format that includes ALL the following: FULL FIRST NAMES AND LAST NAMES of authors **(we respect creators in this course, so a first-name initial alone is not enough — a critical flaw with APA style)**, article/chapter titles, the name of the publication, dates of publication, original URLs (not USC library), and the dates a particular website was accessed.

- **Timeliness:** As in the professional world, meeting deadlines is critical, since missed deadlines can result in penalties, lost business, or legal actions. Without an exceptional circumstance and the instructor's permission, late assignments will be penalized one grade level (e.g., A to B) per day of lateness.

VIII. Policies and Procedures

- **Attendance:** Participation from each student is critical to the success of this course; therefore, class attendance is mandatory. You must attend all classes, arrive on time, and stay for the entire session. Note that attendance alone won't earn participation points. Whether online, in class, or with your team, you must come prepared, converse, ask and respond to questions, and debate respectfully. Staying silent is unacceptable, since it conveys disengagement. You might be in attendance, but not truly "present."

  - **Excused absences:** If you need to miss a class for a valid reason, such as religious observances or medical procedures, you must attain written approval from the instructor in advance (except, of course, in emergencies). Student athletes should provide approved Travel Request Letters. Note that work-related absences, such as job interviews or internship work, are not excused; please plan them around your academic commitments.

  - **Illness:** If you are feeling ill, particularly with COVID symptoms, stay home to protect the health of your classmates, your instructors, and yourself. If you show up to class with an illness, you will be asked to leave and will be recorded as absent.

  - **Unexcused absences:** Although no points are awarded for attendance, an unexcused absence will result in the loss of 2.5 participation points; 3 or more unexcused absences will result in a course grade of D or lower. In addition, arriving late or leaving early without instructor permission might result in a 1 participation point deduction.

  - **Electronics:** You must have a computer for accessing course materials from home; *however, phones and computers may NOT be used during class meetings without permission of the instructor*, and should be completely hidden away before class begins. Tablets may be used for taking notes only. Any unauthorized use of electronics will result in the loss of 1 participation point, and you might be asked to leave and recorded as absent.

- **Artificial Intelligence Apps:** The ability to use AI to support communication work has become an essential skill required by employers; consequently, you are encouraged to use tools such as ChatGPT, but you must adhere to the following guidelines.

  - You must acknowledge using any AI tools, just as you would any other reference source. In each assignment, include a paragraph explaining which AI tools you used and how you used them, including specific prompts. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies.
  - AI is useful for helping start an assignment — even overcome writer's block — but the final submission must reflect your ideas and revisions. Treat AI as a personal assistant who can help you, but who has shortcomings and is prone to mistakes.
  - Don't trust what AI tools claim as facts. Not only are their databases limited, AI tools might draw from fiction and misinformation. In some cases, they might fabricate sources. Assume the answers are incorrect and doublecheck them, particularly sources. You will be held responsible for any errors.
  - Provide detailed prompts to get the best results. You might have to try multiple variations.
  - Your work might become part of the AI's database, so do not include any sensitive information.

- **Zoom etiquette**: Class meetings will take place in person on campus, but occasional meetings might take place on Zoom. Without a valid reason (connectivity issues or privacy concerns), you should turn your camera on and contribute actively to the class. Keep your microphone off except for discussion or questions. Also, *be present*: except for Zoom use, your phone must be turned off and put away, and avoid interactions with housemates during class; if such interactions are unavoidable, step away from your camera (or turn it off) to avoid distracting your instructor and classmates.

- **Respect:** Treat classmates, the instructor, and speakers with courtesy. You may certainly question and criticize ideas — that is encouraged in the learning environment — but never criticize the person. We are a community, so respect the opinions of others; instead of saying that you "disagree" or even "respectfully disagree," offer a "different perspective."

- **Appointments:** If you have questions or concerns, whether academic, career, or personal, you are strongly encouraged to contact the instructor to arrange a meeting (email Freddy at fnager@usc.edu). In emergencies, see the support systems below.

