COM 337 Fall 2025
Real News, Fake News: News Literacy
Tuesday & Thursday 9:30AM – 10:50AM
250 Newhouse 3

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Office Hours: In-person, Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30PM (I'll be there!)
         Zoom, by appointment (please make one!)[1]
         https://syracuseuniversity.zoom.us/j/4241743205

Course Description: Critical-thinking skills to distinguish news from other information, such as commentary and propaganda, and to judge quality of news and sources.

Additional Course Description: This course is part of a national initiative for news literacy. In today's media-saturated world, much of what we see, hear, and read is fake news – all sorts of information that pretends to be or is easily mistaken for real news. This course teaches News Literacy – how to tell the real news from the fake news. I will help you develop[2] critical-thinking skills to help you, the student, make essential distinctions among news, opinion, entertainment, publicity, and propaganda. I will aim to prepare you against the dangers of misinformation and manipulation. I will work to give you the intellectual foundation and the analytical tools to deconstruct news stories and to judge the reliability of news accounts, sources, and other information. Finally, I hope that our experiences in this course together will empower you to participate as credible, trustworthy publishers in the world of blogs, Twitter, Facebook, SnapChat, TikTok, YouTube, and more.

Special Note: This syllabus is adapted from and enriched by the News Literacy course and the National Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University and the News Literacy Project based in Washington, D.C. We gratefully acknowledge those contributions and thank those authors for permission to use their material.

Prerequisite: N/A
Audience: Sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Non-journalism majors.
Credits: 3.0

Learning Objectives[3]
By the end of this course students should be able to:
1. Identify the power of a free press and free information in a democracy, including the basic principles of the First Amendment's protections for free speech and a free press.
2. Distinguish among different kinds of information and media: news, commentary/opinion, advertising, publicity, entertainment, propaganda, persuasion, raw information.

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[1] Trying to set an inclusive and welcoming tone from the start.
[2] I added **welcoming syllabus language** that reframed the course in "I" and "you" terms, and discussing our experiences together.
[3] There were originally 12 learning objectives for this course; I condensed them to 6 to make **alignment** easier and clearer to students.

3. Discern how reporters' decisions and processes result in the characteristics of Real News: Verification, accountability, independence, multiple perspectives, impartiality.
4. Evaluate the reliability and accuracy of news stories and other information, and describe the value of a diversity of news sources in a healthy news diet.
5. Deconstruct news stories - from print, TV and the Web - to judge their reliability, recognize bias (in information and themselves), and determine independence and accuracy.
6. Use news and other information to participate in public life and democracy, including acting as credible, trustworthy publishers in the digital age.

ACEJMC Values and Competencies
As a member of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication the Newhouse School is committed to classroom and learning that achieves ACEJMC professional values and competencies. These include the core areas of freedom of speech, ethics, diversity, critical thinking, research, writing, and use of tools and technologies related to the field. For a full list of ACEJMC values and competencies, see http://www.acejmc.org/policies-process/principles/

People and Culture Principles
The Newhouse School practices inclusivity in student, faculty and staff populations in order to create an academic environment that embraces a diversity of thought and acceptance of all people regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation or societal, political, cultural, economic, spiritual or physical differences.

Wellness and Feedback:
You and I are humans and should treat each other as such. Please come to me with any and all concerns regarding your performance in the class or aspects of life outside of class that are interfering with your ability to engage, participate, and learn. I can only help you if I know what is going on. Syracuse has many resources to help students facing obstacles, and I can help steer your towards those as well.[4]

Within the course, I will include several opportunities for optional anonymous feedback. Please let me know what is and is not helpful, engaging, or interesting to you when these surveys are distributed.[5]

Texts / Supplies – Required:
There is one required textbook for this course.
- Kovach, Bill, and Tom Rosenstiel. 2021. *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect, Fourth Edition.* New York: Crown Publishers. (KR on syllabus)

Course Expectations and Requirements:

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[4] Students will expect **co-created course policies and community agreement** because of this section, which also emphasizes **awareness of wellness.**
[5] **Scheduled feedback** will be part of the course for the first time ever! Interested to see what they say and refer to these suggestions in future versions of the course.

