Leadership and Media Literacy in The Age of Fake News and Big Data

Brown University Summer Leadership Institute
Summer 2018

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Classroom: Rhode Island (RI) Hall (60 George Street), Room 108
Computer Lab Classroom (for sessions listed on syllabus): Watson Center for Information Technology (CIT) Building (115 Waterman St.), Room 265

Course Description

Our phones, tablets, and laptops connect us to a seemingly-endless supply of information: ebooks, newspapers, social media, blogs, digital archives, encyclopedias. How do we stay afloat in this constant stream of media? While digital networks provide us with new modes of access and communication, they also present us with new challenges. In a media landscape dominated by fake news, viral content, bots, algorithms, and crowdsourced knowledge, how much time have we spent examining the ways technology has transformed the ways we learn about, inhabit, and critique the world around us? What does the prevalence of “Fake News” in our current cultural moment tell us about the importance of media literacy in the twenty-first century?

This course challenges students to pay closer attention to the media they create and consume on a daily basis. It also invites them to consider educational and professional contexts that benefit from the ability to read and write across various forms of media. In addition to focusing on the questions of argument, audience, and identity informing the conditions in which information and misinformation spreads and thrives, we’ll also consider the material conditions of knowledge production in these new media landscapes: the changing state of journalism in the age of clickbait and digital advertising, the role social media data and algorithms plays in shaping the news feeds we read, the impact of smartphones on what, where, and how we read about and document the world, and the rhetorical strategies that have proven effective in shaping public discourse in the digital age.
Course Materials and Canvas

Course readings and resources will be posted to Canvas or circulated in class. More information on readings can be found there and in the class schedule. You can access Canvas by visiting http://canvas.brown.edu and following the instructions there. Given that important material relevant to course readings and assignments will be posted here, I expect that you will be able to access Canvas via personal digital devices or on-campus computer resources. Please let me know ASAP if you may have difficulties accessing Canvas on a regular basis.

If you do not remember your usernames or passwords, please visit https://myaccount.brown.edu/. If you do not have a physical Brown ID card, please go to the Brown Card Office in J. Walter Wilson 5th floor. Your username is important information needed to access course materials, so in the event that you misplace or forget that information, I expect you to address the situation in a timely fashion.

You are not required to bring a laptop, smartphone, or tablet to class, but you are encouraged to bring digital devices if they enable you to take notes or access reflections on readings relevant to class discussion. There will be three occasions where I’ve arranged for us to go to a computer lab on campus: see schedule for additional info.

Here’s a list of the texts, tools, and resources we’ll be looking at in the course. Consult the schedule at the end of this document to see when readings are assigned and due. In cases where you’re reading excerpts of materials from longer material or material available via academic portals (sections from books, academic journal articles, etc.) the relevant readings will be posted on Canvas (in the “Files” section). A digital copy of the syllabus with hyperlinks to readings and context is available via Canvas (under “Syllabus”).

Please note that you do NOT have to purchase reading materials for the course: the links to publishers and publications below are provided for reference purposes!

Texts

- Jackson, Sarah and Brooke Foucault Welles. “Hijacking #myNYPD: Social Media Dissent and Networked Publics.” Journal of Communication. 65.6. 2015. (article in “Files” section of Canvas)
- Klein, Lauren. “The Image of Absence: Archival Silence, Data Visualization, and James Hemings.” American Literature 85.4 (December 2013). (article in “Files” section of Canvas)
- Lupi, Georgia and Stefanie Posavec. Dear Data.
- Wikipedia. “Top 25 Report” (Most Popular Articles of the Week)

Digital Tools and Resources

Digital Public Library of America: https://dp.la/
Documenting The Now: https://www.docnow.io/
Google nGram Viewer: https://books.google.com/ngrams
Knight Lab (Northwestern University): https://knightlab.northwestern.edu/projects/
Know Your Meme: Internet Meme Database: http://knowyournmemecom/
#MakeoverMonday, a weekly social data project: http://www.makeovermonday.co.uk/
Newest Americans (Rutgers): http://newestamericans.com/
Pew Research Center: http://www.pewresearch.org/
PhotoViz: http://photoviz.tumblr.com/
Select All: http://nymag.com/selectall/
Storybench (Northeastern University): http://www.storybench.org/
TAGS (Twitter Archiving Google Sheet): https://tags.hawksey.info/
Voyant: https://voyant-tools.org/
Wikipedia: https://www.wikipedia.org/

Course Objectives and Expectations

By the end of the semester, students will:
- Become more familiar with the long history of “Fake News” and the ways this history impacts and deviates from the creation, distribution, and assessment of knowledge in the early twenty-first century
- Demonstrate their growing familiarity with how facts are created and debated online through analysis and imitation of particular genres, mediums, and modes of cultural analysis
- Understand the importance of “Big Data” in the context of our daily lives: how we access and read information about ourselves and the world via databases and datasets, how the media we read and consume use various forms of data to tell and circulate stories in digital spaces, and how we are “read” and understood as “data” in various digital and non-digital contexts
- Consider where and how investments in media literacy impact personal, educational, and professional goals and contexts
- Complete short written assignments related to course research, model forms of digital media content creation, and collaborate on recommendations for peers to raise awareness about gaps and misconceptions re: media literacy
- Develop an Action Plan proposal for implementation after the Summer Leadership Institute

Students are expected to:

- Show up to all classes, be here on time, and participate in class workshops and discussions
- Complete readings and homework assignments (and access Canvas)
- Develop an Action Plan proposal and present it on the last day of the summer semester
- Be respectful of other voices, perspectives, and ideas in the classroom
- Contact Jim if you have questions about course expectations, readings, or assignments

Major Assignment: Action Plan Capstone Project

The Action Plan is a Capstone Project that you will complete over the course of two weeks and present on the last day of the semester to your peers and to your family. Specifically, you will create a proposal where you clearly identify a project that addresses a perceived issue in a community you are a part of (your school, neighborhood, city, or even a larger community at a national or international level), demonstrates that you have researched the issue (and most importantly, what work has already been done and who might serve as an ideal collaborator), and propose a plan that you can realistically implement over the course of the next year. Your Action Plan will change over time, and you'll have opportunities throughout the course to develop, revise, and refine your projects. We'll talk more about Action Plans on the first day of class. For full details on work and expectations, please see the Action Plan Overview document on Canvas (in “Files”).