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University Statement on Academic Conduct

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Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation, is prohibited. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonestly and is strictly prohibited. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

IX. Support Systems

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.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress: To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Annenberg Student Success Fund
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
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.

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 consists 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) 740-2500
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 Graduate Writing Support
In addition to being the place to make one-on-one appointments with the writing coach, this website will host resources, videos, and news about upcoming programs.

Annenberg Digital Lounge
Free lessons and certifications on a range of digital media.

USC American Language Institute
English language instruction, assessment, and resources to support the academic and professional success of non-native speakers of English pursuing degrees at USC.

IX. Course Schedule

This schedule will likely change depending on class progress, world events, and guest speaker availability. For final requirements, please refer to the lecture slides, which will be posted to Brightspace the night before each class. Assigned readings should be completed prior to the NEXT class.

Class 1, January 15: Defining "Influence"
- Course Overview: creativity meets critical thinking
- Popularity ≠ Influence
- Readings (complete before next class):
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - *Influencers & Creators*, Chapters 1-2
  - Fine F. Leung, et al, "Does Influencer Marketing Really Pay Off?", *Harvard Business Review*, 24 November 2022, https://hbr.org/2022/11/does-influencer-marketing-really-pay-off
  - Tim Ingham, "The Five Most Powerful People in the Music Industry…" *Rolling Stone*, 25 January 2019, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/the-five-most-powerful-people-in-the-music-industry-don't-work-in-the-music-industry-783723/
  - "Time 100: The Most Influential People Of 2024," *Time*, https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2024/
  - *Copyediting With An Attitude*
- **Assignment: Self-Intro + Syllabus Acknowledgment in Brightspace discussion before next class**

Class 2, January 22: Finding Your Influence Niche
- Influencer Ikigai: nexus of opportunity + passion + expertise
- Elements of expertise: education, experience, talent, association
- Readings:
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - *Influencers & Creators*, Chapters 3, 4, 7
  - Derek Muller/Veritasium, "The 4 Things It Takes To Be An Expert," YouTube, 2 August 2022, https://youtu.be/5eW6Eagr9XA?si=7m8JTpGyK2aYhHlg
  - Nicole Phelps, "Margaret Zhang Is The New Editor In Chief Of Vogue China," *Vogue*, 24 February 2021, https://www.vogue.com/article/vogue-china-margaret-zhang-editor-in-chief
- **Assignment: Professional Influence Plan — upload to Brightspace assignment February 22**

Class 3, January 29: Meeting The Press
- Influential journalists
- Writing op-ed pieces
- Readings:
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - Trish Hall, *Writing To Persuade*
  - Jenn Harris, "How To Tell The Difference Between A Journalist And A Food Influencer," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 September 2022, https://www.latimes.com/food/story/2022-09-11/journalist-influencer-difference
  - Jenn Harris, "$10,000 For One Instagram Post? How Food Influencers Can Make Or Break Restaurants," Los Angeles Times, 11 September 2022, https://www.latimes.com/food/story/2022-09-11/food-influencers-ethics-fees-charged
- **Assignment: Op-Ed Analysis + Writing — upload to Brightspace assignment February 8**

Class 4, February 5: Setting True Influence Goals vs Vanity Metrics
- SMART Goals, KPI's, vanity metrics, and "wasted marketing"
- The 3B's of Brand, Buzz, Behavior
- Readings:
  - Weekly News Evaluation
  - *Influencers & Creators*, Chapter 5 & 12
  - Grant McCracken, "Who Is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process," *Journal of Consumer Research*, December 1989
  - Association of National Advertisers, "Influencer Marketing Measurement Guidelines," June 2022

- o Maxim Sytch, "How to Figure Out How Much Influence You Have at Work," *Harvard Business Review*, 18 February 2019, https://hbr.org/2019/02/how-to-figure-out-how-much-influence-you-have-at-work

