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### Research in the Digital Age

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*CUNY City College*

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# Research in the Digital Age: Media and Information Literacy

Professor Sarah Cohn  
scohn@ccny.cuny.edu  
Office hours: by appointment

Tuesday & Thursdays  
11am-12:15pm  
NAC 1/301 Z

This course is a zero textbook cost (ZTC) course. All readings will be available either on Blackboard or through the CCNY Libraries.

This course is activity & discussion based; you will be expected to come to class with the readings and assignments for the day completed, ready to actively engage with your classmates on the topics at hand.

## Course Description

Expanding beyond the ability to read and write, there are multiple types of literacy needed to be a successful citizen. In a media-saturated world, these expanded literacies are necessary to understanding and changing the world. Throughout the course, students will think and write critically about information and media in order to better understand and critique our current information environment, in which we all are hoped, assumed, and constructed to be passive consumers. Beyond news media, we will explore how information is created, saved, described, and accessed through institutions like libraries and archives. We will examine the ethics of information use and determine how to critically evaluate sources, and how to leverage the tools at our disposal to discover information in support of academic and personal research.

## Course Goals & Learning Outcomes

### Course Goals

- To introduce you to the theory and practice of the contemporary information, media, and research landscape, including
- Cultural, economic and political factors that affect information and media
- Developing methods for finding information that is relevant to you
- Critically evaluating information and its sources
- Copyright, fair use, and ethical use of information and media
- The role of documentation and citation in scholarly, professional, and public work

### Learning Outcomes

#### 1. Course Specific Learning Outcomes

- 1.1. Evaluate and be critical consumers of information and media
- 1.2. Use critical thinking and problem-solving skills to build an intellectual framework for discovering, using and evaluating information
- 1.3. Successfully search for and acquire appropriate information about your research topic in a variety of media and formats
- 1.4. Use information ethically and responsibly with an awareness of copyright and fair use
- 1.5. Successfully write for a public audience

#### 2. Individual & Society General Education Learning Outcomes

- 2.1. Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view
- 2.2. Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically
- 2.3. Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions
- 2.4. Examine how an individual's place in society affects experiences, values, or choices
- 2.5. Articulate and assess ethical views and their underlying premises
- 2.6. Articulate ethical uses of data and other information resources to respond to problems and questions
- 2.7. Identify and engage with local, national, or global trends or ideologies, and analyze their impact on individual or collective decision-making

## **Assignments**

Detailed instructions for assignments will be given throughout the semester, and will be posted to the course website. There are 8 written assignments, 1 presentation, and 1 meeting, for a total of 10 assignments.

- Information Diary
- Data Visualization
- 2 Reading Responses
- Literature Review
  - The 'final' assignment is broken down into 4 scaffolded assignments
    - Topic & inquiry question
    - Preliminary set of resources (articles)
    - Rough draft
    - Final draft
- Lightning Talk
  - A 3-minute presentation based on the topic of your Literature Review
- Mid Semester Check In
  - A brief meeting (approximately 10 minutes) with me to talk about your literature review topic, as well as your progress in the course in general

## **Grading**

Grades in this class are determined in a way that may be different from what you are used to. Grades will be determined by a grading contract. A grading contract is an agreement between student and teacher about how one can be successful in the class. Instead of focusing on percentages, a grading contract focuses on your efforts. This means that if you meet the terms of the contract, then you get the grade.

You must meet all of the requirements listed in a particular grade in order to receive that grade. These are the terms of the grading contract. Failure to meet all of the requirements will result in the next lower grade.

Since the final grade will be based on this grading contract and how you fulfill it, it is you, the student, who decides how much work you wish to do this semester. This means planning ahead, thinking about all of your obligations and responsibilities this semester and also determining what grade you want or need in this course.

You will not get any grades in this class until the end of the semester; however, I will be keeping track of assignment statuses in the Blackboard Grade Book. Your final grade will not be a surprise.

