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## COM 341: The Press in America

COM 342L-111 Spring 2020

Tuesday/Thursday 11:00–12:15

Lowell Thomas 240

### Course description (from the Marist catalog)

This course offers an in-depth examination of the news media and their effect on American society. The course is divided into three sections: The First Amendment and the philosophical roots of freedom of expression; contemporary issues involving press ethics, law, media technology, and economics; and the history of the press in America. Both print and broadcast media are studied.

### Course introduction

We'll be tackling three huge topics in this course: the history of American journalism; the role of the First Amendment and freedom of the press; and the critical issues that face journalists working today.

For those of you who plan to work in journalism or otherwise in media or communication, this course should help you put your work in context. For those of you who do not, the course should still help you understand the role of the press in shaping American culture, society and politics, and also in shaping our views of those. It's a good story: newspapers, magazines, rebels, scofflaws, radio, TV, wars, money...

Stick around to find out how it ends.

The last few years in particular, the press has been taking something of a beating, so we have a lot of current events to begin to wrap our heads around.

### Professor contact and office hours

There are several ways to get in touch with me during the course. The one I'm mostly likely to see and respond to first is my email address: [kevin.lerner@marist.edu](mailto:kevin.lerner@marist.edu)

You can also use the "Messages" function of iLearn, which you can find in the left-hand navigation column. **You should always choose the option to send a copy of the message to my email address when you do this, especially if your message is urgent. I do check the messages section, but I will get it more quickly if you copy the message to my email.**

You can also leave a message at my office voicemail: 845-575-3000, extension 2661, but I am only on campus occasionally, so this is probably the least effective way to get in touch with me.

If you are on campus in Poughkeepsie, you can also find me in my office, Lowell Thomas 246. I have open office hours on these days this semester:

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### **Spring 2020 office hours, LT 246:**

Mondays: *ONLINE ONLY*: 2:00–4:00 p.m.

Tuesdays: 10–11 a.m.

Wednesdays: 2–4 p.m.

Thursdays: 4:45–5:45 p.m.

### **About the professor**

Hi everyone!

I'm an assistant professor of communication, with a specialty in journalism here at Marist. I have been teaching full time here since 2009, and I have been on the tenure track since the fall of 2014. I'm applying for tenure this year, so with any luck, I'll be an *associate* professor sometime around when this course is ending.

You can call me Dr. Lerner, Professor Lerner, Professor, or if you're feeling very casual, just "Lerner" is OK. Though keep in mind some professors don't like that. **I would prefer that you *not* address me as Kevin in emails.**

I teach American press history, media law, narrative journalism, news editing, and reporting and writing integrating contemporary technology and social media tools. Before I taught at Marist, I taught journalism at Seton Hall University and LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York.

I have published journalism in Slate, The New York Times, New York magazine, The Washington Post, The Columbia Journalism Review, and other publications. I also worked at Architectural Record, where he served as the magazine's first web editor and as the editor of the print magazine's department for young architects. I wrote a book that came out last spring. If you're interested, you can check it out here: <https://www.amazon.com/Provoking-Press-Confidence-Journalism-Perspective/dp/0826221866/>

A lot of that is actually relevant to the ideas we talk about in this class.

For my research and writing, I specialize in American journalism history, press criticism, journalistic professionalism, including law and ethics, and journalism in higher education. In addition to my doctorate, I hold a master's degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and a

bachelor's in nonfiction writing from the University of Pennsylvania. I was born in Washington, DC, and grew up in St. Paul, MN and Arlington, TX. I live with my husband near Kingston, New York, about a half hour away from campus.

## Text and readings

This course requires the purchase of three books. None of them is a traditional textbook, so they shouldn't cost you \$200 each. They are:

- [\*Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism \(Revised and Expanded Edition\)\*](#), by Christopher B. Daly. ISBN: 978-1625342980
- [\*The Elements of Journalism, Revised and Updated 3rd Edition: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect\*](#), by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. ISBN: 978-0804136785
- [\*Make No Law: The Sullivan Case and the First Amendment\*](#), by Anthony Lewis. ISBN: 978-0679739395

*Covering America* is a history of American journalism from the pre-Revolutionary period up to the present. *The Elements of Journalism* is a concise summary of the best practices of American journalism. And *Make No Law* tells the story of the First Amendment through one of the most famous Supreme Court cases ever to test it: *New York Times v. Sullivan*.

## Course objectives

1. After the course, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of concepts of freedom of expression and the First Amendment.
2. After the course, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the principles and best practices of journalism in a democratic society.
3. After the course, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the history of journalism in the United States.
4. After the course, students should be able to effectively relate the concept of freedom of expression, the principles and best practices of journalism, and the history of American journalism to the contemporary practice of journalism.

