

# **Social Media, Citizens and the News**

## **COMA 387 (Special Topics)**

Fall 2011

*Please review often*

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**Class meets: M/W/F: 12:30-1:35 p.m.**

**Ingram 115b (115a lab on Mondays)**

**Office hours: M/W: Noon-12:30 p.m. / 2-3:30 p.m.**

**Fri: Noon-12:30 p.m. / 1:45-2:15 p.m.**

**Ingram 133**

*Please silence cell phones and turn off electronic devices before class begins, unless otherwise instructed. Thank you.*

### **Course overview**

The 20th century gave us news as a top-down lecture by all-knowing journalists — think Walter Cronkite delivering his trademark CBS Evening News sign-off “And that’s the way it is.” The 21st century has turned that model on its head. These days, nearly any private citizen with computer and Internet access can create and distribute news, collaborate in real time with professional media workers (think eyewitness photos/videos from disasters sent to newsrooms) and choose from a dizzying array of options to keep up with the world, from mainstream media sites to private blogs.

This course critically examines the phenomenon of participatory media, where every citizen — including students such as yourselves — potentially is a player in the construction of news and information *as a conversation*. While the course largely is conceptual and historical, it also includes a hefty dose of practical, hands-on experience with participatory/social media, such as the micro-blogging tool Twitter. That hands-on practice will come primarily on Mondays, where we’ll meet next door in the computer lab (Ingram 115a) for “bootcamp-style” training on various social-media tools. Finally, though this course primarily is focused on news, many of the same principles apply to strategic-communications, so we’ll also consider the role of the citizen consumer in public relations and marketing.

### **Departmental objectives to be addressed:**

- \* Critical and reflective thinking
- \* Expression, including class presentations
- \* Interaction
- \* Team work

\* Multiple frameworks of thought

### **Format**

The format of the class primarily will be discussion/interaction, as befits a course about media as a conversation, with some straight-up lecture. All course materials will be managed on PLU's electronic educational site, Sakai. (Please go to this link for access: <https://sakai.plu.edu/portal>).

You are required to keep up with the readings (Friday readings quizzes), respond to discussion questions on the Sakai blog (Monday postings) and respond thoughtfully and respectfully to each others' comments in class throughout the term. In other words, showing up and being engaged is key, **so I'll take attendance at the start of each class.** *I will drop your final class grade one full grade for the first three unexcused absences, then one full grade for each single unexcused absence after that.*

"Bootcamp Mondays" in the computer lab is new this year. The purpose is to introduce you to some key tools that aid professional media workers and potentially allow for citizen participation in media practices at unprecedented levels. Step One for you as a content creator is playing with the tool and knowing how it works. Step Two is taking it to the next level by strategically using it to engage/interact with your audiences.

Also new is a unique collaboration with Minnesota Public Radio/American Public Media's Public Insight Network analyst Michael Caputo. You'll have an opportunity to do a citizen-informed story with his guidance at the end of term, if you choose. *I strongly encourage journalism majors, in particular, to pursue this option for the experience and exposure.*

From time to time, I'll refer to what I call the "CSI" of smart social-media work:

**Create good content** (we'll talk about what constitutes "good")

**Share content** (yours and others via re-blogs, re-tweets, etc.)

**Interact with your audience** ("conversational media" fundamentally is about the exchange of ideas between content creators/audience, where the lines between each blur)

Guest speakers, in-class videos, a possible field trip and other initiatives will aim to give meaning to abstract ideas via multiple ways of learning (visual vs. experiential vs. verbal, etc.)

### **Textbooks and readings**

#### **Required texts:**

***The Conversation of Journalism: Communication, Community, and News* (1996) by Rob Anderson, Robert Dardenne and George M. Killenberg**

***We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* (2006) by Dan Gillmor**

**Other Readings:** Various additional readings are posted for this course *by week* on Sakai under the Resources tab. It is important that you read all assignments carefully and critically. Class presentations and discussions will undoubtedly move beyond the readings. You may be asked to discuss the meanings of the reading and apply that meaning to what you are learning in class and to your personal experiences. If you do not read the materials before class, you will likely be lost during class discussions.

## **Assignments and assessment**

*Assessment in this class will be based on a number of assignments, designed to accommodate various learning styles. I don't allow make-up assignments if you miss a class, and I don't accept any assignments even a minute past deadline (the real-world media business is ruthless about deadlines, as you can imagine). Please check your student e-mail periodically for any updates beyond this syllabus.*

### **Weekly blog posting on Sakai**

Each Wednesday, I'll post a question related to that week's social-media training/readings for you to respond to on the Sakai/Class blog *by the following Monday night*. Please post about 200-250 words (just under 1 page, double-spaced in Word) for each question. The purpose of these questions in part is to give you practice developing your own blog voice. (We'll talk about the differences between blog style vs. academic [term papers] vs. traditional news writing in the course.)

### **Weekly in-class quizzes**

I'll quiz you on each week's readings during the last 10-15 minutes of class on Fridays. Questions will be broad and basic and generally consist of a total of five fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice questions — nothing obscure from the texts. Quizzes will take the place of any mid-term or final exam, comprehensive or otherwise (in other words, *no course exams*).