My goal is to welcome everyone to the study of politics and journalism. Though many of you do not major in either of these areas, I hold the fundamental belief that everyone in the class is fully capable of engaging and mastering the material and using these lessons as they navigate the media environment and American democracy. Our classroom should be an inclusive space, where ideas, questions, and misconceptions can be discussed with respect. The relationship between politics, journalism, and truth is endlessly fascinating and constantly changing, and I look forward to navigating it alongside you this semester![6]

The assignments in this course are aligned with the ultimate goals of the course: understanding the importance of journalism in American society, discerning and evaluating what makes some information journalism (and other information not), and applying these skills to becoming better and more engaged citizens and participants in society.

Assignment	Description	Learning Objective addressed	Percent of grade
Engagement	Being present and active in class discussion and other relevant activities		20%
Discussion forum	Posting articles with short descriptions weekly and discussing in class		10%
Module 1 Assessment	Newsletter with information types		15%
Module 2 Assessment (Midterm)	Story approach breakdown		15%
Module 3 Assessment	Reflective essay on longform articles		15%
Final assignment (summative)	Creative, summative demonstration of value of journalism in civic life and society		25%

Engagement (20%): Each week, please attend class prepared to actively discuss, interpret, and connect current events with the assigned readings. We will have in-class collaborative activities that will be much more valuable for everyone if you are prepared. You will learn more if we can engage with these topics together! I will take attendance each class, and we will co-create and collectively agree to attendance policies in the first several weeks of the course.

This category includes at-home class preparation and active participation in group activities in class.[7] These activities and discussion techniques will vary by topic and module, but will include: acting as an editor to assemble a news product from among different information types, including news and opinion (Module 1); a mock press conference where students are divided into

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[6] This language is meant to emphasize the importance of **classroom climate** in a course that deals with controversial, charged topics around politics and journalism. It deserves extra emphasis **early in the course**, and we should agree as a class on how to deal with controversy.

[7] I changed the name of this section from "Attendance and Participation" to "Engagement," and added much more description of what we will do (and why it matters) using welcoming language. This is meant to signal that class **meetings will be student-centered**, with **multiple ways to show engagement with each other and the class material**.

reporters, editors, and communication staffers (Module 2); and assembling a "Reliable Sources"-type panel to perform media criticism (Module 3).[8]

Discussion forum (10%): This is where you can demonstrate your engagement with current events. You will each choose one of three policy areas: fiscal policy, immigration policy, or higher education policy, and be tasked with adding one article per week to the discussion board for your issue by Monday at 12PM. Please summarize each article in 5 sentences or fewer.

Module assessments: Each module will culminate in a summative assignment that encourages students to creatively apply the concepts from class, activities, and readings. Longer assignment descriptions will be distributed at the beginning of each module.[9]

Module 1 assessment (15%): Students will find several examples from various "information types" in their policy area of interest, and assemble a "newsletter"/Substack post from these stories to distribute to their classmates who are studying different issues. They will then solicit feedback from their classmates and write about what they've learned.

Module 2 assessment ("Midterm," 15%): Students will use the articles from the discussion forum in their topic area to describe how they would approach the reporting and writing of another story in that area. What important questions remained to be answered? Whom should they speak with? What standards would they hope to meet, and what compromises might need to be made?

Module 3 assessment (15%): Students will reflect on the journalistic and civic of several longer-form articles from the discussion forum in their topic area in an essay that relates the content of those articles to the evaluation concepts laid out in Kovach and Rosenstiel.

Final assignment (25%): The final assignment will be based upon the three previous Module assignments and require students to creatively demonstrate the value of journalism for civic life in an attention economy defined by near-infinite choice over quality and inferior information.

Grading

Grade	Value
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79

Grade	Value
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D	61-69
F	60 or Below

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[8] These brief descriptions of some expected class activities are examples of **in-class practice time** and **in-class peer-to-peer learning activities**, not a complete summary of in-class engagement activities.
[9] This section introduction is meant to show how the Module assignments are **scaffolded** by classes within the Module, and how the Module assignments lead to the final assignment.

Tentative Course Schedule
The guiding framework of the course will come from Kovach and Rosenstiel's *The Elements of Journalism* (KR on the syllabus). Since this is a course about the news, I will expect regular engagement with current events as well, from my posted articles to your classmates' posted articles in the discussion forum.

Current events readings will be **posted and available on Blackboard by 12PM Monday of each week**. The course schedule is subject to change at the instructor's discretion, though students will be informed in advance and an updated syllabus will be uploaded to Blackboard.

