Lectures Tuesdays 2:30 P.M. – 3:50 P.M. Javits 102

Professors: Richard Hornik/Jack Millrod

IMPORTANT DATES[[1]](#footnote-1)

* Mid-term Exam: Thursday, November 5
* Final Essay: Thursday, December 3
* Final Exam: Monday, December 14, 8 A.M.
* “My Life As” presentations: TBA

1. PURPOSE OF THE COURSE:

This course is designed to teach students to exercise their power as citizens by becoming perceptive news consumers. Armed with critical-thinking skills, a firm grasp of relevant history and practical knowledge about the news media, News Literacy students learn how to find the reliable information they need to make decisions, take action, make judgments and responsibly share information through social media. At a time when the digital revolution is spawning a flood of information and disinformation each day, the course seeks to help students recognize the differences between facts and rumor, news and promotion, news and opinion, bias and fairness, assertion and verification, and evidence and inference.

1. INTENDED OUTCOMES:

Successful Students Will Be Able To:

1. Analyze key elements of news reports - weighing evidence, evaluating sources, noting context and transparency - to judge reliability.
2. Distinguish between journalism, opinion journalism and unsupported assertion.
3. Identify and distinguish between news media bias and audience bias.
4. Blend personal scholarship and course materials to write effectively about journalism standards and practices, fairness and bias, First Amendment issues and their individual Fourth Estate rights and responsibilities.
5. Use examples from each day’s news to demonstrate critical thinking and civic engagement.
6. Place the impact of social media and digital technologies in their historical context.
7. REQUIRED TEXTS / READINGS:
8. *News Literacy’s main textbook is each day’s news, whether you read, watch or listen.*  
   News Literacy students are expected to follow the news every day and participate in an online discussion board that is the basis for near weekly news quizzes. Keeping up with news makes it possible to finish homework assigned to you.
9. No-cost materials on the Blackboard™ site for this course.
10. Other no-cost materials provided by your instructors.
11. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
12. Prerequisites: None.
13. Attendance: If legitimate circumstances prevent you from attending class, the instructor must be informed by email no more than 24 hours before class starts. Two unexcused absences are permitted. A third or fourth such absence results in a 1/3 drop per absence, (e.g. from B to B-) on your final grade. Five or more can result in an F. Consistent tardiness will also harm your final grade.
14. Blackboard: This course is run from Blackboard, the digital content management system operated by the university. There you’ll find course announcements, homework assignments, reading materials, links for electronic submission of written work, your grades, and required discussion/blog sites.
15. Check Blackboard daily: Because the course frequently changes in response to breaking news, you must check Blackboard daily. Although your lecture and recitation instructors will make every effort to give you advance notice of upcoming assignments, your failure to regularly check Blackboard is not an acceptable excuse for missing a deadline. Email and especially email sent via Blackboard is one of the ways we will officially communicate with you for this course.  It is your responsibility to make sure that you read your email in your official University email account.  For most students that is Google Apps for Education ([http://www.stonybrook.edu/mycloud](http://www.stonybrook.edu/mycloud" \t "_blank)) but you may verify your official Electronic Post Office (EPO) address at: [http://it.stonybrook.edu/help/kb/checking-or-changing-your-mail-forwarding-address-in-the-epo](http://it.stonybrook.edu/help/kb/checking-or-changing-your-mail-forwarding-address-in-the-epo" \t "_blank)
16. Special considerations: If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, 128 ECC Building (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information, go to the following web site: <http://www.stonybrook.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities.shtml>
17. Deadlines: All work is due on time. You must upload your homework to the appropriate SafeAssign links contained in Blackboard prior to deadlines imposed by your instructor. Work that fails to meet deadline will lose one full point. After one week, the student receives a 0. Assignments that will be reviewed in recitation may not be accepted if they are late.
18. Assignments: Your weekly homework assignments may be found in the HW Assignments link in your recitation’s Blackboard page. They will include readings, videos, films and other materials to help you understand the course concepts, plus writing assignments. Your lecturer and recitation instructor will inform you each week of which assignments to work on and when they are due. Writing assignments may require you to do research, additional reading, or evaluate a news report. You will be graded on how well you articulate an understanding of the course material, support it with specific examples from readings, and how you express your own ideas. Your grade will depend, in part, on your ability to write with clarity and logic. Comply with the directions for word length, stay relevant, and always provide specific examples or evidence to support your arguments. The SBU Writing Center provides helpful assistance to students willing to act on expert advice: 632-7405.  
      
