

School of Journalism  
Center for News Literacy  
*JRN 101-B*                      *Spring 2009*                      *JRN 103-G*

*Lecture Section* \_\_\_\_\_

*Recitation Section* \_\_\_\_\_

*Day and Time* \_\_\_\_\_

*Day and Time* \_\_\_\_\_

*Location* \_\_\_\_\_

*Location* \_\_\_\_\_

*Lecturer's name* \_\_\_\_\_

*Instructor's name* \_\_\_\_\_

*Instructor's phone* \_\_\_\_\_

*Instructor's email* \_\_\_\_\_

*Office hours: By appointment*

**I. Purpose of the course:**

This course is designed to teach students how to become more discriminating news consumers at a time when the digital revolution is spawning an unprecedented flood of information and disinformation each day. The course will seek to help students recognize the differences between news and propaganda, news and opinion, bias and fairness, assertion and verification and evidence and inference in news articles and broadcast reports. It seeks to teach students how to apply their critical-thinking skills to these goals so they can act on reliable information. As part of their instruction, students also will learn how the journalistic process works and how professional journalists make decisions.

**II. Required texts and materials:**

- News Literacy Textbook, available only at the campus bookstore
  - “The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect,” Kovach and Rosenstiel, Three Rivers Press, New York.
  - Virtual Course Reader (posted on Blackboard)
  - A 3-ring binder for notes, handouts and material you will print from Blackboard. Please bring the binder to every class.
- Students also will use the following Web sites:
- Committee to Protect Journalists: [www.cpj.org](http://www.cpj.org)
  - Pew Research Center for the People and the Press: [www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org)
  - Poynter Online: [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)

**III. Other requirements and recommendations:**

Students are required to keep up with news events on a timely basis. You are encouraged to subscribe to a daily newspaper (student discounts are available for the New York Times) and routinely monitor broadcast and online news. You will be required to set

your home page to a news site of your choosing for the remainder of the semester. You also will be required to keep a News Log examining specific broadcast news reports, newspaper articles and news Web sites. The News Log format will be distributed early in the semester. You also will be required to participate in at least one “news blog.”

#### **IV. Course Requirements:**

##### **1. Prerequisites:** none

**2. Attendance:** If circumstances prevent your attending class, the instructor should be informed by phone or e-mail. Three unexcused absences will result in a loss of a half-letter grade. Each subsequent absence will result in the loss of an additional half-letter grade. Consistent tardiness also will result in a reduced final grade.

**3. Blackboard:** There is a Blackboard account for this course. Check daily for announcements at <http://blackboard.sunysb.edu>. If you have not done so already, you must set up a Blackboard account. Please note that your NetID expires every six months and must be renewed in order to use Blackboard. In addition, please verify your email address on Blackboard. For help, call 631-632-9602, or see: <http://www.sinc.sunysb.edu/helpdesk/docs/blackboard/bbstudent.php>.

**4. 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.ehs.sunysb.edu> and search Fire safety and Evacuation and Disabilities.

**5. Deadlines:** All work is due on time. **Late work turned in within one week will lose a grade and result in an F or 0 thereafter.**

**6. Assignments:** You will have weekly assignments. Some may be selections of readings to help you prepare for an upcoming class or to supplement material from a lecture. Others may involve writing that, in most cases, first require you to do research, additional reading, or evaluate a news report. Students will also be required to watch the movie “Shattered Glass” outside of class; multiple screenings will be scheduled on campus.

You are required to check the assignments folder on Blackboard at least twice a week. There you’ll find directions for each assignment and where to find the readings, the day that your work is due and electronic templates for written assignments.

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. If your lecturer and recitation instructor are not the same person, contact only your recitation instructor with questions about an assignment. Work will be **COLLECTED at lectures and recitations, and RETURNED at the recitations.**

All essays must be typed and double-spaced. Handwritten or single-spaced submissions may not be accepted. Remember to include your name and recitation section number at the top of the first page and to staple all pages together.