Week	Module	Topic	Learning Objective(s) Addressed
Week 1: 8/26, 8/28	1: Identifying Journalism	What is news literacy? Why does it matter? **KR ch. 1**	**1**
Week 2: 9/2, 9/4		Truth: The first principle; **KR ch. 2** The attention economy	**1, 2**
Week 3: 9/9, **9/11**		Fairness, balance, and bias: Information types No class 9/11 (instructor at conference)	**1, 2**
Week 4: 9/16, 9/18		News vs. opinion; **KR ch. 5** Opinion vs. (?) truth?	**2, 3, 4**
Week 5: 9/23, 9/25	2: Doing Journalism	What's newsworthy? Who decides? Module 1 assessment due 9/25	**4, 5**
Week 6: 9/30, 10/2		Fact-checking and verification; **KR ch. 4** Investigative journalism (PTFO)	**3, 4**
Week 7: 10/7, 10/9		Journalism as an organization/institution; **KR ch. 3** Managing and choosing sources Module 2 assessment ("Midterm") due 10/10	**3, 4**
Week 8: **10/14,** 10/16	3: Evaluating Journalism	No class 10/14, fall break Numeracy and science journalism	**1, 4**
Week 9: 10/21, 10/23		Engaging and relevant; **KR ch. 8** Comprehensive; **KR ch. 9**	**5**
Week 10: 10/28, 10/30		Conscience; **KR ch. 10** Responsibility	**1, 5**
Week 11: 11/4, 11/6	4: Using Journalism in Society	Journalism and governing; **KR ch. 6** Power	**6**
Week 12: 11/11, **11/13**		Journalism and politics No class 11/13: Module 3 assessment due	**6**
Week 13: 11/18, 11/20		Journalism as a public forum; **KR ch. 7** The civic role of audiences; **KR ch. 11**	**6**
Week 14: 11/25, 11/27		*Thanksgiving; no class*	
Week 15: 12/2, 12/4, 12/9		Constituent journalists Conclusion	**1, 6**
Final assignment		Due (TurnItIn) Thursday 12/11, 2:45 PM	**1 - 6**

Content and Respect

My goal is to build a classroom community that is focused on learning and growth, engages students in content that meets the course objectives, and fosters engagement and communication among all who share this space. In this class, we may discuss, read, or view materials that could result in emotional and psychological discomfort. The purpose of these materials is to encourage intellectual growth and inquiry about important issues. However, if your response to any materials becomes, or you anticipate that it may become, one that makes it difficult for you to learn and engage, please communicate with me so we can ensure your success in the class. In the first few weeks of the course, we will collaborate on a Community Agreement to set expectations for expression and respect.

<u>Course-Specific Policies</u>

Policy on Submitting Work

> Deadlines are important in journalism, and should be important to you as well. All assignments will be due on Fridays at 6PM (though not every Friday will have an assignment!). If you ask for an extension before Friday at 5PM, you can have until Monday at 11AM – no longer. If you do not email me before that time, you cannot receive an extension. Hopefully this can provide some flexibility for you while emphasizing the importance of asking for what you need. Any lateness beyond agreed-upon times and dates will result in a one-letter-grade reduction per every 24 hours the assignment is late (i.e., an A- becomes a B-, etc.)
>
> This class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system <u>Turnitin</u>. You will have the option to submit your papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you use have been properly acknowledged and cited before you submit the paper to me. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting the originality report. Keep in mind that all papers you submit for this class will become part of the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

Technology

> Individual recording of class sessions is not permitted without the informed agreement of the instructor. Distribution or public discussion of original course materials, or their content, is strictly prohibited.

Communication

> All students are required to check their syr.edu e-mail account regularly. I frequently communicate with students via email and Moodle, and not checking your email will not be an excuse for missing an assignment or reading. *I will try to reply to all e-mails within 24 hours on business days (M-F), and will not reply to e-mails sent after 5PM until the next business day.*

University Attendance Policy (including absence notification)

Attendance in classes is expected in all courses at Syracuse University. It is a federal requirement that faculty promptly notify the university of students who do not attend or cease to attend any class. Faculty will use Early-Semester Progress Reports and Mid-Semester Progress Reports in Orange SUccess to alert the Registrar and Financial Aid Office on non-attendance. For more information visit: Information for Students: Non-attendance or Stopped Attending. If a student is unable to participate in-person or virtually for an extended period of time (48 hours or more), the student may request an absence notification from their home school/college Dean's Office or through Student Outreach and Retention (SOaR) office. Instructors will be notified via the "Absence Notification" flag in Orange SUccess.