    **The written homework assignments represent 30 percent of your final grade. You read that correctly…30%.**

HOMEWORK GRADING CRITERIA:

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| Superior | Dramatically surpasses the requirements, well-written, demonstrates additional insights or research | Maximum 4 points |
| Good | Exceeds requirements, written clearly and logically | Maximum 3 points |
| Satisfactory | Meets minimum requirements, expresses ideas in a manner that can be understood | Maximum 2 points |
| Poor | Does not meet requirements, confusing or unclear, sloppy | Maximum 1 point |
| Failed to hand in | No credit | No points |

1. Participation and Quizzes: You will be graded on how well you prepare for class, follow the news and engage in discussions and debates held during recitation. You will also be quizzed throughout the semester. Quiz questions will cover current events, the previous week's lecture and any other material you have been assigned. Quizzes reward you for following the news and reinforce concepts you’re learning in class.
2. Extra Credit: Extra credit points are applied to the homework portion of your final grade. Students may earn a maximum of eight extra credit points. The major source of extra credit points is a series of three weeknight programs during which noteworthy journalists speak about their work and answer your questions. Students receive two extra homework points for each lecture they attend. Other extra credit opportunities are offered from time to time and will be announced by your lecturer and recitation instructor.
3. Communication: If you have a general question about the course, the assignments or the lecture you may want to post your question in the discussions link available through your recitation site on Blackboard. For specific questions about your particular grade, you must make an appointment to talk with your instructor in person or by phone during his or her office hours.
4. Academic Integrity:*Any form of fabrication, plagiarism, cheating or other ethical offense will be reported to the Academic Judiciary Committee and can result in a failing grade for the course, dismissal from the journalism program or expulsion from the university****.*** Here is the University’s statement on academic dishonesty: “Plagiarism is the use of others’ words and/or ideas without clearly acknowledging their source. As students, you are learning about other people’s ideas in your course texts, your instructors’ lectures, in-class discussions, and when doing your own research. When you incorporate those words and ideas into your own work, it is of the utmost importance that you give credit where it is due. Plagiarism, intentional or unintentional, is considered academic dishonesty and all instances will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. To avoid plagiarism, you must give the original author credit whenever you use another person’s ideas, opinions, drawings, or theories as well as any facts or any other pieces of information that are not common knowledge. Additionally quotations of another person’s actual spoken or written words; or a close paraphrasing of another person’s spoken or written words must also be referenced. Accurately citing all sources and putting direct quotations – of even a few key words – in quotation marks are required.”For further information on academic integrity and the policies regarding academic dishonesty, go to Academic Judiciary at [www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary](http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary)**.**
5. Americans with Disabilities Act:  If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services,  
   ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128, [(631) 632-6748](tel:%28631%29632-6748). They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. [https://web.stonybrook.edu/newfaculty/StudentResources/Pages/DisabilitySupportServices.aspx](https://web.stonybrook.edu/newfaculty/StudentResources/Pages/DisabilitySupportServices.aspx" \t "_blank).
6. Disruptive Behavior: Stony Brook expects students to maintain standards of personal integrity that are in harmony with the educational goals of the institution; to observe national, state, and local laws and University regulations; and to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty is required to report disruptive behavior that interrupts faculty’s ability to teach, the safety of the learning environment, and/or students’ ability to learn to Judicial Affairs.
7. Electronic Devices. See your recitation instructor for his or her policy. Phones, tablets, and other electronic devices should be silenced and put away and laptops used only for note taking.

VI. CALCULATING FINAL GRADES:  Final grades are weighted as follows:

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| Homework Assignments | 30 Percent- Total HW score is curved |
| Participation | 10 Percent |
| Quizzes | 10 Percent- Total score is curved |
| Mid-term exam | 15 Percent |
| Final Essay | 10 Percent |
| Final Exam | 25 Percent |

You won’t earn more points by writing longer than assigned. Comply with the directions for word length, write succinctly, stay relevant, and always provide specific examples or evidence to support your point.  
**Important**: Only semester grades of C or above count for credit toward the journalism major or minor. Any student earning a C-minus or below who intends to continue in the journalism program must retake the class and will not be able to continue in other journalism skills classes.  
  