Class 5, February 12: Selecting Your Audience
- Communities of interest, NOT stereotypes
- Networks of influence
- Readings:
    - o Weekly News Evaluation
    - o Ogilvy, "The Rebirth Of Social Communities" (PDF on Brightspace)
    - o MIT Initiative On The Digital Economy, "It's Still Who You Know That Counts," *Medium*, 13 July 2023, https://medium.com/mit-initiative-on-the-digital-economy/its-still-who-you-know-that-counts-eb9810f6075f
    - o Taylor Lorenz, "For Creators, Community Is The New Follower Count," *Washington Post*, 24 July 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/07/24/influencers-chat-apps-community/
    - o Kim Parker, "How Pew Research Center Will Report On Generations Moving Forward," Pew Research Center, 22 May 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/22/how-pew-research-center-will-report-on-generations-moving-forward/

Class 6, February 19: Crafting Expression, Part 1 — Personality + Perspective
- Selecting your medium and defining your voice
- "Authenticity" + other myths (performativity, calibrated amateurism, contrived authenticity, "be yourself")
- Readings:
    - o Weekly News Evaluation
    - o David H.P. Shulman, *The Presentation Of Self In Contemporary Social Life*, chapters 1-4
    - o Derek Muller/Veritasium, "My Life Story," YouTube, 18 June 2018, https://youtu.be/S1tFT4smd6E
    - o Charles Duhigg, "How To Become A 'Supercommunicator," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 February 2024, https://www.wsj.com/lifestyle/how-to-become-a-supercommunicator-4d97dd5d
    - o Steven Pinker, "Why Academics Stink At Writing," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 September 2014, https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-academics-stink-at-writing/

Class 7, February 26: Crafting Expression, Part 2 — Persuasion Through Emotion
- Integrating emotions storytelling, and persuasion techniques in messaging
- Affective capital
- Readings:
    - o Weekly News Evaluation
    - o David H.P. Shulman, *The Presentation Of Self In Contemporary Social Life*, chapters 5-7
    - o Daniel Simons & Christopher Chabris, "Why We Get Scammed and What to Do About It," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 July 2023, https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-we-get-scammed-and-what-to-do-about-it-442c2b01
    - o Video: Dr. Robert Cialdini, "Science Of Persuasion," Influence At Work/YouTube, https://youtu.be/cFdCzN7RYbw
- **Assignment: Professional Influence Expressions — share first one in Brightspace discussion on March 8; provide feedback to classmates by March 11**
- **Quiz 1 next week**

Class 8, March 5: Planning Expansion — Amplification + Algorithms
- Quiz 1
- How to enhance your brand and reach at the same time (hint: collabs!)
- Readings/Viewings:
    - o Weekly News Evaluation
    - o Brooke Erin Duffy & Colten Meisner, "Platform Governance At The Margins: Social Media Creators' Experiences With Algorithmic (In)visibility," *Media Culture & Society*, 23 July 2022, https://journals-sagepub-com.libproxy1.usc.edu/doi/full/10.1177/01634437221111923
    - o Kevin Kelly, "1,000 True Fans," *The Technium*, 2008, https://kk.org/thetechnium/1000-true-fans/

- o Brendan I. Koerner, "Watch This Guy Work, and You'll Finally Understand the TikTok Era," *Wired*, 19 October 2023, https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-talent-factory-ursus-magana-creator-economy/
- o Video: Jonah Berger, "Contagious: Why Things Catch On," Talks at Google/YouTube, 27 March 2013, https://youtu.be/FN4eDk1pq6U
- o *Crafting Contagious Workbook*

Class 9, March 12: Evaluating Influencers
- Influencer types and taxonomy
- Readings:
  - o Weekly News Evaluation
  - o *Influencers & Creators*, Chapter 10
  - o Video: *The Inventor: Out For Blood In Silicon Valley*, HBO-MAX
- **Assignment: Professional Influence Expressions — share final two in Brightspace assignment by April 12**