You will be graded in part on how well you articulate an understanding of the course material and how you express your own ideas. As a result, your grade may depend on your ability to write with clarity and logic. If you need assistance, make an appointment at the university's Writing Center, in Humanities room 2009 (phone 632-7405). The tutors there can help you draft your assignments and offer general instruction on effective writing techniques.

The weekly assignments will represent 40 percent of your final grade. Individual assignments will be graded according to the following standards:

Superior: dramatically surpasses the requirements, well written, demonstrates additional insights or research	max. 4 points
Good: exceeds requirements, written clearly and logically	max. 3 points
Satisfactory: meets requirements, expresses ideas in a manner that can be understood	max. 2 points
Poor: does not meet requirements, confusing or unclear, sloppy	max. 1 point
Failed to hand in: no credit	0 points

You won't earn more points by writing a longer assignment. Comply with the directions for word length, write succinctly, stay relevant, and *always provide specific examples or evidence to support your argument*.

**7.Extra Credit** During the course of the semester, the School of Journalism will present a series of special evening programs called "My Life As..." Noteworthy journalists will be speaking about their experiences. Students who sign the attendance sheet with their name and recitation section numbers will receive two extra homework points for each lecture they attend. The "My Life As..." programs are usually at 8:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday evenings.

During the semester, you will have additional opportunities to earn extra credit. Those points will also be applied to the homework portion of your final grade. Students may earn a maximum of six extra credit points.

**8. Plagiarism and cheating:** Any form of plagiarism or cheating will result in a failing grade. 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 the Academic Judiciary Web site at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/CAS/ajc.nsf>.

**9. Disruptive Behavior:** “The University at 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.”

**V. Grades:** Final grades are weighted as follows:

Class assignments:	40 per cent
Tests (2):	20 per cent
Final Exam:	30 per cent
News quizzes	5 per cent
Participation:	5 per cent

For the purposes of this course, grades will be based on the following:

- "A" work is superior; dramatically surpasses minimum requirements
- "B" work is good; exceeds minimum requirements
- "C" work is satisfactory; meets minimum requirements
- "D" work is poor; does not meet minimum requirements

## **VI. Class Schedule:**

### **Week of January 26**

#### **Lecture 1: Why News Literacy Matters: From Johann to Jon**

An introduction and overview of the course, highlighted by a multi-media show of coming attractions, including examples of timely print and broadcast stories that illustrate why news literacy matters to students – and society. We define “the news media,” discuss the numbers, range and scope of American news media outlets and put the course in the context of the accelerating communications revolution, ranging from Johann Gutenberg to Jon Stewart. Students leave this class with an understanding of the course’s goals and the core definition of News Literacy: The ability to judge the credibility and reliability of news reports –and why that matters to them.

#### **Recitation 1: What the Public Thinks of the News Media and Why**

Students discuss their “news blackout” experiences. Class focuses on where and how students get their news, with discussion of which news sources the students will use during the semester. How do students view of 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? Students fill out a news questionnaire.

**Week of Feb.2:****Lecture 2: The Power of Information**

We explore the universal need to receive and share information and the function news has played in every recorded society: To alert, to connect and to divert. Paying attention to disaster and celebrity stories – even dog stories – is embedded deeply in our DNA. We examine the role technology has played in amplifying information – from smoke signals to television – and how this also has enabled the sender to control the news. This leads to a broader discussion of how information is power and why there is a global battle for information control. Students leave this class with a clear understanding of why there is a need for a free flow of information and why some people are willing to kill (and journalists are willing to die) in the battle to control information..

**Recitation 2: The Battle over Information**

The class examines China as a case study in the struggle for information control. What is the conflict in China really about? What is the difference between news and propaganda? Are executives with Google or Yahoo right in agreeing to operate within China’s designated rules? What does the law say about propaganda in the United States? Why do governments try to control news? Does the United States government try to control news? The class ends with an introduction to other categories of information beyond news and propaganda.

