

**Journalism, Justice and Civic Change (IDS 2935)**

**Class Meeting: T Period 5-6; R Periods 6**

**Instructor: Dr. Kim Walsh-Childers**

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**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. This does not mean you should never disagree, but you should always do so courteously.

People of all backgrounds have important contributions to make to this class, and we 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 range of perspectives and experiences and identities .

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). 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)**

For this assignment, we're going to ask you to follow at least one of a variety of news compilations or podcasts and follow stories on one of the topics we are covering this semester. We will provide you with links to the sources we'd like you to consider. Twice this semester, you'll need to choose a story and write a 2- to 3-page essay about the story you chose. For each essay, we'll want you to address at least several of these questions:

- What makes this story/publication/news source trustworthy? What, if anything, would make it more trustworthy?
- What is the problem the story focuses on?
- What state/local policy contributes to the problem?
- What assumptions are being made in this story? Is there a counter-narrative that isn't fully explored that could have been?
- Who has power to change the situation, to solve the problem?
- Who is invested in opposing change?
- If citizens wanted to work toward solving this problem, what would they need to do?

The first essay will be due by 11:59 p.m. on Sept. 24. The second will be due by 11:59 p.m. on Nov. 5.

### **Design Your Ideal News Source Group Project: (150 points, due Oct. 22)**

You will work in teams of two or three students to produce a description of what you envision as the ideal *trustworthy* news source. The description should include:

- A mission statement for the news source, including what topics and levels of government/business your news source will cover
- What your organization's policies will be for verifying information before publication and for acknowledging/correcting mistakes
- What characteristics of your site will be designed to increase public trust in its content
- How you, as the managers, will ensure that the publication provides fair, equitable coverage of all racial, ethnic, religious, geographic and social class groups
- A plan for reaching your audience: What platforms will you use? What storytelling methods will you use?

- A discussion of how many staff members you will need, how much these personnel will cost and how you will bring in enough income to cover the organization's expenses. This isn't meant to be a formal business plan – we just want you to gain an understanding of how much it costs to produce high-quality, trustworthy journalism. We will provide you with a template for this portion of the assignment.

### **Story Impact Paper: (300 points total) Due 12/5**

Each student will select a news story/series, podcast or documentary from a list we will provide; all of them will be examples of high-quality journalism that examined an important social issue at the state or local level. The purpose of this assignment is to help you see how high-quality journalism affects citizens' lives and the operation of state/local government, beyond the function of simply informing people. Relatively early in the semester, you'll submit a proposal for your paper, identifying which story/series/podcast/documentary you wish to examine, what impact you think it had or might have had, and how you will go about determining how the journalist's or journalists' work affected citizens in his/her/their coverage area. (These might include impacts on government policy, impacts on business policy, impacts on community engagement and organization, etc.) The proposal will help us to see whether you understand the requirements of the project so that we can offer advice about assessing its impact. The proposal itself will be worth 100 points. The final report will be worth 200 points (20% of your final grade). More information will be provided in a separate document in 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 Tuesday classes.

#### **WEEK 1**

Aug. 24

The importance of state and local government: Why this course matters.

## **WEEK 2**

Sept. 1 and Sept. 3

The role state and local news plays in our democracy: How is local news different from national news? Why should you care about local news? Discussion of your personal information environment.

## **WEEK 3**

Sept. 8 and Sept. 10

What is journalism? We'll talk about the principles, processes and history of journalism and how they've evolved to meet the digital age. We'll also discuss journalism ethics, the objectivity debate, and whose voices are represented in coverage.

## **WEEK 4:**

Sept. 15 and Sept. 17

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

## **WEEK 5:**

Sept. 22 and Sept. 24

The trust crisis: An overview of the rise and influence of disinformation and misinformation and how that impacts journalism and democracy.

## **WEEK 6**

Sept. 29 and Oct. 1

The First Amendment

Journalism is the only profession explicitly protected by the First Amendment. How should journalists raise awareness of First Amendment issues?

## **WEEK 7**

Oct. 6 and Oct. 8

Voting Rights

Voting is key to a functioning democracy, but who has the right to vote and how that right is protected has been an-often shifting principle. How does journalism affect perceptions and protections of voting rights?

## **WEEK 8**

Oct. 13 and Oct. 15

Education:

Education is the most local of issues. Decisions about education policy and how it is implemented are made at the state and local levels. What does effective coverage of education issues look like?

## **WEEK 9**

Oct. 20 and Oct. 22

Health Care:

Health policy affects who gets medical care, how they get it and how much they pay. How does journalism best document the complexity of these issues at the state and local level?

### **WEEK 10**

Oct. 27 and Oct. 29

The Affordable Housing Crisis

Americans spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. While we often look at housing as a national issue, local decisions can make a big difference in the availability and affordability of housing. How does local news coverage shape perceptions of housing affordability?

### **WEEK 11:**

Nov. 3 and Nov. 5

Policing and criminal justice

There are more than 18,000 local police departments in the United States, and oversight of those departments varies from locality to locality and state to state. What role do journalists play in police accountability?

### **WEEK 12:**

Nov. 10 and Nov. 12

Poverty and economic disparity

Poverty impacts almost every other issue we've studied this semester: Education, housing, criminal justice, housing. People in poverty have limited access to government and are often in the shadows. What is the role of journalism in helping people understand the impact of poverty on other social issues?

### **WEEK 13: Janet**

Nov. 17 and Nov. 19

Traumatic Events

When communities are affected by traumatic events, journalists from the national media show up in large numbers, often with no context for the community. Do local journalists make a difference in sensitivity when covering tragedy?

### **WEEK 14**

Nov. 24

Environment

Environmental issues have implications that begin at the local level and can rise to global concerns. How do local journalists help provide context for their communities?

### **WEEK 15**

Dec. 1 and Dec. 3

Putting it all together

We review what we've discussed this semester and think about healthy information habits.

### **Evaluation of Grades**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Total Points</b>	<b>Percent of Grade</b>
Reflections (10)	100	10 percent
Essays (2)	300	30 percent
Group Project	150	15 percent
Story Impact Paper	300	30 percent
News Habits Assessments (2)	50	5 percent
Class Participation	100	10 percent
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>100 percent</b>

### **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.

### **Campus Resources: Health and Wellness**

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.

*U Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

*Student Health Care Center:* Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).

*University Police Department:* [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

*UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:* For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

*GatorWell Health Promotion Services:* For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) or call 352-273-4450.

### **Academic Resources**

*E-learning technical support:* Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).

*Career Connections Center:* Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

*Library Support:* Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

*Teaching Center:* Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

*Writing Studio:* 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

*Student Complaints On-Campus:* Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.

*On-Line Students Complaints:* View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.