### General Terms of Agreement

- 1) Attendance
  - a) You agree to attend classes regularly, and arrive on time.
  - b) Under normal circumstances, attendance is an element in the grading scheme. However, due to the uncertainty of what COVID may or may not bring throughout the semester, attendance will not factor into your grades.
- 2) Participation
  - a) You agree to regularly participate in class discussions, activities, assignments, and group work.
  - b) Your participation is factored into your final grade as a +/-
  - c) This is meant to reward those students who engage in all the labor of the course in the fullest spirit asked of them and demonstrate themselves to be exemplary class citizens.
- 3) Improvement
  - a) You agree to work to improve your writing, understanding of the course topics, collaboration skills, and any other goals you set for yourself in the beginning of the semester.
  - b) You agree to consider feedback when revising assignments and to work to fully revise, not just make surface level changes. Lessons and assignments will build on top of each other.
  - c) You also agree to ask questions and reach out when you are in need of guidance.
- 4) Assignments
  - a) You agree to submit assignments completed and on time.
  - b) Complete
    - i) An assignment is **complete** if it achieves all the goals of the assignment and the work is of quality – it is clear the writer spent time and energy on the piece.
  - c) Late
    - i) An assignment is **late** if it is submitted after the due date and time, within 48 hours, and without an extension.
  - d) Made-Up
    - i) An assignment is **made-up** if it is submitted over 48 hours after the due time and date, and without an extension.
  - e) Ignored
    - i) An assignment is **ignored** if it is not completed, for any reason.
- 5) Extensions
  - a) May be given to students who ask at least 24 hours before the assignment is due. An extension is not a reflection on your work and does not affect your grade. Extensions can be given for extenuating circumstances, but do not need to be explained to me.
  - b) Extensions are not to be used for every assignment or when not really needed.
  - c) Abuse of the extension policy may result in a denial of further extensions.
- 6) Exceptions
  - a) Accommodations/Inclusivity
    - i) The goal of the Grading Contract is to meet you where you are in your reading and writing experience and to support you in growing as a critical thinker, reader, writer, communicator, and collaborator. Additionally, the purpose is to ensure students have the opportunity to work in a just environment that adapts to their needs and equally supports each student's learning. I am happy to work with you on an

individual basis to determine how best to accommodate your needs as a learner and the course's learning outcomes.

b) University and Military Obligations

- i) Any absence due to a university-sponsored group activity (e.g., sporting event, performance, band, etc.) will not count against you, as stipulated by university policy, if you first provide written documentation within the first two weeks of the semester of all absences. This same policy applies if you have mandatory military-related absences (e.g., deployment, work, duty, etc.). This will allow us to determine ahead of time how you will meet assignments and our contract, despite being absent.

\*\*\*By staying in our course, you agree to all the above terms, and I agree to provide timely and constructive feedback on your work, to keep track of the above details responsibly, and to enforce them democratically.\*\*\*

**Grade Breakdown**

| Grade | # of Late Assignments | # of Make-up Assignments | # of Ignored Assignments |
|-------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A     | 1                     | 0                        | 0                        |
| B     | 2                     | 1                        | 0                        |
| C     | 3                     | 2                        | 1                        |
| D     | 4                     | 3                        | 2                        |
| F     | 5 or more             | 4 or more                | 3 or more                |

You only need one categorical item/column to dip for the entire grade to dip. In other words, having no late assignments but 2 made-up assignments still puts your grade at a B. Participation is factored in as a +/- . In this example, regular participation puts your grade at B+.

