

COM 374 – News Literacy: Critical Perspectives¹

Class meets Tu-Th 5 pm– 6:15 pm

Room: Fell Hall 0152

Instructor: Fernando Severino, Ph.D. **Office:** 459 Fell Hall **Office hours:** Tuesday 1-2 PM (by appointment)

• **E-mail:** fseveri@ilstu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class aims to help students develop a critical understanding of *News* messages. First, we will review the basics of news production and the role of journalists and reporters in this process. Then, we will explore the consumer side of news and information. The idea is to lay the foundation for understanding News Literacy, an increasingly popular concept in a highly populated news environment. The course combines theoretical perspectives on the news from sociological, psychological, and cultural communication perspectives with insights from the journalists, broadcasters, and editors who produce it. Students will analyze research material on journalism alongside newsprint, video, and audio stories.

The aim is for students to become not just intelligent producers and consumers of news but better-informed citizens who are more able to play their civic role in society.

Learning Objectives:

1. Refresh the basic concepts and practices of news production and the news cycle.
2. Explore historical perspectives on news consumption and information processing.
3. Understand the current trends in News Literacy.
4. To distinguish between “real” and “fake” news reports.
5. To develop critical thinking abilities that will allow the student to understand the differences between assertion and verification, evidence and inference, media bias, and *audience* bias.
6. Engage in critical thinking about the news environment, nationally and globally.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

15 points: Attendance and class participation

15 points: Discussion leader

20 points: News Story

25 points: Research Paper Proposal

25 points: Analytical Paper

Total = 100 points.

¹ Thank you to Dr. Megan Hopper for the help with this syllabus (some portions are copied from her syllabus).

Makeup and late work policy

If a student does not turn in an assignment by the deadline, they may submit it during the following week to receive partial credit, but **ONLY** if the instructor was notified in advance.

Extra Credit

The instructor will announce opportunities for extra credit during the semester (if any).

Attendance and Participation

Students are required to attend all classes and lectures. A signing attendance sheet will be distributed in every class. Students are also expected to participate in class discussions and activities. Unexcused absences will result in a deduction of points.

- All students must stay current with weekly announcements posted for this course on Canvas.
- Students must consistently check their **university e-mail** for information about the class.
- Technology usage. Phones NO, Laptops yes (maybe). Sit in the back if you **must** use the laptop to take notes.

REQUIRED TEXTS & READINGS

- **Schudson, M. (2018). *Why Journalism Still Matters*.**
You can access the book via this link:
https://i-share-isu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CARLI_ISU/1vcthf/alma9921315417205845
- All other readings will be posted on Canvas.

Writing Center:

We all need a little help with our writing. Please consider using the Visor Center on campus.
<https://universitycollege.illinoisstate.edu/help/tutoring/>

Also, from Milner Library:

<https://guides.library.illinoisstate.edu/>

COVID-19

I will follow these recommendations: <https://coronavirus.illinoisstate.edu/>

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (From ISU-CIPD)

[Student Access and Accommodation Services:](#)

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Absence

Basic rule: Communicate with me! Do not disappear.

As the Undergraduate Catalog states, you are responsible for attending class and completing all academic work. Make arrangements with me in advance if you will be missing class due to participation in a Sanctioned University Activity or to fulfill a religious obligation.

As responsible adults investing in their future, Illinois State University students are encouraged to take control of their own education, especially when life and health challenges interfere with the planned process. When students need to miss class, they must be swift and proactive in working with their instructors to take advantage of learning opportunities, develop mastery of course materials, meet the learning objectives as outlined in the course, and prepare themselves for more advanced learning.

Also, students must arrive on time and stay until the end of class.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to be honest in all academic work, consistent with the academic integrity policy as outlined in the [Code of Student Conduct](#). All work is to be appropriately cited when it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from another source. Unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration on any work, or the presentation of someone else's work, is plagiarism. In certain circumstances, I may be required to refer violations to the [Student Conduct and Community Responsibilities](#), a unit of the Dean of Students Office.