## Assignments and assessment

1. Students will complete two online exams, one at midterm, one in finals week. (#1, #2, #3, #4)
2. Students will write a paper about the values and best practices of journalism. (#2, #4)
3. Students will write one short paper exploring the causes and outcomes of a chosen event or process in the history of American journalism. (#3)
4. Students will complete one paired project, combining written and visual elements, exploring the relationship between the contemporary practice of journalism and the values and practices that have developed in American journalism and its tradition of freedom of expression. (#1, #2, #3, #4)

5. Students will meet in assigned discussion groups for the first 15 minutes of most class periods to discuss the day's assigned readings and prepare discussion questions for the rest of class. (#1, #2, #3, #4)

### Assignments:

**Midterm and final exams (15% of the course grade each, 30% total):** These will be online (iLearn) essay-style exams. They are open book and untimed, and you will have approximately a week to complete each exam.

**Five-page historical paper (20% of the course grade):** This paper will ask you to choose any event, process, or outcome in the history of American media and explain the factors that led to that outcome, as well as how that outcome affected subsequent outcomes.

**Five-page paper on the values and best practices of American journalism (20% of the course grade):** This paper will ask you to examine how the press does its job *today*, and to assess whether or not it is doing its job well enough.

**Paired creative project (20% of the course grade):** This assignment will ask you and a partner to each do half of a creative project in which you demonstrate your understanding of the historical and contemporary press by imagining how a real historical publication would have covered a contemporary event *or* how a contemporary publication would have covered a historical event.

**Daily discussion groups (10% of the course grade):** For each day that we are covering a section of the course material, you will be required to come to class prepared to discuss the material with a small team of your classmates. For the first 10 minutes of class every class meeting, you will go over the readings and, as a group, come up with a short list:

- Summarize two or three main "takeaways" from the readings for that day. What has stuck with you, and what do you think will be important points to remember from that reading?
- Come up with two or three discussion questions that will get your classmates talking when we get back together as a whole class.
- List any unclear points that you want to ask the professor to clarify.
- Are any of your teammates missing today? I will use your team meetings to take attendance—so be sure to show up to class on time!

### Course policies

**How to succeed in this course:** My expectations for you are simple. I expect that you will attend every class period. I expect that you will arrive on time. I understand an occasional absence, but class attendance is essential for doing well. You should turn off and put away anything that might distract you or me or your classmates. So please, no phones or text messaging during class. If I can make it 75

minutes, so can you (see policy below).

To be clear: ***no laptops, tablets, or phones in class, unless you have special permission.***

I will spend some time in each class period explaining some of the more difficult concepts, but I expect you to come to class with questions. Some of these ideas are very difficult, so I do not expect you to understand everything after you have read the chapters once. That's what I'm here for, and why it is essential that you have done all the reading before you get to class. I hope that we will have some lively discussions here, and even some disagreement.

**Attendance:** Your presence is expected at all class sessions. We are a community of learners (and at least one Lerner), and we are entering into this process of discussion and critical thinking together. Therefore, your absence at any of our class sessions detracts from everyone's experience. So you should be there every time. It's an expectation of your education. However, there is also a written policy:

You are allowed two absences all semester with no penalty. You may use these absences any time you choose, and there is no need to inform me. There is no difference between an excused absence and an unexcused absence for this course. If you are absent, you are absent. This applies to the whole gamut of reasons for being absent: illness; death in the family; sporting event; spring break travel; or just that first warm day of spring when you can sit out on Marist Beach.

While I acknowledge the differences as a human being, the class sees no difference.

After your first two absences, your attendance grade will drop quickly. You will lose ten points (out of 100) on your attendance grade for each absence after the first two. One absence? 100. Two? 100. Three? 90. Four? 80. Five? 70. If there are truly extenuating circumstances, get in touch with me. I'm not inhuman.

**Phones, computers, and other distractions:** *Unless you have special permission from me, these are not allowed in class.* Take notes on paper. Studies show that this actually helps you to learn. And no matter how good you think you are at multitasking, you really can't. If you're texting or checking up on your fantasy football team (OK, yes, it's the spring), or even just searching for terms I've used in class, you're not paying attention to what's going on around you. So put them away. If I have to ask you to put your phone away more than once in a class, you will be counted as absent for that day. I don't mean to be a jerk about it, but it's distracting to me and to people around you.

**Speak up!** We talk a lot about freedom of expression, and this is a great place for you to exercise it. You should not be ashamed of your opinions or your points of view. Bring them to class, but be open to modifying them in response to your classmates. That said, we are living in a fraught political time, and tensions are high. So be civil to each other. Civil discourse has been a key component of the history of the United States (as has uncivil discourse). So we will practice that here. Differing points of view are both welcome and encouraged, but nastiness is not.