VII. SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM GRADING SCHEMA:

A : 93 and above  
A-: 90-92  
B+: 87-89  
B : 83-86  
B-: 80-82  
C+: 77-79  
C : 73-76  
C-: 70-72  
D+: 67-69  
D : 60-66  
F : 59 and below

VIII. CLASS SCHEDULE:

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| **TUESDAY: LECTURE** | **THURSDAY: RECITATION** |
| **1. Week of August 24** |  |
| AUGUST 25 **L1: Why News Literacy Matters Helping consumers in the digital age find reliable, actionable information**   * The latest information revolution has empowered consumers but also has made them responsible for determining what information is reliable and whether to publish it. * From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: Parallels between the first and latest information revolutions. * The digital age has created a crisis of authenticity — fakes masquerading as news stories, photos and videos — and a blurring of the lines between news and opinion and news and promotion. * Overcoming our own bias: The toughest challenge facing today's news consumers may be challenging their own biases. | AUGUST 27 **R1: Public perception of the news media**  Students discuss the results of the student media survey they and their classmates completed. Class focuses on where and how students get their news, with discussion of which news outlets the students will be using. (Students will be introduced to the Blackboard discussion board where they will post the news stories they will be quizzed on throughout the semester.)  How do students view the news media? How does it compare with the general public’s view? What’s the source of the public’s current unease? Is it justified? What’s a news consumer to do? |
| **2. Week of August 31** |  |
| SEPTEMBER 1  **L2: The Power of Information**  **Humans have a universal need to receive and share information**   * Since humans first walked the earth, the power of information has derived from its ability to alert, divert and connect people. * The power of print: Why Napoleon said: "Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets." * The power of images and video: They can move audiences and bring about change. * The power of social media: How platforms like Twitter and Facebook spread and make news. * Freedom of the press: How the First Amendment’s guarantees are based on the conviction that the excesses of a free press a price are a price worth paying for keeping our government and other institutions in check. | SEPTEMBER 3 **R2: The news blackout and the power of information** Students discuss their News Blackout experiences in the context of the CPJ readings about blacked out news worldwide. The class examinestimely examples in the news of the struggle for information control.  **News Quiz 1** |

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| **3. Week of September 7** |  |
| SEPTEMBER 8 **NO LECTURE** | SEPTEMBER 10 **R3: Is the press too free?**  Paparazzi, the National Enquirer, tabloid TV, Gawker … Are the excesses of a free press too high a price to pay for the benefits to society afforded by First Amendment protections? Our country’s founders, who saw a free press as a check on the power of government, certainly didn’t think so. Today’s class explores the question and students’ attitudes toward the news media.  **News Quiz 2** |
| **4. Week of September 14** |  |
| SEPTEMBER 15 **L3: But Is It True?**  **Part 1: Journalism is all about finding and reporting the truth. But that's not as easy as it sounds.**   * Journalists and scientists have a similar understanding of truth — a statement of probability that’s proportional to the amount of available evidence and subject to an informal system of peer review. * The concept of provisional truth: Because journalism is a snapshot in time, journalistic truth evolves as new evidence emerges. The lesson for news consumers: Follow a story over time. * Context and transparency: Key concepts in the journey from fact to truth. Valuable news stories put information in context and are transparent about how reporters know what they know and don’t know and why. * Truth is more likely to emerge when you look at a story from different perspectives. Journalists do that by trying to include the voices of all involved. | SEPTEMBER 17  **R4: Verification: The process of establishing what really happened**  What's the difference between facts and truth?  Review the steps used in Anderson Cooper story to find the truth.  **News Quiz 3** |

