

# JOURNALISM & PUBLIC TRUST

J494 Spring 2018 Pollner Seminar  
Monday and Wednesday  
11:00 a.m. to 12:20 p.m.  
401 Don Anderson Hall  
Instructor: Deborah Potter

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Office hours: Tuesday and Wednesday, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. or by appointment. I'll spend a lot of time at the Kaimin, so you might look for me in the second floor newsroom. Send me an email to arrange a time to meet if you want to schedule an appointment outside office hours.

## THE COURSE



Denounced as #fakenews and described by President Trump as “the enemy of the American people,” news organizations and journalists are under siege. Two-thirds of Americans say they don’t trust the media to report the news fully, accurately and fairly. The purpose of this course is to explore why public trust for journalism matters, why it has eroded, and what the news media can do to help rebuild it. Among the questions we’ll explore: How do people decide what news is trustworthy? How can journalists rebuild trust and credibility? In a time when fake stories proliferate and circulate faster than real news, what can credible news organizations do to correct the record and stand out? What we learn will be published online so journalists and the public, as well as journalism educators and students, can better understand the crisis of trust faced by the profession and can replicate strategies designed to rebuild public trust.

## THE GOAL

If you complete this course successfully, you will be equipped with two of a journalist’s most essential tools: a compass and a backbone. By learning to think critically and creatively about why trust is essential to journalism and democracy, why it has declined, and how the news media can regain the public’s trust, you will be able to navigate the changing world of journalism and to advocate for ethical practices. Your thorough research and clear, complete written reports will document strategies newsrooms can



employ to restore the trust that is essential to the survival of free and independent news media.

## ASSESSMENT

Your grade in this course will depend on your involvement in class discussions and on your written work, which must be submitted on time (see *Deadlines*, below). There will be no mid-term or final exam.

Participation (including news log and website review)	10 points
Daily takeaway blog	10 points
Midterm written report (including peer review)	20 points
Trust interview	10 points
Final report proposal	10 points
Final report bio	5 points
Final report class presentation	5 points
Final report presentation feedback	5 points
Final written report	25 points
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Total	100 points

## GRADING SCALE

A	100-93	C	77-73
A-	92-90	C-	72-70
B+	89-88	D+	69-68
B	87-83	D	67-63
B-	82-80	D-	62-60
C+	79-78	F	59 and below

## REQUIRED READING

There is no textbook for this course but we'll have plenty of readings, which will include video and audio. Most will be available online and are linked to from Moodle *on the date they are due*. Because the issue of public trust in journalism is a moving target, I expect things to come up during the semester that will result in additional readings, either online or in hard copy that will be distributed in class. Follow me on Twitter @dpotternews for updates; our class hashtag will be #jourtrust. I may also add guest speakers or special presentations, some of which may be scheduled outside of class time.



## SOME RULES

You should know this already, but I'll spell it out. Do your own work. Never cheat. Be truthful. Comply with all terms of the [Student Code of Conduct](#). Academic misconduct in this course will result in a lower grade, possibly even a failing grade. You may also face disciplinary sanction by the University. The rules you have to follow aren't just academic requirements. They are obligations for all journalists.

**Plagiarism and honesty.** In the newsroom, plagiarism is a firing offense. Do not represent another person's words, ideas, data or materials as your own. Ever. Submitting false or invented information is a firing offense, too. As John

Hersey wrote, "There is one sacred rule of journalism. The writer must not invent. The legend on the license must read: NONE OF THIS WAS MADE UP."

**Same work for multiple classes.** You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously been or will be concurrently submitted for another class or publication, including the Kaimin and broadcast outlets, unless you receive *prior* approval from me. To do so without permission will result in an F for the assignment and an F for the course.

**Deadlines.** Late is late. Missing deadline is not acceptable in this class any more than it would be in a newsroom. If you have an emergency, call or see me *before* deadline and we'll discuss. And be aware: there are few legitimate excuses for missing deadline. Any work handed in after the due date and time will be *marked down by one letter grade* per 24 hours of lateness.