**Turning in assignments:** The midterm and final exams will be conducted on iLearn, and the due

dates will be firmly set. You will have a full week to take each exam.

The two papers will also be submitted on iLearn. Each assignment will give you manuscript preparation guidelines. Finish your papers well enough ahead of time that you can proofread them carefully. Papers that do not follow the style guidelines will not be accepted.

The “paired project” will be submitted electronically. How you do so will depend to some extent on the nature of your particular project. More specific guidelines will be distributed.

## **Discussion teams**

These are the teams for in-class discussion:

### **Team Ida B. Wells**

Natalie Bochi, Demi Lonergan, John Powers, John Rohr, Gabrielle Van Dyk

### **Team Izzy Stone**

Christopher Bianchi, Craig Conway, Justin Pacheco, Jessica Santacroce, Darryl Sullivan Jr.

### **Team A.J. Liebling**

Jane Capozziello, Luke Cassar, Stefan Feibel, Kache Foreman, Breana Pelliccio

### **Team Ida Tarbell**

Austin Day, Raquel Lekic, Scott Long, Serena Ruggieri, Matthew Savoca

### **Team Earl Caldwell**

Colton Armstrong, Lauren Cooper, Jennifer DiTomasso, Michael Major, Robert Sullivan III, John Ziehl

### **Team Joan Didion**

Brian Ciampa, Jason Demick, Ryan Dorrian, Natalie Garcia, Jay Silver

## **My Media Diet (and yours)**

While it is not explicitly a requirement of this course, I expect you to be reading, watching, and engaging with the American press all semester long. To that end, I wanted to provide you some idea of what that means for me. I realize that I probably consume far more news than you do, and I don't expect you to read all of the following, but I want to give you an idea of what is out there.

Newspapers

- The New York Times
- The Washington Post
- The Poughkeepsie Journal
- The Wall Street Journal
- USA Today

#### Radio/Podcasts

- The Daily (from The New York Times)
- Slate's Political Gabfest
- Slate's Culture Gabfest
- Slate's What Next?
- Fresh Air
- Reply All
- 99% Invisible
- Studio 360
- Professor Buzzkill
- This American Life
- Radiolab
- The New Yorker Radio Hour
- Radio Atlantic
- Slate's Whistlestop
- Wait, Wait... Don't Tell Me

#### Magazines

- The New Yorker
- The Atlantic
- The Nation
- Vanity Fair
- Hudson Valley
- The New York Review of Books
- New York
- Mother Jones
- Wired
- Slate (online)
- Politico

#### Press Criticism

- The Columbia Journalism Review
- On the Media (podcast/radio)
- The American Press Institute (email newsletter)
- Muck Rack (email newsletter)

- CNN's Reliable Sources (email newsletter)
- Jack Shafer at Politico
- Margaret Sullivan at The Washington Post
- The Nieman Lab/Nieman Reports
- Pew Research Center Daily Briefing of Media News

## Course schedule

The pdf version of the course schedule is attached. I recommend downloading it for your records (and printing it if that's easier for you). But I am also including one here for quick reference:

DATE	Topic	Readings (do before the class date listed)	Assignments
Tuesday, January 21	Intro to the course		
Thursday, January 23		"The Case Against the Media—By the Media" (handout)	Discussion groups
Tuesday, January 28	The purpose of journalism	Elements of Journalism (EoJ) Ch. 1: What is Journalism For?	Discussion groups
Thursday, January 30	Where are we now, and why are we doing it?	Pew Research Center State of the Media 2019 Report (linked from iLearn)	Discussion groups
Tuesday, February 4	The Past, and how to think about it	Covering America (CA) Intro	Discussion groups



Thursday, February 6	Colonial journalism and the origins of freedom of expression	CA Ch. 1	Discussion groups
Tuesday, February 11	News and independence	CA Ch. 2	Historical outcome paper assigned; discussion groups
Thursday, February 13	Putting the news in newspapers	CA Ch. 3	Discussion groups
Tuesday, February 18	Abolition and the Civil War	CA Ch. 4	Discussion groups
Thursday, February 20	Yellow Journalism and the Gray Lady	CA Ch. 5	Discussion groups
Tuesday, February 25	Professionalizing the news	CA Ch. 6	Discussion groups
Thursday, February 27	Magazines and radio emerge	CA Ch. 7	Historical outcome paper due in class; Discussion groups

