JOURNALISM 160
Understanding News Media
Fall 2016
Tues/Thurs 9:30-11:45 p.m.
MM Room 100

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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.

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	25%
In-class activities/participation	20%
Midterm exam	20%
Deconstructing the news group paper	10%
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.

Assessment 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.

You will also write a group paper toward the end of the semester. Your group will deconstruct a news story, and you will turn in one paper for the whole group. I will give you the opportunity to assess the work and contributions of your team members after the paper is due.

Assessment of In-Class Exercises/Participation:
Participation in the in-class group exercises is essential to succeeding in this course. Students should consistently demonstrate that they have knowledge of the news; that they have completed 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 exercise in small groups of up to five people. 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

I will also occasionally ask you to complete a short assignment by yourself during class. These assignments will be worth 5 points, and you will receive full credit as long as you address the topic at hand. With these assignments, I WILL NOT accept any makeups.

Assessment of Midterm and Final:
The midterm and final will consist of three short essays. You will get your choice of questions. They will be graded based on the "Assessment of Written Work" above.

Class Schedule
Note: This schedule is subject to change.

WEEK 1
8/23: What you'll learn in this class, how you'll do it and how you'll be graded
8/25: Why news literacy matters

WEEK 2
8/30: The power of information: The press, the people and democracy
9/1: In-class exercise #1: China and Google
BEFORE CLASS: Read news articles in "China and Google" folder on BeachBoard
DUE: Homework #1: News blackout assignment

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

WEEK 3
9/6: But is it true? Finding and reporting the truth
9/8: "The Falling Man" documentary

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

WEEK 4
9/13: Verification: How it works, and how it can fail
9/15: "Buying the War" documentary

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

WEEK 5
9/20: In-class exercise #2: Assessing a real-life verification breakdown
BEFORE CLASS: Read articles in "Rolling Stone" folder on BeachBoard
DUE: Homework #2: Anderson Cooper
9/22: What is journalism, and what isn't: News neighborhoods and blurred lines

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

WEEK 6
9/27: Midterm Review
9/29: **MIDTERM EXAM**

WEEK 7
10/4: Balance and fairness
10/6: Documentary: "A Hidden Life"

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

WEEK 8
10/11: Bias in the news and audience bias
10/13: In-class exercise #3: Examining bias
DUE: Homework assignment #3: Create your own code of ethics

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

WEEK 9
10/18: Who decides what's important? News drivers and news values
10/20: In-class exercise #4: You be the editor

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

WEEK 10
10/25: The medium is the message, digital edition
10/27: Deconstructing the news, part 1: Source evaluation

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

WEEK 11
11/1: Deconstructing the news, part 2: News stories
11/3: Class activity: Deconstructing news stories; class discussion: *The Shallows* and *The Filter Bubble*

WEEK 12
11/8: Deconstructing the news, part 3: Social media
11/10: In-class exercise #5: Creating a rubric for deconstructing news on social media
DUE: Homework #4: Essay on *The Shallows* and *The Filter Bubble*

WEEK 13
11/15: Work in groups on deconstructing the news group paper
11/17: Work in groups on deconstructing the news group paper
DUE by midnight on 11/17: Deconstructing the news group paper

FALL BREAK/NO CLASS: 11/21-11/25

WEEK 14
11/29: Freedom of expression/who is a journalist? Start "Citizenfour"
12/1: Finish "Citizenfour"

WEEK 15
12/6: The future of news
12/8: Final review

FINAL EXAM: 12/13, 10:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m.