

Journalism, Justice and Civic Change (IDS 2935)
Class Meeting: T Period 4; R Periods 4-5
Instructor: Janet Coats
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Office Hours: Wednesday noon to 2 p.m. and by appointment

About This Course:

What you will learn in this class

Students in this course will learn to identify and analyze how media content reflects, supports and sometimes curbs societal power structures in ways that influence civic life. Students will be exposed to relevant mass communication theories such as agenda-setting and framing. Students will engage in analytical writing in ways that help them understand the presentation of important social issues through mass media, within their historical contexts.

Learning Objectives

Students who complete the course will be able to:

- Develop and demonstrate the critical thinking skills necessary to distinguish credible information sources and evaluate their reliability;
- Describe the journalistic process, the impacts of journalism in a democratic society and the relationship between journalists and the public they serve;
- Articulate the effect of algorithms on their information consumption, including the impact they have on the spread of disinformation/misinformation;
- Explain how news coverage influences government policies and identify the ways citizens can use trustworthy news to inform their civic participation.

Class Policies

Classroom Atmosphere: Each of you plays an important role in shaping this course. I encourage you to be actively involved in class discussions and activities. Please do make comments and ask questions! This course lends itself to sharing your experiences with journalism and media, and your input will significantly enrich our conversation. Please also be appreciative of the contributions of others, including any guest speakers, and help create a class environment that is respectful and inclusive. This does not mean you should never disagree, but you should always do so courteously.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We expect each of our courses to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communication in a global society.

People of all backgrounds have important contributions to make to this class, and I expect all of you to respect that. If, at any point, you believe someone in the class – including me – has expressed ideas in inappropriate ways, please let me know. My goal is to make certain everyone feels comfortable participating in and listening to class discussions, and that these discussions support a diversity of perspectives and experiences and honor your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, abilities, etc.).

If you prefer a name and/or pronouns that differ from those in the official records, please tell me so that I can refer to you as you prefer. If experiences outside this class are interfering with your performance in the class, please let me know; I'd like to help connect you with appropriate resources for dealing with any such issues.

Cell Phone Use in Class: As a matter of courtesy to your fellow class members, please turn off or silence all cell phones before class starts. Please **do not** text message during class or attempt to work on assignments for other classes. Multi-tasking is not effective.

Attendance: Your attendance and participation are important to making this class a success. We expect that you will attend every class unless an emergency prevents you from doing so. If you find that you do have to miss a class due to an emergency, let me know immediately. Excessive absences, late arrival or early departure will affect your final class participation score – you can't participate if you aren't here. This course follows the university's attendance policy, which is available [here](#).

Missing Deadlines or Assignments: If you believe you have an exceptional reason for missing a deadline for an assignment, please discuss it with me *immediately* and *in advance*. Please note that poor planning, including underestimating how long it will take to do the research you need to do for your final paper, does not constitute an acceptable reason for missing a deadline. Fairness, both to me and to your classmates, requires that you meet all deadlines. All assignments are due at the times specified in Canvas. Failure to turn in your assignments by the deadline will result in a late penalty, at a minimum.

Accommodations for Special Needs: If you have a legitimate, documented special needs situation, we will be more than happy to work with you to find accommodations. University policy requires students requesting classroom accommodation to register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide appropriate documentation to you, and you should provide this documentation to me at the beginning of the semester. Please do so, even if you do not believe you will need the accommodations. It is your responsibility to initiate this conversation early in the semester.

Required Readings

There is no textbook for this course. The reading materials, podcasts, etc., will all be available as hyperlinks from the syllabus. Content that is behind paywalls will be available as PDFs within that week's module on Canvas. You are expected to read these articles and to listen to or watch the podcasts or documentaries listed on the syllabus *before* the class for which they're assigned. Most weeks, you'll be required to post a reflection that helps me assess whether you are reading and understanding the content. Each reflection will be in response to a question I pose, and your responses will help shape our classroom discussion. You can comment on the reflections of your classmates, but that is not a requirement.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

Many students in this class may have no intention of becoming communications professionals. Nonetheless, every student at the University of Florida is bound by the Honor Code, which demands that students do their own work, independent of unauthorized assistance. In short, it is your responsibility to make certain you understand what constitutes plagiarism and to ensure that you give proper credit every time you draw on someone else's writing.

- Do not rely on what you think you've learned before. We strongly recommend that everyone complete the free Poynter NewsU course called [Avoiding Plagiarism and Fabrication](#).
- Prof. Mindy McAdams also has put together an excellent guide: <http://www.macloo.com/cheat/index.htm>
- If you have questions, ask one of us! There's no penalty for asking questions, but the penalties for plagiarism are severe.
- Treat Internet sources like any other book, journal article or other print source. Make certain you copy down correct reference information when you copy material from a website, even if you're paraphrasing. You will need to include references for the sources for your final project paper, and it's possible you may want to cite other sources in weekly reflection posts. For reflection posts, you can simply include hyperlinks rather than citations, but for the paper, you will need formal citations.
- Do not turn in for this class any work you previously have submitted to another instructor or that you plan to submit for any other class at UF or any other institution.