**Week of February 9:****Lecture 3: Know Your Neighborhood – What Makes Journalism Different.**

What makes journalism different from other kinds of information? The first rule for a smart news consumer is this: Always know what information “neighborhood” you’re in. This lecture explores the differences between news, propaganda, publicity, advertising, entertainment and raw information? Students begin work on an Information Grid that defines these “neighborhoods.” In the journalism neighborhood, a news consumer should always find three key values: verification, independence and accountability. But the lines on the grid are blurring, often by design, and it’s easy to be deceived as to what journalism is and who is a journalist. The class watches Video News Releases, war “coverage” on YouTube and Jon Stewart.

**Recitation 3: The Blurring of the Lines**

Together, students complete and review the Information Grid. Students debate whether Jon Stewart is a journalist and whether a consumer can find reliable news reports on YouTube.

**Week of February 16****Lecture 4: The Mission of the American Press**

This class looks at the philosophical and practical underpinnings of a free press in America and the ongoing tension in a democracy between the press and the government. We examine the First Amendment and what freedom of the press really means, looking at landmark Supreme Court cases (*Near vs. Minnesota*, *Pentagon Papers* and others). We examine the role of the press in wartime, issues of censorship and press responsibility and the role of the press as a “watchdog.”

#### **Recitation 4: The New York Times and National Security**

Case study: Did The New York Times act responsibly or commit treason in disclosing Operation Swift? Students debate which principle takes precedence: national security or the public's right to know. They conduct a mock trial of the Times' reporters.

#### **Week of Feb. 23**

##### **Lecture 5: What is News and Who Decides?**

What makes some information news? This class examines news drivers, news values and how the news process works. What is the decision-making process that determines whether a story gets published or broadcast? Who decides? How do editors balance the interesting and the important? What is "news play," or presentation, and why does it matter? What is proportionality? What is sensationalism? Are news decisions driven by the profit motive or social responsibility or some combination of the two? Students examine the question of whether there is too much bad news?

##### **Recitation 5: You Be the Editor**

Students decide what to put on the front page of the "*SB World*." After an examination of the types of issues editors must deal with every day, students break into small news meetings and plan the front page of a campus newspaper.

#### **Week of March 2**

##### **Lecture 6: Opinion: The License to Kill**

What is the difference between news and opinion within the journalism neighborhood and why are the lines blurring so rapidly? How can you differentiate news from opinion in a newspaper, on television, on the Internet? What is a columnist? A commentator? Are bloggers journalists? Is Keith Obermann presenting news or opinion? How can a news consumer identify the difference? And why does it matter.

##### **Recitation 6: The License to Kill / Part 2.**

###### **Test #1**

Students review the differences between news and opinion using their assignments as examples. A discussion on the importance of paying attention to labels. How do newspaper editorials and endorsements work? Would we be better off without any opinion?

#### **Week of March 9**

##### **Lecture 7: Truth and Verification: What is Journalistic truth? How do journalists verify information?/**

What do journalists mean by "truth"? How does journalistic truth differ from philosophical truth, or scientific truth? What standards do journalists use to try to verify information? This class explores the pursuit of journalistic "truth" and the verification process. What makes some news sources reliable and others unreliable? What are the differences between direct and indirect evidence, assertion and verification, evidence and inference. How news consumers can assess journalistic evidence and why the verification process break down. A look at news coverage of Hurricane Katrina and how it relates to themes in the lecture.

**Recitation 7: How journalists verify information.**

Case study: Anderson Cooper's reporting about the tsunami. Students identify key factors in the verification process. Class also reviews the difference between assertion and verification and how separating the two can help news consumers by examining the Sean Bell shooting story.

**Week of March 16****Lecture 8: Fairness and Bias.**

This class explores one of the most controversial and contentious issues surrounding the press. Is the news media fair and balanced? What do those terms mean? How can a news consumer tell? What is bias? What's the difference between *media* bias and *audience* bias?

