

COMM 109N

American News Media

OVERVIEW

The syllabus

What you need to know

This class surveys the history of the **American news media** – including perspectives on the origin of news, the professionalization of news gathering, and the situation of journalism amid literary styles, social forces, and national politics. We consider the evolving culture of journalism and its organization, the economics of news production, and the relationships between journalists and other social actors (such as government officials and social movements). We discuss debates about “**media bias**” and the notion of “**objectivity**.” We follow news coverage closely during the course, bringing our historical perspective to bear on current events in order to **evaluate and critique** news judgment practices. We conclude by considering the existing state of economic and conceptual flux of contemporary journalism and still-emerging digital methods of its production and delivery.

We will begin by digging up some theoretical roots of American journalism (e.g., Enlightenment concepts like the “public sphere”) before looking into how these were enshrined in the Constitution and continually recodified later. We’ll look at how news values developed & evolved through the practice & professionalization of news gathering. This will lead us into debates about objectivity, bias, and the motivations & effects of investigative journalism (from Watergate on!). We’ll follow the evolution of news into a hot market commodity, and the sensationalism this engenders in its makeup & impact. Then we’ll catch up journalism’s struggles in the present-day digital world, locating the good, the bad & the ugly news online.



How has the ecology of news media evolved, and how can we understand it better? That’s what this course explores!

LOGISTICS

Who, what, where & why

Instructors, contact info, and office hours

Teaching philosophy

My chief teaching goal is to prepare students not only to understand the world but to act within it – to **claim their own place, contribute, and affect positive change.**

I see my role as being a facilitator who provides perspectives, concepts and tools to help you get the most out of this exploration and to send you forth at the end of the term armed not just with a broader sanctioned perspective on how humans make and share meanings about the world but how *you yourself* participate in these ongoing processes, discourses, and games – and thus with a better idea of how you may manage that participation in order to seize your most active and enriching place in it.

Instructors & timing

Dr. Thomas Conner

tconner@ucsd.edu

(please include “COMM 109N” in the subject line!)
– *Office hours:* 10-11:30 a.m. Wednesdays via Zoom (link on Canvas) or by appointment)

TA: Olga Lazitski

olgalazitskaya@gmail.com

(please include “COMM 109N” in the subject line!)
– *Office hours:* 4-5 p.m. Mondays via Zoom (link on Canvas) or by appointment

Scheduled class time

5-7:50 p.m. Mondays & Wednesdays

Remote instruction via Canvas & Zoom

All online! Synchronous and asynchronous!
(See Course Modality, p. 2)

Course modality

Where to be & when

Our course will be conducted online via Canvas and Zoom – but some will be *synchronous* and some will be *asynchronous*. Find out which is which!

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Policies & grading

What you’ll do & earn

You’ll learn about the theoretical and practical history of media by completing quizzes, discussing in class & online, and working on projects.

Page 2

Assignment schedule

What you’ll read & watch

The material basis for our analysis includes the usual readings (both scholarly & journalism) plus podcasts, videos, movies & more!

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WHERE TO BE & WHEN

Course modality: All online!

Synchronous on Wednesdays, asynchronous on Mondays (except June 27)

This course is being taught remotely during the summer 2022 term. That means all instruction will occur online. In addition, we will divide our online work between synchronous & asynchronous tasks.

WE WILL MEET SYNCHRONOUSLY DURING OUR SCHEDULED CLASS TIME ON WEDNESDAYS ONLY (except the first meeting on Monday, June 27).

During these sessions, conducted via Zoom, we will discuss the week’s readings. I will lecture a bit based on the week’s theme, and we will breakout into smaller groups for further discussion and/or an in-class activity. Sometimes we will watch some video or look at other multimedia materials together for discussion and elaboration.