Please see the UF Office of Student Judicial Affairs website for definitions of academic dishonesty <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>.

The violations most likely to be potential problems for students in this class include plagiarism, misrepresentation and fabrication. It is your responsibility to understand what kinds of actions are prohibited. If a situation ever arises in which you think something you're contemplating *might* constitute one of these types of academic dishonesty, ask before you do it. Apologies after the fact will never resolve the problem for anyone. I consider it part of my duty as a

professor and journalism educator to report academic dishonesty to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs.

Assignments

Weekly reflections (10 points per post, 100 points total)

Over the course of the semester, you will be required to write 10 short reflections (at least two-three paragraphs). The due date for each reflection is noted in the week-by-week class outline below; each reflection will be due by midnight on a Friday. Each reflection assignment will have a prompt to help you focus your response. The reflections will help form the basis of our in-class discussions; you can post discussion comments on each other's reflections, but that is not required.

Essays (two of them, 150 points each)

You will write two essays for this course; each will be 2- to 3-pages in length. The first essay is due on Sept. 11. For this essay, you will consider the readings and in-class discussion about the differences between local news and national news. Your essay will focus on your own definition of local news and its value to you. The second essay is due on Nov. 6. For this essay, you will consider the readings and class discussion on the role of journalism in social issues and civic change. You will pick from three coverage areas – race, environmental issues, education – and discuss the role journalism has played and could potentially play in social change around that topic.

Social Media Avatar Project (150 points)

This will be a group project. Each group will design an avatar representing particular demographic/psychographic social media users. The group will create social media accounts on two platforms using that avatar and observe the kinds of content served to that avatar by the social platform. Groups will report out in class through the semester about what they are observing, with final group reports in class the week of Nov. 15.

Case Study Paper (300 points total). Due 12/6.

We will examine in depth two stories to help us understand the questions of trust and who is represented in journalism. The first case study will focus on coverage of the Uvalde school shooting in May 2022. The second case study will focus on a New York Times package of stories entitled "The Ransom" that explored the exploitation of Haiti by France, the U.S. and the global financial system. You will choose one of these case studies to consider in your paper. Drawing from our readings and class discussions on journalism ethics, representation and trust, you will analyze the effectiveness and flaws of the coverage you have chosen to review. You will submit a proposal for your paper on Oct. 9; the proposal is worth 100 points. The paper itself is worth 200 points. More information on this assignment will be provided in a separate document on Canvas.

News Assessment (50 points total)

At the beginning of the semester, you will answer questions in a Google form about your own consumption of news. At the end of the semester, we will revisit the same questions. Each exercise is worth 25 points, for a total of 50 points.

Class Participation (100 points)

Every student is expected to be an active participant in this class. That means showing up on time, having read or listened to or watched the required materials, asking good questions, respectfully offering your opinions and thoughts on the information presented, etc.

Course Outline

Below is a description by week of the material we will cover. We will generally have guest speakers related to the topic for at least a portion of our Thursday classes.

WEEK 1

Aug. 25

Media Habits: How do you know what you know? Discussion of your personal information environment.

Readings:

[The changing news habits and attitudes of younger audiences | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#) (No paywall – access is available through link)

[Where are Gen Z and Millennials getting their news? | YPulse](#) (No paywall – access is available through link)

[“The differences seem to be growing”: A look at the rising generation of news consumers | Nieman Journalism Lab](#) (No paywall – access is available through link)

Assignment: Media Habits Assessment, complete Google form.

Due Aug. 28

WEEK 2

Aug. 30

What is journalism? We'll talk about the principles, processes and history of journalism and how they've evolved to meet the digital age.

Readings:

[The Existential Issue](#) | Columbia Journalism Review (No paywall – access is available through link)

[Journalism Essentials: Introduction | Tom Rosenstiel](#) (No paywall – access is available through link)

[Bad news for journalists: The public doesn't share our values. But there's hope. | The Washington Post](#)

[16 – When Attention Went on Sale. Guest: Tim Wu | Center for Humane Technology \(Podcast: No paywall\)](#)

[10-year-old Ohio girl raped: How we reported truth as lies spread. | USA Today](#)

Sept. 1

The ethics of journalism. Discussion of journalism ethics, the objectivity debate, whose voices are represented in coverage?

