**JOURNALISM 160**

**Understanding News Media**

**Fall 2015**

**Tues/Thurs 9:30-10:45 a.m.**

**MM Room 100**

**Instructor:** Robin Jones

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**Office Hours:** Thursdays, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., LA-4, Room 206

**OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this course is to broaden and deepen student understanding of news media production, distribution, and interpretation practices in the digital age. Students will examine how journalistic processes work and learn how to recognize and critically question news media narrative patterns, hidden meanings, and stereotypes. Throughout the semester, students will watch television news reports; listen to radio newscasts, read printed news articles, and access online news sources to become more discerning news consumers. At a time when the digital revolution is spawning an unprecedented flood of information and disinformation each day, the course, which is based in part on a model of news literacy developed by educators at the Stony Brook University School of Journalism, ultimately seeks to help students recognize the differences between news and propaganda, news and opinion, bias and fairness, assertion and verification, and evidence and inference. It will draw on disciplines such as sociology, political science, philosophy, and media studies to demonstrate that news, reality, and truth in the digital age can often be a matter of personal perspective, political orientation, and information-seeking habits.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of this course, students will have gained experience in:

* Developing a sophisticated understanding of forces which are reshaping news standards & practices
* Discussing the traditional mission of the press in democratic societies
* Examining the First Amendment and exploring issues of freedom of expression in the digital age
* Distinguishing between legitimate journalism and other kinds of information
* Describing how news decisions are made
* Analyzing the key elements of a news account, including weight of evidence, credibility of sources and verification steps, to judge its credibility and reliability
* Connecting current news stories to course concepts
* Sharpening communication skills – both oral and written
* Enhancing critical thinking capacities about news and individual information-seeking choices

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Carr, N. (2011). *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains.* New York: Norton & Co.

Pariser, E. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think.* New York: Penguin Books.

**Other readings** will be assigned throughout the term and made available electronically on BeachBoard including selections from *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (2007) and *Blur: How to Know What’s True in the Age of Information Overload* (2010) by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel.

**CLASS POLICIES/STATEMENTS**

**Absences from Class:** Grades in a course will be adversely affected by absences. Make-ups usually are granted in strict accordance with CSULB policy, which defines excused absences as (1) illness or injury to the student; (2) death, injury or serious illness of an immediate family member or the like; (3) religious reasons; (4) jury duty or government obligation; (5) CSULB-sanctioned or approved activities. *These and any other requests for an excused absence must be documented.*

**CSULB Cheating/Plagiarism/Fabrication Policy:** CSULB takes issues of academic dishonesty very seriously. If students use any deceptive or dishonest method to complete an assignment, take an exam, or gain credit in a course in any other way, or if students help someone else to do so, they are guilty of cheating. If students use someone else’s ideas or work and represent it as their own without giving credit to the source, they are guilty of plagiarism. This does not apply if the ideas are recognized as common knowledge, or if students can show that they honestly developed the ideas through their own work. Students should use quotation marks and bibliographic references to give credit to their sources according to established citation formats.

**Students with Disabilities:** Students needing support services or accommodations should establish their eligibility for assistance by contacting the Disabled Student Services Office (Brotman Hall 270) at (562) 985-5401. Students are to provide me verification of their disability and appropriate alternatives from Disabled Student Services.

**Class Civility and Professional Conduct:** This should go without saying, but students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. In order to assure that all students have the opportunity to gain from time spent in class, students are prohibited from engaging in any form of distraction. Forms of distraction include, but are not limited to, using smart phones, talking when others are speaking, or arriving late. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result, minimally, in a request to leave.

**Assistance:** If students think they might need help with some aspect of the course, they probably do. I strongly encourage students to meet with me to review their progress or if they have questions, needs or concerns. My office hours are listed at the beginning of this syllabus. Students can also reach me via email. Please include “JOUR 160” in the subject line of all e-mails to me regarding this class.

**Grading:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Homework | 20% |
| In-class activities/participation | 20% |
| Midterm exam | 20% |
| Book review/essay | 15% |
| Final exam | 25% |
|  | **100%** |

Grading scale:

A=90% - 100% B=80% - 89% C=70% - 79% D=60 - 69% F=below 59%

**Assessment of Written Work:**

Students will be graded on how well they articulate an understanding of course material as well as how they express their own ideas and arguments. Simply put, grades depend a great deal on a student’s ability to write with clarity and logic. In general:

**“A”** assignments are exceptionally written, cogently argued, intelligently analyzed, and brilliantly synthesized; they need little or no rewriting.

“**B”** assignments are superior in argument, analysis, synthesis and writing; they require minor editing or rewriting.

“**C”** assignments are average in argument, analysis, synthesis and writing; they show a grasp of subject matter, but need heavy editing or rewriting.

“**D”** assignments show poor grasp of subject; there are serious problems with argument, analysis, synthesis, and writing.