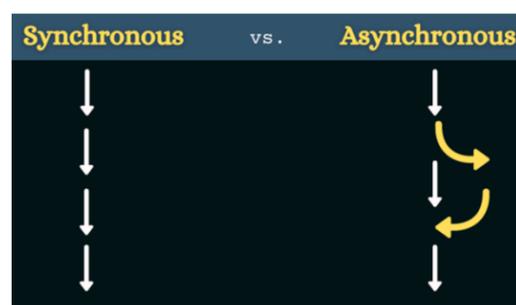
WE WILL NOT MEET SYNCHRONOUSLY DURING OUR SCHEDULED CLASS TIME ON MONDAYS (except the first meeting on Monday, June 27).

Instead, you may use this allotted time to start the week’s asynchronous tasks. Most weeks, this will involve the following:

- Watching or reading additional material, then **participating in a Discussions thread** on Canvas, reacting to/analyzing that material in light of the week’s theme.
- Three of the five weeks include **the Media Watch assignment**, in which you will select and analyze a report from current news media.
- By week’s end, completing a **weekly quiz** (usually five multiple-choice or true-false questions based on the readings and lecture).

So: we’ll be together on Zoom each **Wednesday from 5 to 7:50 p.m.** (not an ideal timeslot, I know, but it’s what we’ve been dealt). The Zoom link is on our Canvas page.

Then, **the three hours allotted to Mondays may be utilized at your discretion, as long as the corresponding assignment deadlines are met.**



All digital roads lead to Rome, as it were.



STUDENT-TEACHER PACT

Course conduct & trust

What I expect of you: You can expect of us:

- Read & watch all assigned texts**
Take in the ideas carefully & deliberately.
- Engage with the material**
Don’t just “read over” a text. Engage, apply it to life, bring us ideas & questions.
- Attend & participate**
Zoom: be visible & vocal.
Discussions: post & respond to others.
- Monitor comms**
Check email/Canvas daily!
- Be courteous to all**
Read and abide by the conduct and anti-racist pedagogy statements on Canvas.
- Be flexible**
Things change, stuff happens. Ride the waves. It’ll all work out.

- Orientation**
All will be explained clearly as possible.
- Interaction & responsiveness**
Ask questions & we will answer. Speak up & you’ll be heard.
- Enthusiasm**
We’ll be prepared & invigorated. You put in the effort, as will we.
- Regular communication**
Weekly announcements & reminders.
- Respect for all**
These statements aren’t just for you; we abide by them, too.
- Reasonable accommodation**
Stuff happens. We’ll work with you the best we can. It’ll all work out.

GRADING

Points, scales, rubrics

How you’ll be evaluated

The assignments in this class are interlinked and designed to help you see connections between course readings, media material, and the real world. I understand that grades are important, and I will do everything I can to support you in meeting your goals. Ultimately, however, I hope that you work hard because you care about your personal growth.

Grading breakdown:

- **Engagement** (attendance & participation): **100 points**
- **Weekly quizzes** (50 points each x 4): **200 points**
- **Weekly Discussions** (50 points each x 5): **250 points**
- **Media Watch** (50 points each x 3): **150 points**
- **Final exam**: **300 points**

TOTAL possible: 1,000 points

Letter-grade scale:

97-100% A+ / 94-96% A / 90-93% A-
87-89% B+ / 84-86% B / 80-83% B-
77-79% C+ / 74-76% C / 70-73% C-
67-69% D+ / 64-66% D / 60-63% D-
59% & below F



“This is a Muppet news flash!” The Newsman was a regular character on *The Muppet Show* (1976-1981), delivering humorous news reports from Muppet News Central.

THE SCHEDULE: Texts & assignments

Here’s everything you’ll read & do this summer

*This schedule is available as a separate Canvas page and – given life at the present moment – subject to tweaks, changes, and general upheaval. **Pay attention to course updates & announcements, and please be flexible & understanding.** You will always have a week’s notice before any changes to assigned reading. (This PDF will not be updated; the Canvas page always will contain the current schedule & assignment information.)*

Week 1: What is news? Sharing & shaping public opinion

Assigned texts:

Conceptual origins

– PDF: **Michael Schudson**, “Defining Journalism” & “Where News Came From: The History of Journalism” (from *The Sociology of News*, 2003). [Read all; 31 pgs]