Readings:

[It's possible to be a journalist and a human - Poynter](#)

[In journalism, 'objective' is a good word with a noble history. But let's consider 'distance from neutrality.' - Poynter](#)

[Student journalists ask: Is objectivity becoming obsolete? - Poynter](#)

[blog — The View from Somewhere](#)

[Newsrooms must reframe abortion coverage and the worn-out debate around the rules of objectivity - Poynter](#)

Assignment: Reflection 1

Consider the meaning of objectivity. Is objectivity an appropriate goal for journalists to strive to achieve?

Due Sept. 2

WEEK 3

Sept. 6

The value of local news: What is the role of local news in the digital age? What special challenges do local media face?

Readings:

[Our local-news situation is even worse than we think - Columbia Journalism Review](#)

[Let's strengthen local reporting by 50,000 new journalists. - Columbia Journalism Review](#)

[Every week, two more newspapers close — and 'news deserts' grow larger - The Washington Post](#)

[Is local journalism dying? Look closer. - Poynter](#)

Sept. 8

What does it mean to be a local journalist? What does impact look like for local journalists?

Readings:

[How local journalists proved a 10-year-old's abortion wasn't a hoax - The Washington Post](#)

Assignment: Essay 1

Differentiating local news and national news: How does the local news mission differ? What are the particular challenges of local news? What would make local news more valuable to the communities they serve? To you?

Due Sept. 11.

WEEK 4

Sept. 13

The platforms change the game: The evolution of internet search and social media. How did we get here?

[We warned Google that people might believe AI was sentient. Now it's happening. - The Washington Post](#)

[A.I. Is Mastering Language. Should We Trust What It Says? - The New York Times](#)

[Journo-influencers are good for newsrooms, but they need support. | journalism.co.uk](#)

Social Media Avatar Group Project Assignment Discussion

Sept. 15

Internet 3.0 and beyond: What does the future hold?

Readings:

[The Metaverse in 2040 | Pew Research Center](#)

[The End of Social Media](#)

[Crypto enthusiasts want to remake the internet with 'Web3.' Here's what that means](#)

Assignment: Reflection 2

How do you think algorithms affect your own information consumption?

Due Sept. 16

Social Media Avatar Group Project Assignment Discussion

We'll discuss the design of this group project and expectations for how it will be executed.

WEEK 5

Sept. 20

The trust crisis: An overview of the rise and influence of disinformation and misinformation.

Readings:

[Let's get the conversation around trust in media unstuck - Poynter](#)

[A fresh Reuters Institute report detects an epidemic of news avoidance - Poynter](#)

[Concede defeat to bad speech — BuzzMachine](#)

[Disinformation is not *the* problem — BuzzMachine](#)

Sept. 22

Mastering your media.

Assignment: Reflection 3

How do you assess what information is trustworthy?

Due Sept. 23

WEEK 6

Sept. 27

Journalism Case Study

Uvalde School Shooting: An examination of the news coverage

Readings:

[Uvalde school shooting: A timeline of the massacre and police response | The Texas Tribune](#)

["This is not us": Tight-knit Uvalde, rooted in Texas history, navigates incalculable grief](#)

[Why KVUE and the Austin American-Statesman released video of the Uvalde school shooting - Poynter](#)

[How a broadcast reporter for Houston's KHOU has approached coverage of the Uvalde shooting - Poynter](#)

[Exclusive: Watch Uvalde school shooting video obtained by Statesman showing police response | Austin American-Statesman/USA Today](#)

[My Uvalde | Texas Monthly](#)

[Why the Austin American-Statesman chose to publish video from inside Robb Elementary | Austin American-Statesman/USA Today](#)

Sept. 29

Journalism Case Study

Uvalde School Shooting: Whose voices are represented in the story?

Assignment: Reflection 4

Put yourself in a reporter's shoes: What steps would you take to cover a story like Uvalde so that the voices of those most directly affected by the events are represented?

Due Sept. 30

WEEK 7

Oct. 4

Journalism Case Study

New York Times "The Ransom": An examination of the coverage

Readings:

[The Root of Haiti's Misery: Reparations to Enslavers | The New York Times](#)

[6 Takeaways About Haiti's Reparations to France | The New York Times](#)

[Toward a journalistic ethic of citation | BuzzMachine](#)

[What's new \(and what isn't\) in the NYT's big Haiti story | The Racket](#)

[The Times, Haiti, and the treacherous bridge linking history and journalism | Columbia Journalism Review](#)

Oct. 6

Times Haiti Stories: Whose voices are represented in the story?

Assignment: Reflection 5

Put yourself in the reporter's shoes: What steps would you take to make sure you are giving appropriate credit to earlier work and ensuring the voices of those most directly affected by the events are represented?

Due Oct. 7

WEEK 8

Oct. 11

Course mid-point: What have we learned about journalism? How are you thinking about the news?