**Cell phones and laptops.** Silence your cell phone and keep all electronics out of reach during class unless I tell you to use them. We'll all get more out of the course if we're focused on the content, not on a personal screen. Anyone using electronics in class without permission will have their device confiscated until the end of the period. Don't do it.

**Common courtesy.** Show respect to your classmates and instructor. Don't sleep in class. Don't talk while others are speaking. Advocate for your own views without belittling anyone else's.

**Accommodation for students with disabilities.** The University is committed to making this course accessible to qualified students with disabilities. Please contact me to request reasonable course modifications. The [Disability Services for Students](#) office can help us with this.

**After-hours access.** If you think you might need access to the J-school after regular business hours, please read about the process of gaining access and sign up [on the after hours access page on the School of Journalism's website](#).

## ASSIGNMENTS

Except as noted, readings, assignments, instructions, and due dates are in the class section on Moodle. Assignments are posted on the date they are due.

**Seminar participation and attendance.** You are expected to attend every class and to participate in discussions. Show up on time and stay to the end. Do all assignments and contribute to the conversation on a regular basis. You will be allowed *two unexcused absences*. If you have more than two unexcused absences, your final grade will drop one letter grade. If you are late three times, it will be considered an unexcused absence. If you're sick or on university business, you must provide written evidence of your illness/travel no later than the next class period for your absence to be excused. *If you miss five or more classes for any reason, you will fail the course.*



**Daily takeaway blog.** After each class period, write a sentence or two on your Daily Takeaway blog sharing the most significant things you learned in class or from the readings and *why* they struck you as meaningful. Include any questions that linger. I may share this content on Twitter, so write for public consumption. *This assignment is due by 11:59 p.m. on the day of each class.* I suggest you get it done as soon as possible after class ends, while the discussion is fresh in your mind.

**Mid-term report.** You will research and write a report on one of the reasons public trust in the news media is so low. Your topic will be assigned by the luck of the draw on **Monday, February 5**. Your *midterm report* should be suitable for publication and include specific examples and citations in the form of embedded web links. Visuals and multimedia elements are highly recommended. You'll be graded on the thoroughness of your research, the depth of understanding you demonstrate, and the quality and clarity of your writing. This is a journalism assignment. Do not hand in a research paper with



footnotes. Spelling and grammar errors will hurt your grade.

**Due date: Wednesday, February 28.** Maximum word count: 1,000.

**Trust interview.** You will conduct an interview using a guide from the Trusting News Project and submit a written summary using the template provided on Moodle. The goal is to better understand how news consumers decide what information is trustworthy. **Due date: Monday, March 12.**

**Final report.** You will propose, research and write a report on a trust-building strategy that newsrooms are using or should consider using and why. You must choose a topic from the list on Moodle or see me for approval of a different topic no later than **Monday, March 5**. The earlier you do this, the better your chance of getting your first choice. On **Monday, March 19**, submit a *proposal* (no more than 500 words) outlining the

specific points you plan to make and listing at least three newsrooms you will feature. Provide contact information for individual sources you will speak to. Your *final report* must be suitable for publication and include quotes from interviews you conduct with working journalists, news managers and/or journalism entrepreneurs in at least three different organizations. Visuals and multimedia elements are highly recommended. You'll brief the class and get feedback to improve your final report before you turn it in. Your written report will be graded on the thoroughness of your research, the persuasiveness of your argument, and the quality and clarity of your writing. This is a journalism assignment. Do not hand in a research paper with footnotes. Spelling and grammar errors will hurt your grade. **Due date: Monday, April 30.** Maximum word count: 2,000.

**Graduate increment.** Graduate students enrolled in the seminar must complete the following additional requirements for full credit:

1. Collaborate to design and build a public class website, in coordination with the professor. **Deadline: March 5**
2. Conduct three trust interviews (as opposed to just one, as required of undergraduates), with multimedia elements required (as opposed to recommended for undergraduates). **Deadline: March 12**

3. Assist in copy editing midterm reports for website publication. **Deadline: March 14**
4. Analyze and summarize results of all class trust interviews for publication on class website. **Deadline: April 2**
5. Enhance and suggest additional content to enhance class website content with multimedia elements (images, audio, video, graphics). **Deadline: April 18**