**“F”** assignments demonstrate weak grasp of subject or do not meet basic standards of accuracy and academic integrity.

A**ssessment of Homework:**

Students will be required to complete a handful of homework assignments of no more than 500 words. Each of these homework assignments will be evaluated out of 20 points. Homework will be assessed on the ability of a student to think critically, write clearly, apply course concepts, and follow directions.

**Assessment of In-Class Activities/Participation:**

Participation is essential to succeeding in this course. Students should consistently demonstrate that they have knowledge of the news; that they have completed the homework and assigned readings; and that they are willing to engage respectfully and thoughtfully in class discussions and group active learning activities. In several instances, you will break up into small groups and discuss the material or complete an activity together. You will be required to turn in notes showing each person’s contribution. Examples of factors that are considered when evaluating these discussions and activities include:

* Contributing interesting, insightful comments
* Presenting good examples of concepts being discussed
* Building on comments of others
* Raising good questions
* Listening and responding appropriately to others’ comments
* Attending all class meetings and being on time

**Class Schedule**

Note: This schedule is subject to change.

**WEEK 1**

**Aug. 23:** What you’ll learn in this class, how you’ll do it and how you’ll be graded

**Aug. 25:** Why news literacy matters

**WEEK 2**

**Sept. 1:** The power of information: The press, the people and democracy

**DUE:** Homework #1: News blackout assignment

**Sept. 3:** In-class activity #1: China and Google

**BEFORE CLASS:** Read news articles in “China and Google” folder on BB

**Readings:** *The Elements of Journalism*, chapter 1: “What is Journalism For?” from (on BB)

**WEEK 3**

**Sept. 8:** But is it true? Finding and reporting the news, and verifying it

**Sept. 10:** In-class activity #2: Rolling Stone verification breakdown

**BEFORE CLASS:** Read articles in “Rolling Stone verification” folder on BB

**Readings:** *The Shallows*, prologue and chaps. 1, 2, and 3 (pgs. 1-57)

**WEEK 4**

**Sept. 15:** What is journalism, and what isn’t: News neighborhoods and blurred lines

**Sept. 17:** Discussion: understanding the difference between news, advertising, promotion and propaganda

**DUE:** Homework #2: Anderson Cooper

**Readings:** *The Shallows*, chaps. 4, 5, and 6 (pgs. 58-114)

**WEEK 5**

**Sept. 22:** The medium is the message: Traditional media

**Sept. 24:** In-class activity #3: Analyzing strengths and weaknesses of traditional media

**Readings:** *The Shallows*, chaps. 7, 8, and 9 (pgs. 115-200)

**WEEK 6**

**Sept. 29:** The medium is the message: Digital media; start “Digital Nation”

**Oct. 1:** Finish “Digital Nation,” discussion

**Readings:** *The Shallows*, chap. 10, plus epilogue and afterword (pgs. 201-228)

**WEEK 7**

**Oct. 6: Midterm Review**

**Oct. 8: MIDTERM EXAM**

**WEEK 8**

**Oct. 13:** Ethics and the media; video: “A Hidden Life”

**Oct. 15:** Finish “A Hidden Life,” discuss

**WEEK 9**

**Oct. 20:** Who decides what’s important? News drivers and news values

**Oct. 22:** In-class activity #5: You be the editor

**DUE:** Homework assignment #3: Create your own code of ethics

**WEEK 10**

**Oct. 27:** Balance, fairness and bias in the media – and in yourself

**Oct. 29:** Discussion: news vs. opinion and how to tell the difference

**Readings:** *The Filter Bubble,* introduction and chaps. 1-2 (pgs. 1-76)

**WEEK 11**

**Nov. 3:** War, propaganda, truth and “news,” begin “Buying the War” documentary

**Nov. 5:** “Buying the War” documentary; discussion

**DUE:** Homework assignment #4: News vs. opinion

**Readings:** *The Filter Bubble,* chaps. 3-4 (pgs. 77-135)

**WEEK 12**

**Nov. 10**: Deconstructing the news, part 1

**Nov. 12:** In-class activity #5: Deconstructing a story

**BEFORE CLASS:** Read stories in “Deconstructing news story” folder on BB

**Readings:** *Blur*, chapter 3: “The Way of Skeptical Knowing” chapter 3 (on BB)

**WEEK 13**

**Nov. 17:** Deconstructing the news, part 2

**Nov. 19:** In-class activity #6: Creating a new rubric for deconstructing the news

**Readings:** *The Filter Bubble,* chaps. 5-6 (pgs. 137-188)

**Nov. 23-27: FALL BREAK/NO CLASS**

**WEEK 14**

**Dec. 1:** Freedom of expression/who is a journalist? Start “Citizenfour”

**DUE:** Homework assignment #5: Truth and turkey

**Dec. 3:** “Citizenfour,” cont.; in-class activity: Edward Snowden discussion

**Readings:** *The Filter Bubble,* chaps. 7-8 (pgs. 189-243)

**WEEK 15**

**Dec. 8:** Final review

**DUE:** Book review/essay

**FINAL EXAM** will be given at the time and date assigned by the university. I will inform you when I have that information.