Oct. 13

Journalism and social change: What is the relationship between journalism and civic change? What does civic change look like in the social media age?

Assignment: Reflection 6

How have your perceptions about news and journalism changed since the beginning of the semester?

Due Oct. 14

WEEK 9**Oct. 18**

Journalism and civic change: Coverage of race
Case study on the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter

Readings:

[It's time for local journalists to reckon with the racism we overlooked - The Washington Post](#)

[By bearing witness — and hitting 'record' — 17-year-old Darnella Frazier may have changed the world | The Washington Post](#)

[Read This Powerful Statement From Darnella Frazier, Who Filmed George Floyd's Murder | NPR](#)

[A Flower for the Graves | Atlanta Journal Constitution](#)

Oct. 20

Journalism and civic change: Coverage of race
Coverage of race on the local level

[The Philadelphia Inquirer has grappled with racism for decades. Is it too late to change? | The Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

Assignment: Reflection 7

Consider the actions of Darnella Frazier in documenting the murder of George Floyd murder: Is that journalism?

Due Oct. 21

Proposal for case study paper due Oct. 21

WEEK 10**Oct. 25**

Journalism and civic change: Coverage of the environment

Readings:

[A new media strategy for selling the seriousness of the climate crisis: Humor - The Washington Post](#)

[We're All In the Climate Fight Together | The Late Show with James Corden/YouTube](#)

[Climate journalism enters the solutions era | Columbia Journalism Review](#)

Oct. 27

Journalism and civic change: Coverage of the environment

Coverage of climate on the local level

[The Contested Swamps of Robeson County | The Assembly](#)

[The power of a pamphlet - Columbia Journalism Review](#)

Assignment: Reflection 8

How should coverage of climate change reflect science vs. opinion?

Due Oct. 28

WEEK 11

Nov. 1

Journalism and Civic change: Coverage of education

[The Tragedy of America's Rural Schools - The New York Times](#)

[An audio documentary by APM Reports | Who wants to be a teacher?](#)

Nov. 3

Journalism and civic change: Coverage of education

Coverage of education on the local level

[Three Chicago teens, one pandemic year: How COVID-19 widened education gaps for boys of color | Chalkbeat Chicago](#)

Assignment: Reflection 9

What does effective coverage of local education issues look like?

Due Nov. 4

Assignment: Essay 2

Choose one of the civic change topics we've covered during the last three weeks. How do you think journalism has influenced civic action on that topic? Where has journalism failed, and how could it be better?

Due Nov. 6

WEEK 12

Nov. 8

Election Day: What does good election coverage look like? What are the distinctions between national and local elections coverage?

Readings:

[Democracy is at stake in the midterms. The media must convey that. - The Washington Post](#)

[If American democracy is going to survive, the media must make this crucial shift | The Washington Post](#)

[The Authoritarian Playbook: a media guide - Protect Democracy](#)

Assignment: Reflection 10

Pick a media outlet or social platform to read/watch mid-term election coverage. How would you rate the quality of the coverage?

Due Nov. 10

Nov. 11

Class discussion: What would effective election coverage look like?

WEEK 13

Nov. 15

Your responsibilities as a content creator

Readings:

[Why “how to become a content creator” is such a popular search term - Vox](#)

Nov. 17

Social media avatar presentations

WEEK 14

Nov. 22

How the Kennedy assassination changed media coverage: The beginning of live news as a social experience

Audio:

[Covering The JFK Assassination | On the Media | WNYC Studios](#)

WEEK 15

Nov. 29

Reassessing your information needs

Assignment: Media Habits Assessment #2, complete Google form.

Due Nov. 28

Dec. 1

Class discussion on case studies

WEEK 16

No class: Final paper due Dec. 6

Evaluation of Grades

Assignment	Total Points	Percent of Grade
Reflections (10)	100	10 percent
Essays (2)	300	30 percent
Social Media Avatar Project	150	15 percent
Case Study Paper	300	30 percent
News Habits Assessments (2)	50	5 percent
Class Participation	100	10 percent
TOTAL	1,000	100 percent

Grading Scale

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
E	Below 60

Assignment Rubrics

Assignments will be evaluated on the following criteria: Content, organization and coherence, argument and support, style, and mechanics. Rubrics specific to each assignment are available in Canvas.

Course Credit

You will receive two grades for this course: one reflecting mastery of the subject matter and one reflecting writing performance. This course confers three credits toward the General

Education requirement in social and behavioral science. A course grade of C is required to earn this credit. This course also confers 2,000 words towards the Writing Requirement, which ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. While helping students meet the broad learning outcomes of content, communication, and critical thinking, the instructor will evaluate and provide feedback on students' written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Writing Studio

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 302 Tigert Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.