Your work should be original/NEW and created ENTIRELY BY YOU for the assignments on this course/semester. DO NOT SUBMIT THE SAME ASSIGNMENT, ARTICLE, OR PAPER YOU HAVE USED FOR A DIFFERENT CLASS.

Campus Safety

Illinois State University is committed to maintaining a safe environment for the University community. Ask students to ensure they have downloaded the SafeRedbirds app. Also, note the information posted in each classroom about emergency shelters and evacuation assembly areas (both are indicated on stickers inside every classroom).

Classroom Behavior

In the classroom and elsewhere, you are expected to conduct yourself in a manner consistent with Illinois State University's [Code of Student Conduct](#).

Constructive Conversation

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Engaging in civil discourse is both a privilege and a responsibility of living in a democratic society. This class will provide both anticipated and unexpected opportunities to engage in this kind of conversation. Thus, we will work to agree on a set of guidelines that ensures that our civil discourse remains civil.

Diversity

ISU remains committed to creating and maintaining a working, learning and living environment that is welcoming, supportive, respectful, inclusive, diverse and free from discrimination and harassment.

ICRT

In addition, the Inclusive Community Response Team (ICRT) serves students by fostering an open and inclusive campus and responding to instances of hate and bias. You can learn more about how the team can help and report concerns on the [ICRT website](#).

MCOT

The Multicultural Outreach Team (MCOT) is a group of staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students in Student Counseling Services dedicated to fostering an equitable, diverse, and inclusive university community for our minoritized students. MCOT offers workshops which promote dialogue about identity, empathy, stereotypes, bias, privilege, power, white supremacy, and systemic racism. Students can learn more about MCOT at <https://counseling.illinoisstate.edu/outreach/multicultural-outreach-team/>

[Multicultural Center](#): The Multicultural Center provides a number of programs and services to help students flourish academically and socially and to encourage understanding, appreciation, and respect for diversity in the University community. Resources include LGBTQAI+ resources, legal resources for undocumented students, healing and self-care resources, anti-racism education, leadership development, cultural organizations (BSU, ALAS, TRIBE, PRIDE and APAC), and lots of gathering space!

Mental Health

Life at college can get complicated. If you're feeling stressed, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, depressed or are struggling with personal issues, do not hesitate to call or visit [Student Counseling Services \(SCS\)](#). These services are free and completely confidential. SCS is located at 320 Student Services Building, (309) 438-3655.

If you are worried about a friend and don't know how to help, you can call SCS and ask to speak to a counselor. The [Kognito simulation](#), available through SCS's webpage, can also help you learn how to assist your friend in connecting to services.

Student Technology

All students are encouraged to take the Introduction to Technology Online Orientation, found here: [IllinoisState.edu/Quickstart](https://illinoisstate.edu/Quickstart). Additionally, technology support can be found at [Help.IllinoisState.edu](https://help.illinoisstate.edu), which offers online chat and help articles, as well as phone support at (309) 438-HELP (4357). Walk-up support and computer repair & purchases are available from TechZone, located on the first floor of the Bone Student Center, as well as [TechZone.IllinoisState.edu](https://techzone.illinoisstate.edu).

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Two software packages are available at no additional charge: Microsoft Office 365 (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) and Adobe Creative Cloud. Students can download these packages for installation on their personal computers.

Students can view IT Help Desk articles for more information on [Microsoft Office 365](#) and [Adobe Creative Cloud](#).

Students who do not have access to the technology they need to be successful in their coursework should contact Help.IllinoisState.edu or (309) 438-HELP (4357) to discuss options.

Student Wellbeing

It's hard to learn if you're hungry or couch surfing. If you are having difficulty affording groceries, accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or securing a safe and stable place to live, help may be available. I urge you to contact the [Dean of Students Office](#) to learn more.