## Course Schedule

| Date | Topic                                       | Readings due   | Assignments due   |
|------|---|--|---|
| 2/1  | Introductions                               |  |   |
| 2/3  | The information cycle                       | Ohio State University. Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide to Academic Research. Chapter 2: Types of Sources.  |   |
| 2/8  | Evaluating information & reading critically | Annotation guidelines & sample.<br><br>Head, A. J. Reading in the Age of Distrust.   |   |
| 2/10 | Intro to library databases                  | Research Toolkit. Getting started, Topics & Search Strategies  | Information diary   |
| 2/15 | Citation as political practice              | Ray, V. The racial exclusions in scholarly citations.<br><br>Mott, C., and Cockayne, D. Citation Matters: Mobilizing the Politics of Citation Toward a Practice of ‘Conscientious Engagement’. [Selected sections] |   |
| 2/17 | Academic publishing                         | McGuigan, G. S., & Russell, R. D. The Business of Academic Publishing. [Selected sections]<br><br>Resnick, B & Belluz, J. The war to free science.   |   |
| 2/22 | History of libraries                        | Knott, C. Not Free, Not for All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow. Preface, Introduction, Epilogue.   |   |
| 2/24 | Library classification systems              | Change the Subject. [documentary film, 55 min]<br><br>Bias in the Library. On the Media. [podcast, 17 min]   |   |
| 3/1  | Print archives                              | Millar, L. A. The Uses of Archives. in Archives : Principles and Practices. Pages 67-75.<br><br>Farmer, A. Archiving While Black. Chronicle of Higher Education.   | NOTE: Class visit to the DSI Library & Archives. Meet at NAC 2/202. |
| 3/3  | Digital archives                            | Caplan-Bricker, N. Preservation Acts: Toward an ethical archive of the web.  |   |
| 3/8  | Algorithmic bias                            | O’Neil, C. Do Algorithms Perpetuate Human Bias? [video, 12 min]<br><br>Noble, S. Google Has a Striking History of Bias Against Black Girls.  |   |

|      |   |   |  |
|------|---|---|--|
| 3/10 | Filter bubbles; Confirmation bias       | <p>Facing History. Defining confirmation bias.</p> <p>Pariser, E. Beware the filter bubble. [video, 20 min]</p> <p>Flaxman., S, Goel, S., &amp; Rao, J. M., Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption. [Selected sections]</p>                               | Literature Review topic & inquiry question |
| 3/15 | News media 1: Introduction              | González, J. and Torres, J. Introduction. News For All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media.   |  |
| 3/17 | News media 2: Objectivity in journalism | <p>Lowery, W. A Reckoning Over Objectivity, Led by Black Journalists.</p> <p>Rosenstiel, T. On Moral Clarity.</p>   |  |
| 3/22 | Research day & topic voting             |   | Mid semester check ins                     |
| 3/24 | Wikipedia: Neutrality & notability      | <p>van Dijck, J. Wikipedia and the Neutrality Principle. In The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media.</p> <p>Harrison, S. The Notability Blues.</p> <p>Harrison, S. How Wikipedia Became a Battleground for Racial Justice.</p>                        |  |
| 3/29 | Misinformation; Disinformation          | <p>Higgins, A., McIntire, M. and Dance, G. Inside a Fake News Sausage Factory: ‘This Is All About Income’.</p> <p>Lucca, V. &amp; Bernstein, J. Bad News. [podcast, 40 min]</p>   | Literature Review preliminary resources    |
| 3/31 | Viral news                              | <p>Maheshwari, S. How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study.</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> reading TBD</p>   |  |
| 4/5  | The digital divide                      | <p>Anderson, M and Kumar, M. Digital divide persists even as lower-income Americans make gains in tech adoption.</p> <p>Nonko, E. New York’s New Broadband Plan Hopes to (Finally) Address the Digital Divide.</p> <p>Winkler, J. Mapping New York City’s Digital Divide.</p> |  |
| 4/7  | Net neutrality                          | <p>Wu, T. Network Neutrality FAQ.</p> <p>Finley, K. The Covid-19 Pandemic Shows the Virtues of Net Neutrality.</p>  |  |
| 4/12 | Topic TBD                               |   |  |