– PDF: **The Hutchins Commission**, “The Requirements” (from *A Free and Responsible Press*, 1947). [Read all; 4 pgs]

Foundational history

– PDF: **Anthony R. Fellow**, “The Press and the Founding of a Nation” (from *American Media History*, 2013). [Read all, but can skip the profile boxes; 18 pgs]

– Podcast: “Founding Propagandists,” <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/128716-founding-propagandists> (On the Media, 2006). [12.5 mins]

– Blog: **Malea Walker**, “Honoring African American Contributions: The Newspapers,” <https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2020/07/honoring-african-american-contributions-the-newspapers/> (Library of Congress, 2020)

Featured viewing:

– Video: “The Fourth Estate: The First 100 Days” (s1ep1, Showtime, 2018). [on Course Reserves; 1 hr 23 mins]

Monday, June 27: synchronous session:

– Review syllabus & course policies

Wednesday, June 29: synchronous session:

– Introduce concepts of public debate & early press history in America

– In-class activity

Week 1 assignments:

- Post and comment to Discussions thread #1 (due: 3 p.m. PST Friday)
- Complete Quiz #1 (due: 9 a.m. PST Friday)
- Complete MediaWatch #1 (due: 5 p.m. PST Sunday)

Week 2: Workaday ideals: Professionalization & routines of newsmaking

Assigned texts:

Professionalization & organization

- PDF: John Nerone & Kevin G. Barnhurst, “U.S. newspaper types, the newsroom, and the division of labor, 1750–2000,” *Journalism Studies* (4) 4, 2003: 435-449. [Read all; 14 pgs]
- PDF Wolfgang Donsbach, “Journalists and Their Professional Identities” (from *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, 2010). [Read all; 10 pgs]

Values

- PDF: Herbert J. Gans, “Values in the News” (from *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*, 1979). [Read first 3 pgs, then skim the rest; 31 pgs total]
- Podcast: “Going Viral, Antebellum Style,” <https://www.wnyc.org/story/going-viral-antebellum-style/> (On The Media, 2013). [5 mins]

Objectivity

- PDF: Michael Schudson, “The Ideal of Objectivity” (from *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*, 1978). [Read all; 8 pgs]
- Online article: Wesley Lowery, “A Reckoning over Objectivity, Led by Black Journalists,” *The New York Times*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/opinion/objectivity-black-journalists-coronavirus.html>.

Against objectivity

- PDF: Mitchell Stephens, “‘Much as One May Try to Disappear From the Work’: The Argument Against Objectivity” (from *Beyond News: The Future of Journalism*, 2013). [Lightly read all; 24 pgs]
- PDF: Tom Wolfe, “The Birth of ‘The New Journalism’” (*New York*, Feb. 14, 1972). [Read all; 20 pgs]
- Video: “Gay Talese and the art of ‘New Journalism,’” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJ1WRbRjcpE> (CBS, 2017). [7.5 mins]
 - (Optional online article: Gay Talese, “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold,” *Esquire* (1966/2016), <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a638/frank-sinatra-has-a-cold-gay-talese/>.)
- Video: “Unconventional journalists: Wolfe, Kanafani and García Márquez,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DMz57wsSl8> (The Listening Post, 2021). [26 mins]

(Monday – July 4 holiday)

Tuesday, July 5

- Watch: Week 2 Mini-Lecture

Wednesday, July 6: synchronous session:

- Overview of news organization structures & functions
- Review & discussion of news values (for journalists, for readers)
- Discussion & debate about objectivity as an operational ideal
- In-class activity

Week 2 assignments:

- Complete Quiz #2 (due: 9 a.m. PST Friday)
- Post and comment to Discussions thread #2 (due: 3 p.m. PST Friday)
- (NO MediaWatch this week)

Week 3: Crisis coverage, investigations & moral crusading

Assigned texts:

- PDF: Anthony R. Fellow, “The Media and National Crises” (from *American Media History*, 2013). [Lightly read all, but can skip the profile boxes; 38 pgs]
- PDF: James S. Ettema & Theodore L. Glasser, “Introduction: The Reporter’s Craft as Moral Discourse” (from *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue*, 1998). [Read all; 15 pgs]
- PDF: Donald Matheson, “The Watchdog’s New Bark: Changing Forms of Investigative Reporting” (from *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, 2010). [Read all; 9 pgs]
- PDF: Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, “Violence, Stereotypes and African Americans in the News” (from *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 2001). [Read all; 16 pgs]
- Video: “Freedom of the Press: New York Times v. United States,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnp0YfaKnIA&t=1s> (Annenberg Classroom, 2018). [25 mins]
- Online article: Watergate explainer, <https://www.vox.com/2014/8/7/5970967/what-was-watergate-scandal-nixon> (Vox, 2019).

Familiarize yourself with current investigative journalism by browsing some of these sites (or suggest others):

- ProPublica: <https://www.propublica.org/>
- The Center for Public Integrity: <https://publicintegrity.org/>
- Investigating Power: <http://www.investigatingpower.org/>
- Reveal (Center for Investigative Reporting): <https://revealnews.org/>
- PBS *Frontline*: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/>

Featured viewing:

- Watch “Investigative Reporting: The Righteous Lens” (Columbia, 2006). [on Course Reserves; 30 mins]
- Watch: “All the President’s Men” (Warner Bros., 1976). [on Course Reserves; 2 hrs 18 mins]

Monday, July 11

- Watch: Week 3 Mini-Lecture

Wednesday, July 13: synchronous session:

- Overview of purposes & strategies of in-depth news investigations
- Survey of relevant journalism law
- In-class activity

Week 3 assignments:

- Post and comment to Discussions thread #3 (due: 3 p.m. PST Friday)
- Complete Quiz #3 (due: 9 a.m. PST Friday)
- Complete MediaWatch #2 (due: 5 p.m. PST Sunday)

Week 4: News as commodity & entertainment

Assigned texts:

Commodification of news

- PDF: Michael Schudson, “News in the Marketplace” (from *The Sociology of News*, 2003). [Read all; 17 pgs]
- PDF: John H. McManus, “Commodification of News” (from *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*, 2019). [Read all; 5 pgs]

Tabloids & infotainment

- PDF: Reece Peck, “Channeling America’s ‘Tabloid Soul’: How Rupert Murdoch, Roger Ailes and Bill O’Reilly Remade Television News” (from *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class*, 2019). [Read first 5 pgs, then rest lightly; 45 pgs total]
- PDF: Nikki Usher, “News For (and by) the Rich and White” (from *News for the Rich, White and Blue: How Place and Power Distort American Journalism*, 2021). [Read all; 25 pgs]
- PDF: Daya Kishan Thussu, “The Evolution of Infotainment” (from *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*, 2007). [Read all; 17 pgs]

Featured viewing:

- Watch “Feeding the Beast” (ABC News, 2004). [on Course Reserves; 22 mins]
- Watch “Outfoxed : Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism” (TDC, 2004). [on Course Reserves; 1 hr 17 mins]
- (Optional extra: Watch “Filmmaker Errol Morris on Donald Rumsfeld and Evidence-based Journalism” (Reason, 2014). [on Course Reserves; 41 mins]

Monday, July 18

- Watch: Week 4 Mini-Lecture

Wednesday, July 20: synchronous session:

- Overview of news as commodity, impacts of marketplace on journalism
- Discussion & debate of cable TV outlets and 24/7 news cycle
- Watching portions of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*
- In-class activity

Week 4 assignments:

- Post and comment to Discussions thread #4 (due: 3 p.m. PST Friday)
- Complete Quiz #4 (due: 9 a.m. PST Friday)
- Complete MediaWatch #3 (due: 5 p.m. PST Sunday)

Week 5: New models & practices in the digital era

Assigned texts:

Journalism transitions to digital

- PDF: Anthony R. Fellow, “The Internet Revolution and the Information Explosion” (from *American Media History*, 2013). [Read all, but can skip the profile boxes; 24 pgs]
- PDF: Ángel Arrese, “From gratis to paywalls: A brief history of a retro-innovation in the press’s business,” *Journalism Studies* 17 (8), 2015: 1051-1067. [Read all; 13 pgs]
- Podcast: “The Future History of the Newspaper Industry,” <https://www.wnyc.org/story/future-history-of-newspaper-industry/> (On the media, 2014). [5 mins]

New models & practices

- PDF: Miguel Carvajal, José A. García-Avilés, and José L. González, “Crowdfunding and non-profit media: The emergence of new models for public interest journalism,” *Journalism Practice* 6 (5-6), 2012: 638-647. [Read all; 8 pgs]
- Podcast: “How Will Journalism Keep the Lights On?” <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/292662-how-will-journalism-keep-lights> (On The Media, 2013). [12.5 mins]
- Video: “The Impact of Twitter on Journalism,” <https://www.pbs.org/video/-book-impact-twitter-journalism/> (PBS, 2012). [5 mins]

Featured viewing:

- Watch “That’s news to me : transformation of journalism in a wired society” (Lancaster, 2009). [on Course Reserves; 28 mins]
- Watch “Breaking the Wall to True Press Freedom, How Open Journalism Saves Publishing in the Digital Age” (Falling Walls, 2014). [on Course Reserves; 15 mins]

Monday, July 25

- Watch: Week 5 Mini-Lecture

Wednesday, July 27: synchronous session:

- History of journalism transitioning into digital contexts
- In-class activity
- Summations & farewells

Week 5 assignments:

- Post and comment to Discussions thread #5 (**due:** 3 p.m. PST Friday)
- (NO quiz this week!)
- (NO MediaWatch this week!)

Final exam

The final exam will be conducted on Canvas. It will consist of several multiple-choice and true/false questions, plus one essay. You will receive the essay question in advance.

The exam will be open for several hours on July 29, closing by 9:59 p.m. *Full details to come.*



THE FINAL WORD

Academic integrity

You're brilliant! So make sure your work is *yours*



These paths are always before us. Choose wisely!

You are required to observe university regulations regarding academic integrity.

This means no student shall engage in any activity that involves attempting to receive a grade by means other than honest effort.

For example:

- No student shall knowingly procure, provide, or accept any unauthorized material that contains questions or answers to any examination or assignment to be given at a subsequent time.
- No student shall complete, in part or in total, any examination or assignment for another person.

- No student shall knowingly allow any examination or assignment to be completed, in part or in total, for himself or herself by another person.
- No student shall plagiarize or copy the work of another person and submit it as his or her own work.
- No student shall employ aids excluded by the instructor in undertaking course work or in completing any exam or assignment.
- No student shall alter graded class assignments or examinations and then resubmit them for regrading.
- No student shall submit substantially the same material in more than one course without prior authorization.

These are all serious academic offenses, and committing them opens you to world of bureaucratic trauma and lingering future penalties (both academic *and* professional). The university has strict rules and severe punishments for plagiarism and cheating. These will not be waived under any circumstances.

If you have the slightest question about these parameters, ask your instructors — asking is not an offense, committing the acts above is — or contact the UCSD Office of Academic Integrity, <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/>.

Just remember: If you weren't capable of doing the work, you wouldn't be here. Don't blow it.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Thomas Conner

A journalist teaching journalism

With more than two decades of daily journalism experience, Thomas Conner brings an informed & practical perspective to this course. Most recently a cultural columnist at the Chicago Sun-Times, Dr. Conner has covered local and national politics, but for the bulk of his career he worked as a pop-music critic and features editor. His work has appeared in The Washington Post, Down Beat, and more. Learn more about him at thomasconner.info.



YOUR TA

Olga Lazitski

Likewise, your teaching assistant, Olga

Lazitski, is also a practicing journalist and media-studies scholar, studying the all-too-timely topics of prodganda & populism in the current "post-truth" era. Ask her about "*endarkenment*"!



Let's have a great & productive summer!

You've got this! You'll do great! We'll help!