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| **5. Week of September 21** |  |
| SEPTEMBER 22 **L4: But Is It True?**  **Part 2: Verification** — **How it works, and why it can fail**   * Journalists pursue the truth by following a ranking of direct evidence that places the greatest value on photographs and videos, documents and records, personal observations and witnesses. * Seeing isn't always believing. News outlets and consumers must also verify the authenticity of visual journalism. How news organizations and consumers evaluate still images and videos. * Assessing the value of polls, surveys and studies. Understanding the science of polling and evaluating reports of scientific breakthroughs. * The battle between journalism’s pursuit of the truth and digital-age business models: How the fight for page views, ratings and circulation can put journalistic values in peril. | SEPTEMBER24 **R5: Why verification is so difficult** Discussion: The problem with pursuing a "greater truth." Comparing classic examples of the journalistic process of verification breaking down — “Jimmy's World,” and the Rolling Stone's campus rape story.  The difference between inference and evidence: Watching the witch hunt sequence from "Monty Python and the Holy Grail."  **News Quiz 4** |
| **6. Week of September 28** |  |
| September 29 **L5: WHAT MAKES NEWS DIFFERENT?**  **Verification – Independence – Accountability**   * News is information of some public interest that is shared and subject to a journalistic process of **verification**, and for which an **independent** individual or organization is directly **accountable**. Those three attributes are represented in the acronym VIA, and all must be present to classify information as journalism. * Who is a journalist? Is “citizen journalism” really journalism? In a world where news consumers are also news producers, VIA becomes a litmus test. * Know your neighborhood. One of the keys to determining if information is reliable is being able to identify what it is: journalism, advertising, publicity, propaganda, entertainment or raw information. * The blurring of the lines between these information neighborhoods is one of the biggest challenges facing news consumers. * Understanding why advertising, promotion and propaganda pose as journalism. The tactic isn't new, but economic pressures are fueling the rise of “native advertising.” | OCTOBER 1 **R6:** **Know your neighborhood** Examine best examples from student homework.   Game: Where Am I? Class divides into teams and compete to be the first to identify to which information neighborhood a video or visual belongs.  **News Quiz 5** |
| **7. Week of October 5** |  |
| OCTOBER 6 **L6: FAIRNESS AND BALANCE**  **The pursuit of truth relies on journalists being fair -- especially to the facts**   * Responsible journalism aspires to being fair to all sides of a story and to the facts themselves. It requires fair presentation, language and treatment. * The selection and layout of Images in print and on websites can have an impact on and videos on balance and fairness. Editing and production techniques can do the same in video reports. * Though true objectivity may not be attainable, the journalistic discipline of impartiality is a key to achieving fairness. When journalists take sides, they blur or cross the line between news and opinion. * Beware of loaded language: The difference between description and characterization and what happens when news organizations adopt the language of partisans in a dispute. * Distinguishing between legitimate opinion journalism and mere assertion. Moynihan's maxim: "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts. | OCTOBER 8  **R7: Fair or foul?**  Class works in teams that compete to be the first to determine if a video or visual is fair or unfair and why.  The Keller-Greenwald debate: Who was right? Should reporters take sides in their quest for the truth?  **News Quiz 6** |
| **8. Week of October 12** |  |
| OCTOBER 13  **L7:** **WHO’S BIASED NOW?**  **Recognizing bias -- including your own**   * Defining bias: Bias is not an event -- it's a pattern of unfairness found in the coverage of a single news organization over time. * Three ways to spot bias: 1) Look for a pattern over time in a single news outlet's coverage. 2) Compare coverage of the same stories by other outlets. 3) Take note of the self-interest of those alleging bias. * Sometimes bias is institutional: Partisan news outlets operate on a business model rooted in taking sides and blurring the line between news and opinion. * Sometimes the perception of bias is rooted not in journalistic bias but in audience bias. News consumers who seek affirmation, not information, distrust or dismiss information that disagrees with their opinions or beliefs because that causes cognitive dissonance. * To avoid cognitive dissonance, news consumers seek out reports that confirm their opinions and beliefs and avoid that which does not. | OCTOBER 15 **R8: Media bias vs. audience bias** Students review issues of fairness and bias; discuss their responses to an Internet-based test of their own possible biases.  Media trust and confirmation bias: A look at the Pew studies showing how Republicans and Democrats began placing trust in different media outlets in recent years.  Stewart vs. Wallace: Watch a clip from Jon Stewart's discussion of media bias on Chris Wallace's Fox News show. Discuss students' impressions.  **News Quiz 7** |
| **9. Week of October 19** |  |