|      |   |  |                               |
|------|---|--|-------------------------------|
| 4/14 | Topic TBD                                       |  | Literature Review rough draft |
| 4/18 | No class: Spring break                          |  |                               |
| 4/22 | No class: Spring break                          |  |                               |
| 4/26 | Plagiarism                                      | CUNY Academic Integrity Policy Section 1.2. Plagiarism<br><br>Lanegran, K. Fending Off a Plagiarist.   |                               |
| 4/28 | Copyright; Creative commons; Fair Use; Sampling | Ohio State University. Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide to Academic Research. Chapters 11 & 12.<br><br>Digital Music Sampling: Creativity Or Criminality?.<br><br>Sisario, B. 'Blurred Lines' on Their Minds, Songwriters Create Nervously. |                               |
| 5/3  | Data visualization                              | Developing Visualization Literacy (all orange menu items)  | Data Visualization            |
| 5/5  | Lightning talks I                               |  |                               |
| 5/10 | Lightning talks II                              |  |                               |
| 5/12 | Course wrap up & reflection                     |  |                               |
| 5/17 | No class: Reading day                           |  |                               |
| 5/24 | No class: Final                                 |  | Literature Review final draft |

## **Policies**

### **Contacting Me**

Email: [sohn@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:sohn@ccny.cuny.edu)

Office Hours: by appointment

Please speak with me if there is anything you find unclear about the readings or assignments, or if you have concerns about your work in the course. Email is the best way to contact me – I try to respond within 48 hours during the week. I am available to meet by appointment, either in-person or online via Zoom. Appointments can be made via email.

### **Discussion Etiquette**

Please follow the community norms developed collectively by the class. These norms will be posted to Blackboard.

### **Academic Integrity**

CCNY adheres to the CUNY-wide policy on academic integrity, which includes but is not limited to cheating and plagiarism.

### **CUNY COVID-19 Policies**

CCNY adheres to the CUNY-wide policy on masking while indoors in any CUNY space. Please wear a mask over your nose and mouth throughout class.

If you test positive for COVID-19 during the semester, notify me (and all your instructors) right away, so I can determine if we need to move the class to remote instruction for a time.

## **Resources**

### **Disability Accommodations**

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with Student Disability Services. If you have already registered Student Disability Services, please provide me with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with me.

The AccessAbility Center/ Student Disability Services ensures equal access and full participation to The City College of New York's programs, services, and activities by coordinating and implementing appropriate accommodations. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations and services, please visit the office in NAC 1/218, or contact AAC/SDS via email ([disabilityservices@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@ccny.cuny.edu)), or phone (212-650-5913 or TTY/TTD 212-650-8441).

## **CCNY Libraries**

CCNY Libraries has multiple libraries on the Harlem campus and one at the CWE campus downtown. The libraries own more than 950,000 print volumes and provide access to more than 980,000 electronic books and 118,000 electronic journals. The collections may be accessed through the libraries' catalog, lists of online databases, online journal collections, and the online research subject guides which allow focused inquiry 24/7.

Specialized research help can be found online and at our reference desk.

<https://library.ccny.cuny.edu/askus>

## **Writing Center**

The City College Writing Center offers one-on-one assistance for students working on writing assignments and projects from any discipline. Writing consultants will work with you on planning, drafting, and revising — all of the important steps in your writing process. <https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/writing>

## **Gateway Academic Center**

The mission of The Gateway Academic Center (GAC) is to meet the needs of the undeclared or undecided student. The GAC offers mentoring, tutoring, workshops and special events to help students navigate these critical years to completion of the degree.

<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/gateway>

## **CCNY Community Standards**

All student members of the College community are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates mutual respect for the rights and personal/academic well-being of others, preserves the integrity of the social and academic environment, and supports the mission of the College.

<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/studentaffairs/community-standards>

## **Food Assistance**

Students who find themselves experiencing difficulties obtaining food every day or who lack a stable and safe place to live are urged to come to Benny's pantry for assistance

<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/bennysfoodpantry>.

Benny's pantry is located on the ground floor of the North Academic Center (NAC) and is open to anyone within the CUNY community (students, staff, faculty) in need of support. The pantry is open from 10am to 6pm and is self-serve. Additional emergency support for financial, health and housing needs are also available through Benny's. Please contact Dee Dee Mozeleski at [dmozeleski@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:dmozeleski@ccny.cuny.edu) or Charles Ramirez @[cramirez@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:cramirez@ccny.cuny.edu) for additional details.