### **Twitter scavenger hunt**

You'll participate in a live, all-class scavenger hunt during one of our bootcamp Monday classes, finding and tweeting about items you've uncovered during the hunt.

### **Live-tweet guest speaker**

The manager for the main @seattletimes Twitter account, Sona Patel, will be speaking to our class about her work, and you'll "live-tweet" (report on/cover) that talk on Twitter.

**In-class thought exercises:** Throughout the term, I'll ask you to apply what you're learning to real-world problems via handouts and other thought exercises in class. In many cases, you'll pair up with others to explore issues. Class attendance is crucial.

### **Class presentation on Dewey-Lippmann debates**

Working in assigned pairs, you'll be given a contemporary scenario to argue in the vein of one of these two great media scholars of the past century. (They're best known for their written debates with each other in the 1920s/30s about the role of the public in

democracy and in the media.) For an in-depth look, check out Dewey’s seminal book, *The Public and its Problems*, and Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*, on 24-hour reserve for this class at the campus library. You’ll then present your scenarios in class.

**Paper/class presentation on commenting practices of mainstream/private blog**

You’ll describe in detail the commenting practices of a mainstream (corporate) media site and a private blog in a 2-3 page, double-spaced paper and present your findings in class. The goal is to familiarize you with one of the most vexing issues of our times in mass communications: *Whether to allow citizen comments on sites and how to manage them.*

**Final Project:**

For your final assignment, you may do ONE of the following, with or without a partner of your choice: 1.) a critical evaluation of conversation in practice on a media site of your choosing (you’ll address specific aspects of “conversationalness” from what you learn throughout the term) or 2.) create/develop a community on Newsvine that shows audience engagement in several forms or 3.) write a 900-word story derived from a mock MPR-style citizen source network that you’ll create for this assignment. I’ll also require you to meet with me in the weeks before the final assignment is due to make sure you’re on course. In addition, you will share your findings/experiences with the class.

**Please note: All required assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.**

**Points allotment:**

Weekly Sakai forum posts (12 @ 5 pts each) .....	72
Weekly readings quizzes (10 @ 5 pts each) .....	60
Twitter scavenger hunt .....	5
Live-tweet guest speaker talk .....	5
Dewey-Lippmann paper (10 pts.) /presentation (10 pts.) .....	20
Comments description paper (10 pts.) / presentation (10 pts)....	20
Various in-class thought exercises (3 @ 5pts each) .....	15 (Subject to change)
Final project (20 pts) /presentation (20 pts) .....	40
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>237</b>

**Grading:**

Your course grade will be based on your point total at the end of the semester and awarded (rounded off to nearest whole number) in the following manner:

Point Total	Grade
237-225	A
221-209	A-
208-200	B+

Point Total	Grade
181-173	C+
172-164	C
163-155	C-

Point Total	Grade
136-128	D-
127-119	E

199-191	B
190-182	B-

154-146	D+
145-137	D

The final course grade represents the following:

- An “A” grade: The student’s body of work is intellectually rigorous, analytical, often creative and shows a thorough knowledge of the materials. The work is communicated in a clear and concise manner. Few, if any, errors of fact or writing.
- A “B” grade: The student’s body of work has a few errors but shows a good effort at comprehending the material. Clear, understandable writing with some care and expression of knowledge. Discussion needs more clarity, more development and/or more examples. The work may be missing some of the subtleties of the argument.
- A “C” grade: An adequate but superficial completion of coursework. Few examples used. Discussion or argument is unsubstantiated. Sources are poorly cited, some errors of fact, weak writing and grammar.
- A “D” grade: Inadequate completion of many assignments. Many errors of fact, errors in grammar and missed deadlines.
- An “E” Grade: Most or all work not completed, poorly executed and/or turned in extremely late.

## **Academic Integrity and communication ethics**

Please review the link below.

<http://www.plu.edu/academics/integ.html>

You will note that even if you merely witness an abuse of academic integrity at PLU, you may be liable for sanctions if you do not report the abuse. You will be responsible to uphold the university's highest standards of academic integrity in this class. This might be a challenge because of take-home exams and the collaborative efforts of some of the assignments. I will assume you fully understand your responsibilities as an honorable member of this community. The PLU Department of Communication and Theatre takes its ethics seriously. *We believe that public communicators have an added responsibility to uphold ethical standards and to tell the truth in every circumstance.*