Spring Break, March 19: No Class Meeting

Class 10, March 26: Planning Influencer Campaigns
- Integrating Influencers into the AIDA Customer Journey
- Influence in the time of COVID
- Readings:
  - o Weekly News Evaluation
  - o *Influencers & Creators*, Chapters 9 & 11
  - o COVID vaccination campaign readings:
    - Donovan X. Ramsey, "One Woman Helped Move The Needle On Black Vaccination In South L.A. She's 'Mama Tsega'", *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 2021, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-12-10/mama-tsega-a-quiet-force-at-l-a-city-hall
    - Christopher F. Schuetze, "A German State Is Last in Almost Everything, But It's No. 1 in Vaccines," *New York Times*, 12 April 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/12/world/europe/germany-covid-vaccine-strategy.html
    - Mike Ives, "Celebrities Are Endorsing Covid Vaccines. Does It Help?" *New York Times*, 1 May 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/01/health/vaccinated-celebrities.html
    - Jan Hoffman, "Clergy Preach Faith in the Covid Vaccine to Doubters," *New York Times*, 14 March 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/14/health/clergy-covid-vaccine.html
    - Maya Lau & Laura J. Nelson, "From Taco Vendors To Flyers: The Epic Outreach To Vaccinate California's Most Vulnerable," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 2021, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-03-22/how-covid-vaccines-reaching-high-need-california-areas
- **Assignment: Team Campaign Pitch — share in Brightspace discussion and assignment on May 8**

Class 11, April 2: Managing Influencers + Agencies
- Contracts, controversies, and the power of commitment
- Statements of Work + Creative Briefs
- Readings:
  - o Weekly News Evaluation
  - o Edelman, "Influence and Impact 2024"
  - o Influencer Marketing Hub & Viral Nation, "The State Of Influencer Marketing 2024"
  - o FTC Endorsement Guidelines 2023
  - o Whalar Agency documents
  - o How To Succeed In Mr. Beast Production

Class 12, April 9: Deliberating Issues, Equity & Ethics, Part 1
- Legal vs Ethical decisions
- Diversity and equity
- Readings/Viewings:
  - o Weekly News Evaluation

- o *Influencers & Creators*, Chapters 6, 7
- o Sophie Bishop, "Influencer Management Tools: Algorithmic Cultures, Brand Safety, and Bias," *Social Media + Society*, 30 March 2021, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/20563051211003066
- o Sara Ashley O'Brien, "Her 'Skinny' Videos Divided TikTok. She Says They're 'What the Viewers Want,'" Wall Street Journal, 16 September 2024, https://www.wsj.com/health/liv-schmidt-skinny-tiktok-videos-e705c954
- o Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, "Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders?", *Harvard Business Review*, 22 August 2013, https://hbr.org/2013/08/why-do-so-many-incompetent-men

Class 13, April 16: Deliberating Issues, Equity & Ethics, Part 2
- Inclusion and access
- Readings/Viewings:
  - o Weekly News Evaluation
  - o Fyre Festival pitch deck + documentaries (2 weeks):
    - ▪ *Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened*, Netflix
    - ▪ *Fyre Fraud*, Hulu
- **Assignment: Personal Influence Analysis, upload to Brightspace assignment April 26**

Class 14, April 23: Pondering AI — The Future of Influence?
- Digital Human as a Service: Virtual Influencers
- Readings:
  - o Weekly News Evaluation
  - o Kim Eunjin (Anna), et al, "The Next Hype In Social Media Advertising: Examining Virtual Influencers' Brand Endorsement Effectiveness," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2023, https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1089051
- **Quiz 2 nest week**

Class 15, April 30: Guest Speaker
- Quiz 2
- Readings:
  - o Weekly News Evaluation
- **Assignment (reminder): Team Campaign Pitch, upload to Brightspace discussion and assignment**

Exam Week (May 8): Team Campaign Pitch