Class Recording

Notice of recording a class session by the instructor

The University wants to make students aware that a course may be recorded by the faculty member for later use. Please understand that each faculty member makes an individual decision on whether recording and/or sharing their class materials is warranted. Any recordings that a faculty member makes available are for use by students enrolled in the class and are for the purpose of individual or group study only. The recordings may not be reproduced, shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to publicly accessible web environments. Please do not independently record the course without prior authorization from the faculty member or an approved accommodation from [Student Access and Accommodations Services](#) office.

Regarding students making their own recordings

Full denial to record

Students may not use audio or video devices to record classroom lectures or discussions. Students with disabilities who need to record classroom lectures or discussions must contact the [Student Access and Accommodation Services](#). Students who violate this policy may be subject to both legal sanctions for violations of copyright law and disciplinary action under the University's [Code of Student Conduct](#).

Permission required to record

Students who wish to use audio or video devices to record classroom lectures or discussions must obtain written permission from the instructor. Such recordings are to be used solely for the purposes of individual or group study with other students enrolled in the class. They may not be reproduced, shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to publicly accessible web environments. Students with disabilities who need to record classroom lectures or discussions must contact the [Student Access and Accommodation Services](#). Students who violate this policy may be subject to both legal sanctions for violations of copyright law and disciplinary action under the University's [Code of Student Conduct](#).

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Attendance and class participation (15 points). This course is much more fun if you come to class and participate in the discussion! I will have an attendance sheet for every class (starting WEEK 2). *The expectation is to read the weekly readings to participate in class.*

Discussion leader (15 points). Each student will be a discussant leader on a Thursday of the semester. The student will prepare a brief presentation (no more than 5-10 minutes) about one topic of the week's class content that interests you. You need to find an example that might apply or be related to current events and propose at least two discussion questions to the class. **DO NOT SUMMARIZE** the content of your week's topic; instead, focus on a particular issue that interests you. This activity aims to develop your presentation skills and enrich your knowledge about the topic of your interest. We will assign the dates and topics in the first week of class.

Follow these steps:

- Read the assigned book chapters or readings/materials for your selected week.
- Choose a specific topic of the readings that caught your attention. What is interesting to you?
- Read the news and choose one case (news article, opinion, editorial, etc.) that can be linked to your topic.
- Present to the class highlighting the news story and ask two questions for the class to discuss.

News Story (20 points). You will write a news story following journalistic standards. The plan is to focus the story on a topic closely related to the class. I will provide detailed instructions and a rubric three weeks in advance.

Research Paper Proposal (25 points). You will write a short research *paper proposal* about News Literacy. You will follow an academic research format (Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Expected Results, Conclusion/Discussion). I will provide detailed instructions and a rubric three weeks in advance.

Analytical Paper (25 points). This will be a paper to assess your understanding of the class material but, at the same time, will have an analytical and applied component. I will provide detailed instructions and a rubric three weeks in advance.

The grading scale is a standard ten percentage point scale:

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

Explanation of grading scale:² (UNC office of Registrar).

A= Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. The A grade states clearly that the students have shown such outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study that he/she may be strongly encouraged to continue.

² [Taken from the UNC office of the registrar.](#)

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B= Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The B grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.

C= A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The C grade states that, while not yet showing unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development.

D= A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment. A student has given no evidence of prospective growth in the discipline; an accumulation of D grades should be taken to mean that the student would be well advised not to continue in the academic field.

F= For whatever reason, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. A grade of F should warrant an advisor's questioning whether the student may suitably register for further study in the discipline before remedial work is undertaken.