**Special needs** *If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please see me **as soon as possible**.*

Date	Topic	Reading due today	Assignment Due
Sept. 7 Wednesday	Introduction Syllabus review		
Sept. 9 Friday	Overview: Public's role in media	Gillmor intro Anderson et al. Forward/Introduction Kovach & Rosenstiel Chap. 1	Readings quiz (end of class)
Sept. 12 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Microblogging: Twitter 101 (Getting started)	Various Twitter How-To pdfs	Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Sept. 14 Wednesday	Rebel Yells: Loud-Mouth Colonists	Altschull Chaps. 12-15, 18, 19	
Sept. 16 Friday	Rebel Yells: (cont.)	See Wednesday	Readings quiz (end of class)
Sept. 19 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Microblogging: Twitter 201 (3 <sup>rd</sup> -party applications/services)		Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Sept. 21 Wednesday	The Pragmatists	Altschull Chaps. 35-38, 50 Anderson et al. Chaps. 1-2, 4 Dewey-Lippmann articles	
Sept. 23 Friday	The Pragmatists (cont.)	See Wednesday	Readings quiz (end of class)
Sept. 26 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Microblogging: Twitter 301 (Scavenger hunt)		Sakai blog post due 5 p.m. Scavenger hunt items
Sept. 28 Wednesday	The Pragmatists (concl.) Public Journalism reforms	See last Wednesday (Pragmatism) Lambeth et al. Chaps 1-3 Carey article ( <i>Kettering Review</i> ) Anderson et al. Chaps 5-7 Hoyt's <i>CJR</i> article	
Sept. 30 Friday	Public Journalism reforms (concl.)	See Wednesday	Readings quiz (end of class)
Oct. 3 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Microblogging: Facebook 101 / LinkedIn 101 (Friends/Groups/Fans)	<i>Rockville News</i> article Facebook Pages How-To post	Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Oct. 5 Wednesday	Dewey-Lippmann presentations	See last week's readings	
Oct. 7 Friday	Dewey-Lippmann presentations	See last week's readings	Readings quiz (end of class) Dewey-Lippmann papers (12:30)
Oct. 10 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Managing @seattletimes Guest speaker: Sona Patel		Livetweet Sona's talk (5-tweet minimum, please) Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Oct. 12 Wednesday	The Internet: Early Days	Gillmor Chaps. 1-2 Shirky Chap. 3 Schultz articles (two research studies) Singer article (research study)	
Oct. 14 Friday	The Internet: Early Days (cont.)	See Wednesday	Readings quiz (end of class)
Oct. 17 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Microblogging (geo-location): Foursquare 101 (Getting started) Blogging: Tumblr 101 (Getting started)	7 Ways to Use Foursquare How News Orgs Use Foursquare	Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Oct. 19 Wednesday	The Internet: Our Times	Stefanac Chap 1 Gillmor Chaps. 3, 7 Shirky Chaps. 4-5	
Oct. 21 Friday	<b>NO CLASSES TODAY: MID-SEMESTER BREAK</b>		

Oct. 24 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Blogging: Tumblr 201 (To Follow and Be Followed)		Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Oct. 26 Wednesday	The Internet: Our Times (cont.)	Briggs Chap. 2 Gillmor Chaps. 4, 6 Kovach & Rosenstiel Chap. 11 Various commenting articles/blog posts	
Oct. 28 Friday	The Internet: Our Times (cont.) Guest visitor: Aaron Blank (Fearey PR Group)	See Wednesday	Readings quiz (end of class)
Oct. 31 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Aggregation/Curation: Storify 101 (Creating curated narratives) <b>HAPPY HALLOWEEN</b>	Various pdfs of stories/posts re: Storify	Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Nov. 2 Wednesday	The Internet: Our Times (cont.)	Briggs Chaps. 4, 10 Gillmor Chaps. 6, 9, 12 Marchionni research	
Nov. 4 Friday	The Internet: Our Times (concl.)	See Wednesday	Readings quiz (end of class)
Nov. 7 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Aggregation/Curate: Newsvine 101 (Citizen-created news agendas)		Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Nov. 9 Wednesday	Comments presentations	See Week 8 commenting articles	
Nov. 11 Friday	Comments presentations	See Week 8 commenting articles	Readings quiz (end of class) Comments papers (12:30)
Nov. 14 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Social bookmarking: Delicious (Link storage and tags)		Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Nov. 16 Wednesday	Advanced Conversation: Ideas to Practice	Briggs Chaps. 3, 11 Lavrusik's 10 commandments article	
Nov. 18 Friday	Advanced Conversation: Ideas to Practice (cont.)	See Wednesday	Readings quiz (end of class)
Nov. 21 Monday	Public Insight Network 101 (Linda Fantin overview via Skype)	MPR "PIJ" story (see web site)	Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Nov. 23 Wednesday	<b>NO CLASSES TODAY: THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>		
Nov. 25 Friday	<b>NO CLASSES TODAY: THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>		
Nov. 28 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Public Insight Network 201 (The art of the query)	Stories derived from PIN and associated query examples	In-class query writing Sakai blog post due 5 p.m.
Nov. 30 Wednesday	Field trip: <i>The News Tribune</i> (optional)	Briggs Chap. 10 (again) Angelotti engagement tips Scan <a href="http://www.thenewtribune.com">www.thenewtribune.com</a>	
Dec. 2 Friday	Guest speaker: Job talk by <i>Seattle Times</i> news producer Lauren Rabaino		Readings quiz (end of class)
Dec. 5 Monday <i>Bootcamp--Room 115a</i>	Skype: Mike Caputo (MPR)		
Dec. 7 Wednesday	Final project presentations		
Dec. 9 Friday	<b>LAST DAY OF CLASS</b> Final project presentations		Final project papers (12:30)