| OCTOBER 20 **L8: WHO DECIDES WHAT’S NEWSWORTHY?**  **Increasingly, you do — but here’s why some stories rise to the top of the news**   * Historically, news outlets have determined news value through a combination of four factors: Universal news drivers, editorial judgment, an understanding of their target audience and the news outlet's business model. * Universal News Drivers: Importance, Timeliness, Proximity, Magnitude, Prominence, Conflict, Human Interest, Change, Relevance, Unusualness. * Great images and compelling video drive story play. They’re powerful tools for verification, but can distract or influence the perceptions of news consumers and skew news judgment. * Increasingly, the audience determines newsworthiness. The rise of commenting, most-shared status, website algorithms and real-time analytics drive story selection and play online. * As more and more people get their news through social media, news aggregating sites and apps, savvy consumers should identify news outlets they can trust and depend on to curate the news. | OCTOBER22  **R9: You are the editor**  Groups of students make news judgments, factoring in market and business considerations, as they build their own front pages.  **News Quiz 8** |
| **10. Week of October 26** |  |
| OCTOBER 27 **L9: THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE**  **Part 1: The strengths and weaknesses of traditional news platforms**   * Newspapers and magazines still offer the most comprehensive coverage, but market forces, technological advances and demographic changes have dramatically reduced their resources and reach. * Radio has survived by maintaining an intimacy and immediacy and developing its own style of storytelling. * TV news is still the most powerful tool for following breaking news stories with compelling visuals, but it exists in an entertainment medium. | OCTOBER 29 **R10: Mid-Term Review** The News Literacy Game Show: Using a TV game show format, teams of students drill for next week's mid-term exam.  **News Quiz 9** |
| **11. Week of November 2** |  |
| NOVEMBER 3 **L10:** **THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE**  **Part 2 – An Election Day look at the power of new media**   * News websites and search engines have broadened the reach of news consumers while presenting them with new challenges — information overload, questions of authenticity and confirmation bias — in their pursuit of reliable information. A key lesson: Ranking on search engines does not necessarily indicate the reliability of a website or piece of information found online. * The explosion of social media and the evolution of the news consumer from observer to news producer have brought not only a powerful level of engagement but also the proliferation of misinformation. **Plus:** How social media has been used in modern election campaigns. | NOVEMBER 5 **R11: MID-TERM EXAM** |
| **12. Week of November 9** |  |
| NOVEMBER 10 **L11: SAYS WHO?**  **The technique of source evaluation**   * The first of three lectures introducing the concept of deconstructing a story to assess its reliability focuses on evaluating the strength of the sources of information a repor depends upon. * IMVAIN: News Literacy teaches students to evaluate news sources with a five-step test based on the idea that the most reliable sources are: 1) Independent, 2) Multiple, 3) Provide Verifiable information, 4) Authoritative or Informed and 5) Named. | NOVEMBER 12 **R12: How to deconstruct a story** Students practice deconstructing several news stories together. Class also reviews assignment dealing with the Washington Post story on Walter Reed Hospital.  **News Quiz 10** |
| **13. Week of November 16** |  |
| NOVEMBER 17  **L12: DECONSTRUCTING THE NEWS**  **Using News Literacy concepts to assess the evidence, thoroughness and fairness of a news report.**   * This 7-step deconstruction process uses News Literacy concepts to analyze and dispassionately judge a report's reliability.   1. Summarize the main points and then check if the headline and the lead support the main point(s) of the story?  2. How close does the reporter come to opening the freezer? Is the evidence direct or “arm’s-length?”  3. Evaluate the reliability of the sources using  IMVAIN.  4. Does the reporter make his or her work transparent?  5. Does the reporter place the story in context?  6. Are the key questions answered?  7. Is the story fair?   * Students apply the principles of deconstruction to all forms of traditional media including video and audio news stories. * For video news, we analyze a series of “winners” and “sinners” and how you can tell the difference. | NOVEMBER 19  **R13: How to Deconstruct Video Stories** Review of Electronic Wasteland video deconstruction exercise.  In-class deconstruction exercises using Deconstruction Handbook examples.  **Bonus News Quiz**: Extra credit opportunity for students who haven't missed one. |

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| **14. Week of November 23** |  |
| NOVEMBER 24  **L13: DECONSTRUCTING NEW MEDIA**  **Digital-age news platforms pose new challenges for news consumers who now are also news producers**   * This class looks at the new opportunities—and responsibilities—for news consumers to not only find news, but to participate as “citizen journalists” in news production in the digital age. * Students will discuss the multiple means by which they can now influence and even contribute to news coverage via the Web, texting and social media. * The IMVAIN technique should also be used to evaluate the trustworthiness of news websites and social media reports by identifying primary and authoritative sources of information*.* | NOVEMBER 26 **NO RECITATION** Happy Thanksgiving! |
| **15. Week of November 30** |  |
| DECEMBER 1 **L14: WHAT’S NEXT?**  **It’s really all about you** The final step in the deconstruction process is to conclude whether the news report is reliable enough to act upon. In the past, that was generally a personal choice about what to believe or do. Today, news consumers also are publishers with the added responsibility of deciding not only what to do, but what to share. | DECEMBER 3 **R14: Review and preparation for the final exam**  ***Final essay due in recitation*** |
| **16. December 14, 8 AM** |  |
| ***News Literacy Final Exam*** |  |

1. Dates and times subject to change. Watch “Announcements” section of Blackboard for updates. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)