Tuesday, March 3	Depression-era journalism	CA Ch. 8	Discussion groups
Thursday, March 5	War and speech	CA Ch. 9	Midterm exam available on iLearn; Discussion groups
Tuesday, March 10	Big media	CA Ch. 10	Discussion groups
Thursday, March 12	The Long Sixties, Part 1	CA Ch. 11	Midterm exam due by 11:59 p.m.; Discussion groups
SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
Tuesday, March 24	The Long Sixties, Part 2	CA Ch. 12	Multimedia "paired" projects assigned; Discussion groups
Thursday, March 26	Times vs. Sullivan	Make No Law Chs. 1–5	Discussion groups
Tuesday, March 31	The meaning of Freedom	Make No Law Chs. 6–10	Discussion groups

Thursday, April 2	Times vs. Sullivan	Make No Law Chs. 11–end.	Discussion groups
Tuesday, April 7	Truth, and how to find it	EoJ Chs. 2 and 4	Multimedia “paired” projects due in class; Discussion groups
Thursday, April 9	Journalism, money and independence	EoJ Chs. 3 and 5	Discussion groups
Tuesday, April 14	The watchdog function	EoJ Ch. 6	“Values and best practices” paper assigned; Discussion groups
Thursday, April 16	Journalism as conversation	EoJ Ch. 7	Discussion groups
Tuesday, April 21	No class: Housing and assessment day	No class: Housing and assessment day	No class: Housing and assessment day
Thursday, April 23	Making the important stuff interesting	EoJ Chs. 8–9	Discussion groups
Tuesday, April 28	The consciences of journalists and the responsibilities of citizens	EoJ Chs. 10–11	Discussion groups

Thursday, April 30	Technology, news consumers and the future of media	CA Ch. 14	Discussion groups
Tuesday, May 5	Technology, news consumers and the future of media	CA Ch. 15	"Values and best practices" paper due in class; Discussion groups
Thursday, May 7	The future and the case FOR the media	Poynter Institute 2020 news predictions (linked from iLearn)	Discussion groups
FINALS WEEK	FINALS WEEK	Review!	Final exam due Tuesday, May 12, 11:55 p.m.

 [Press in America Spring 2020 Course Calendar.pdf](#)

## Academic Honesty

This course operates under the Marist College Academic Integrity Policy. You should [read it here](#).

## Turnitin policy

Use of Turnitin is mandated for this course. Turnitin is a service used by Marist College faculty to compare a student's written work with its very large database of sources, student papers from other institutions, and the like, to check for originality. Work submitted to Turnitin will be used only for purposes of assessing originality, and will not be shared beyond Turnitin or used for any other purpose. Students must submit all assignments to Turnitin through the regular iLearn submission process. Students who wish to remove their personal identifying information (name, student identification number, etc.) from the submitted file may do so but must notify their professor ahead of submission. Work submitted through iLearn in this course will not be reviewed by the Professor or maintained by the College unless and until the Turnitin process is completed.

## Support links

This course is entirely online and will be taught asynchronously. There is an expectation that students enrolled in this course have a basic understanding of iLearn and related computer technologies (such as being able to save and attach a Word document to an email). For students who have not yet mastered these prerequisites, Marist College provides a range of resources to help you get the most from your online educational experience.

For students who have not yet mastered these prerequisites, Marist College provides a range of resources to help you get the most from your online educational experience.

For access to iLearn support, click the links at the bottom of the iLearn login screen (<http://ilearn.marist.edu>). Here, you will find access to a brief web tutorial for an overview of iLearn tools, 1- or 2-page tips sheets for using specific tools, and a page of frequently asked questions for students.

For additional technical support please contact: [helpdesk@marist.edu](mailto:helpdesk@marist.edu)  
Or call: 1-845-575-4357 (HELP)

Important information about the Marist College Help Desk (including hours) is available at the Help Desk Website: <http://www.marist.edu/it/helpdesk/>

Please note: the Help Desk is usually closed on weekends, so you will need to plan your schedule accordingly when completing assignments with weekend due dates in this course.

Marist College also has a number of academic resources, including tutoring, writing assistance, and advising, and proofreading assistance. You are encouraged to visit <http://www.marist.edu/academics/resources.html> to learn more about these support tools.

The Marist College Academic Learning Center hosts a proofreading site in iLearn. On the proofreading site, you can submit your academic papers for review before you turn them into me for this class. To access the site, click My Workspace in your Quicklinks bar at the top of this screen. Then, click Membership in the left hand navigation bar. At the top of the screen, click Joinable Sites and scroll to join PROOF\_001N\_001.

## **Americans with Disabilities Act statement**

All efforts have been made to ensure the iLearn system is compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. Information about the accessibility of the system can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/28p59pq>

The Marist College Office of Special Services provides individualized support to students in order to ensure access to a complete education. Information about Marist's support services can be found at <http://www.marist.edu/specialservices/>.