COURSE SCHEDULE

	Class description	Reading	Assignment
Week 1 1/16- 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus review, assessment, and feedback. • Discussion leader assignment • Introductory lecture. 	<i>Class syllabus</i>	<i>Thursday- bring your syllabus feedback for participation points</i>
Week 2 1/23 - 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Refresher for News Production and Journalism style. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zelizer et al. <i>The Journalism Manifesto</i> (Chapter 1 and 5). Available in Canvas 	
Week 3 1/30 – 2/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of Journalism a summary of perspectives, criticisms, adaptability, and persistence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Schudson</u> Introduction & Chapter 1. • Carlson. Introduction to <i>“Journalistic Authority”</i> Available on Canvas 	<u>Instructions for News Story</u>
Week 4 2/6- 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy and “Free Press” • Watchdog press? Herd mentality? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary “The Central Park Five. • https://www.kanopy.com/en/illstu/video/122854 • <u>Schudson</u>. Chapter 2 & 10 	
Week 5 2/13 -15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectivity, Bias & Slant • <u>Thursday class</u> will be used for open office hours to discuss your News Stories) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Schudson</u> Chapter 3 • “Beyond Objectivity” ASU. Available here. • American Press Institute: “Understanding Bias” 	News Story due Sunday midnight

<p>Week 6 2/20- 22</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence, Verification and Transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentary: Outfoxed (YouTube) Schudson: Chapter 5 & 9 AmericanPress Institute “Journalism as a discipline of verification” 	
<p>Week 7 2/27 - 29</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> News Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming and other theories of media effects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dietram A. Scheufele , David Tewksbury, Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models, <i>Journal of Communication</i>, Volume 57, Issue 1, March 2007, Pages 9–20, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00326.x David H. Weaver, Thoughts on Agenda Setting, Framing, and Priming, <i>Journal of Communication</i>, Volume 57, Issue 1, March 2007, Pages 142–147, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00333.x Valkenburg, P. M., Peter, J., & Walther, J. B. (2016). Media effects: Theory and research. <i>Annual review of psychology</i>, 67, 315-338. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033608 	<p>Instructions for Research Paper proposal</p>
<p>Week 8 3/5 -7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media and News Literacy research and approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tully, Melissa, 'Why News Literacy Matters', in Valérie Bélair-Gagnon, and Nikki Usher (eds), <i>Journalism Research That Matters</i> (New York, 2021; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 July 2021). (Online available at Milner Library) 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can News Literacy Be Taught? • WHAT Is Media Literacy and HOW Can Simple Shifts Center It 	
Week 9 3/12 -14	SPRING BREAK!!!		
Week 10 3/19 -21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sources and Emotional Labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dell’Orto: AP Foreign Correspondents in Action Chapter (Canvas). • Covering Trauma (Dart Center) • Documentary: <i>The War Around Us</i> • https://www.kanopy.com/en/illstu/video/93039 	
Week 11 3/26- 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polarization and Media • <u>Thursday class</u> will be used for open office hours to discuss your Research Paper proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Niche News Chapter (Canvas). • Prior. (2013). Media and Political Polarization. <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i>, 16(1), 101–127. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-100711-135242 • So Maybe Facebook Didn’t Ruin Politics 	Research Paper Proposal due Sunday midnight
Week 12 4/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News Avoidance and News Trust • <u>Professor at Conference 4/4 (No class)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benjamin Toff , Antonis Kalogeropoulos, All the News That’s Fit to Ignore: How the Information Environment Does and Does Not Shape News Avoidance, <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>, Volume 84, Issue S1, 2020, 	

		<p>Pages 366–390, https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfaa016</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reuters. News for the Powerful and Privileged: How Misrepresentation and Underrepresentation of Disadvantaged Communities Undermine Their Trust in News (Just the INTRO - Canvas) 	
<p>Week 13 4/9 -11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journalism and the public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Schudson</u> Chapter 6 Nikki Usher “News for the Rich, White and Blue” (Canvas) 	<p>Instructions for Analytical Paper</p>
<p>Week 14 4/16 – 18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journalism as a profession, challenges, and career paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Schudson</u> Chapter 7 	
<p>Week 15 4/23- 25</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethics and Responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentary/Movie: Shattered Glass. <u>Schudson</u> Chapter 4 The fabulist who changed journalism 	
<p>Week 16 4/30 – 5/2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>1:1 Meetings Final Paper.</u> 		<p>Final Paper due Sunday May 5th midnight.</p>

Note: This schedule is subject to change. Students will be held accountable for all changes announced by the instructor, both in class and via Canvas.