Barnes Center at the Arch (Health, Counseling, etc.) staff will not provide medical excuse notes for students. When Barnes Center staff determine it is medically necessary to remove a student from classes, they will coordinate with SOaR case management staff to provide appropriate notification to faculty through Orange Success. For absences lasting less than 48 hours, students are encouraged to discuss academic arrangements directly with their faculty.

Additional information may be found at Student Outreach and Retention: Absence Notifications Students should also review the University's religious observance policy and make the required arrangements at the beginning of each semester.

Syracuse University Policies: Syracuse University has a variety of other policies designed to guarantee that students live and study in a community respectful of their needs and those of fellow students. Some of the most important of these concern:

People and Culture policies (ensuring that students are aware of their rights and responsibilities in a diverse, inclusive, accessible, bias-free campus community) can be found here.

Religious Observances Notification and Policy (steps to follow to request accommodations for the observance of religious holidays) can be found here, at: https://policies.syr.edu/policies/university-governance-ethics-integrity-and-legal-compliance/religious-observances-policy/

Orange SUccess (tools to access a variety of SU resources, including ways to communicate with advisors and faculty members) can be found here, at: http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/

Disability-Related Accommodations: Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit Center for Disability Resources. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process. https://disabilityresources.syr.edu/

Academic Integrity
As a pre-eminent and inclusive student-focused research institution, Syracuse University considers academic integrity at the forefront of learning, serving as a core value and guiding pillar of education. Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy provides students with the necessary guidelines to complete academic work with integrity throughout their studies. Students are required to uphold both course-specific and university-wide academic integrity expectations such as crediting your sources, doing your own work, communicating honestly, and supporting academic integrity. The full Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy can be found by visiting class.syr.edu, selecting, "Academic Integrity," and "Expectations and Policy."

Upholding Academic Integrity includes the protection of faculty's intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or share instructors' course materials, including presentations, assignments, exams, or other evaluative materials without permission. Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others, which are then presented as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation. All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person assignments, quizzes, and exams also apply online.

Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered. Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

Artificial Intelligence
Based on the assignments in this course and our specified learning outcomes, the full use of artificial intelligence as a tool, with disclosure and citation, is permitted in this course. Students do not need to ask permission to use these tools before starting an assignment or exam, but they must explicitly and fully indicate which tools were used and describe how they were used by including the full prompt entered into the AI software to receive the assistance provided.

Additional Policies of Note

Pronouns/Names
Syracuse University encourages, but does not require, community members to share the pronouns they use for themselves. In My Slice "My Profile," all students may choose from a list of pronouns or designate "no pronouns" if they prefer only the use of their names. Students may also share a preferred name there. For information on designating personal pronouns and

preferred names, go to answers.syr.edu/PronounFAQ or answers.syr.edu/PreferredNameFAQ.

Discrimination or Harassment
Federal and state law, and University policy prohibit discrimination and harassment based on sex or gender (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, and retaliation). If a student has been harassed or assaulted, they can obtain confidential counseling support, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, from the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team at the Counseling Center (315-443-8000, Barnes Center at The Arch, 150 Sims Drive, Syracuse, New York 13244). Incidents of sexual violence or harassment can be reported non-confidentially to the University's Title IX Officer (Sheila Johnson Willis, 315-443-0211, titleix@syr.edu, 005 Steele Hall). Reports to law enforcement can be made to the University's Department of Public Safety (315-443-2224, 005 Sims Hall), the Syracuse Police Department (511 South State Street, Syracuse, New York, 911 in case of emergency or 315-435-3016 to speak with the Abused Persons Unit), or the State Police (844-845-7269). I will seek to keep information you share with me private to the greatest extent possible, but as a professor I have mandatory reporting responsibilities to share information regarding sexual misconduct, harassment, and crimes I learn about with the University's Title IX Officer to help make our campus a safer place for all.

Health and Wellness
Mental health and overall well-being are significant predictors of academic success. As such it is essential that during your college experience you develop the skills and resources effectively to navigate stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides (https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/) and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days, at 315-443-8000, and I encourage you to explore the resources available through the Wellness Leadership Institute, https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/wellness-leadership-institute/.