**Recitation 8: Exploring Fairness and Bias: Case Studies**

A discussion of the issues of fairness and bias. Students divide into groups and examine whether stories are fair. Students also discuss their responses to an Internet-based test of their own possible biases.

**Week of March 23****Lecture 9: Who Owns the Media and Why It Matters**

From Ben Franklin to Rupert Murdoch, American media outlets have always been driven by both profit and public service. How has the business of the news media evolved and why should we care? Is concentration of media ownership bad for democracy? Does it raise any questions of fairness or bias? How do the sweeping changes and economic problems in the news industry today affect the quality of journalism? Will new digital models and technologies make it more difficult—or easier-- to be a critical news consumer? Will the changes make the news media more democratic, or less? What are the prospects for the future?

**Recitation 9: Economic Stories and the Use and Misuse of Numbers.**

A look at how news consumers should assess stories on business and economics. How statistics can be used and misused by journalists, and how a savvy news consumer can tell when the numbers in stories really add up. This class unfolds to the backdrop of the current economic crisis.

**Week of March 30****Lecture 10: How Can You Tell If You Are Getting the Truth from the News Media?**

This key class examines how to “deconstruct” news stories to judge their credibility and reliability by asking a series of key questions. The class reprises previous classes on evidence, sourcing, and fairness, but also explores context, transparency and thoroughness.

**Recitation 10: How to Deconstruct a Story, Part II**

Students practice deconstructing several news stories together. Class also reviews assignment dealing with Washington Post story on Walter Reed Hospital.

**Week of April 7 SPRING BREAK**

**Week of April 14****Lecture 11: The Power of Images**

For the past 150 years American news consumers have been getting their news not only from text, but powerful visual images, a trend that has rapidly accelerated in recent years. This class explores the power of news images to inform, move and verify, but also manipulate and offend, from photojournalism to TV and the Web. What are the special strengths of visual journalism? What are the potential pitfalls for news consumers? Is a picture really worth a 1,000 words? What makes TV news different from other kinds of news? What special challenges does new digital technology that can alter images pose for news consumers?

**Recitation 11: Radio: The Forgotten Medium.****TEST 2.**

A look at news on the radio.

**Week of April 21:****Lecture 12: Deconstructing TV News**

Students apply the principles of deconstruction to TV news stories. Guest lecturer Marcy McGinnis presents and analyzes a series of “winners” and “sinners” and how you can tell the difference.

**Recitation 12: The Internet: A Blessing or a Curse?**

A discussion of the revolutionary changes the Internet has spawned and the potential positive and negative consequences for news consumers. This is in advance of our next lecture on the Internet. Students also review an assignment deconstructing a major TV news story.

**Week of April 28:****Lecture 13: News on the Net**

This class examines the special challenges and opportunities for news consumers navigating the net: the potential for unprecedented sources of information, but also the potential to be deceived. A hands-on class on how to evaluate news Web sites, online stories, blogs and sources to avoid deception and maximize the Internet’s advantages.

**Recitation 13: What do ethics have to do with it, anyway?**

Self-censorship, when and why the news media withhold information, the First Amendment vs. the right to a fair trial or the right to privacy. How do these affect content and credibility? Students break into groups and examine a series of ethical case studies and “make the calls.”

**Week of May 4:****Lecture 14: We’re All News Consumers and *Publishers* in the Digital Age**

This class looks at the new opportunities—and responsibilities—for news consumers in the Digital Age given the growing proliferation of viral news, e-mails, tweets and “citizen journalists.” What standards should students use before they forward an e-mail or contribute to a news account? The class also reprises the top lessons for smart news consumers and

looks at what the public should expect from the news media. Finally, the class prepares students for the portion of the final exam that involves deconstructing TV stories.

**Recitation 14:**

Practicing for the final.