Course Performance Report
At the end of the course, each student will receive a Course Performance Report (CPR), in which I will describe and evaluate your performance. I expect that students will attend every class session, complete all assignments on time, and participate in class discussions. Please email me if you have any questions about coursework or course expectations.

Class Schedule, Agenda, and Major Readings

We’ll review homework assignments in greater detail on relevant class days. If you have questions about an upcoming deadline or an assignment, don’t hesitate to email Hanan or myself!

Checklist for Major Homework Deadlines (more information below: I’ve just placed them here so they’re on your radar!)

Discussion Board Post: Algorithms of Oppression: Post to Canvas Discussion Board by 11pm on Monday, July 9th
Action Plan: Research Question: Post to Canvas Discussion Board by 11pm on Wednesday, July 11th
Discussion Board Post: Wikipedia: Post to Canvas Discussion Board by 11pm on Thursday, July 12th
Action Plan: Proposals: Post to Canvas Discussion Board by 11pm on Sunday, July 15th
Discussion Board Post: Memes: Post to Canvas Discussion Board by 11pm on Monday, July 16th
Action Plan: “Elevator Pitch”: Be prepared to present in class on Wednesday, July 18th
Discussion Board Post: Visualizing Regional Identity: Post to Canvas Discussion Board by 11pm on Thursday, July 19th
Action Plan: Final Presentations (Slides and Presentation Remarks): Friday, July 20th, 1pm

Week One

Monday 7/9: Why Media Literacy Matters In 2018

9am-11:30am: Introductions, Overview of Syllabus, Introduction to Action Plan, Inventory of Keywords and Major Concepts
In-class Work: Glossary of Media Terms and Contexts: What do we talk about when we talk about media? How did we learn to read and evaluate different forms of media?
11:30-1pm: Lunch
1pm-3pm: Media Consumption Self-Assessment and Discussion: News From Page To Screen To Phone To Fact, Personal Data Assessment

*In-class Work:* 1) Inventory the kinds of media you read and created (on social media or elsewhere) and where / how you access media over the weekend. 2) Create your first dataset with groups in class and tell a story about these patterns of media consumption

3:15pm-5pm (IN SAL 001): Director’s Welcome

*Homework:* Read excerpts from *The Filter Bubble* (Eli Pariser) and *Algorithms of Oppression* (Safiya Umoja Noble); excerpts available in the “Files” section of Canvas. Complete Discussion Board assignment on Canvas (screenshot of Google Search results) by 11pm tonight.

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**T 7/10 Filter Bubbles, Search Engines, and Fake News**

9am-11:30am: (meet in Computer Lab: Watson Center for Information Technology CIT Building:115 Waterman St., Room 265) Describing and Dismantling Our Filter Bubbles, Introduction to Text Analysis and Visualization (Voyant), Action Plan Brainstorming

*In-class Work:* What have we learned about the limits of Google and the narratives and ideas that search results implicitly and explicitly endorse? What do we learn from documenting patterns in language and word choice from the media we create and consume?

11:30-1pm: Lunch

1pm-2:45pm: Listening Skills (meet in 85 Waterman Street, Room 130)

3:15pm-5pm: NSEW: Leadership Styles (meet in room TBA)

*Homework (due THURSDAY):* Read “The Image of Absence: Archival Silence, Data Visualization, and James Hemings” (Lauren Klein) and “facts and FACTS’: Abolitionists’ Database Innovations” (Ellen Gruber Garvey). Come prepared to discuss how these authors and their subjects use data to productively critique unjust perceptions and perspectives of the world they reside in. Additionally, review Action Plan documentation and post your Action Plan Research Question (on Canvas in the “Discussion” section) by 11pm on Wednesday night.

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**W 7/11: 8am-4pm: Challenge course (meet at Wheeler instead of class: additional details provided elsewhere)**

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**TH 7/12 Fake News In Historical Context**

9am-11:30am: The Medium, The Message, and The Archive; The Long History of “Yellow Journalism”; Action Lab Proposal Development

*In-class Work:* 1) How do historians assess and critique the rhetorical strategies and social uses of media like advertisements? 2) How is history told in particular kinds of media and with particular forms of evidence like archival materials and contexts? 3) What are your initial Action
Plan questions? What research and evidence is needed to support or develop responses to these questions?

11:30-1pm: Lunch

1pm-3pm: Field Trip to The John Hay Library (20 Prospect St.): Introduction to Archives and Early Propaganda with Heather Cole, Librarian for Literary and Popular Culture Collections

3:15pm-5pm: Exploring Identity and Privilege (meet in RI Hall 108)

**Homework:** Read “Most Popular Wikipedia Articles of The Week” (Wikipedia), “Making Feminist Points” (Ahmed), “Library of Congress to Cancel the Subject Heading ‘Illegal Aliens’” (Library of Congress). These are all short articles. Post a link to a Wikipedia page related to your Action Plan research on Canvas and discuss how this article justifies its claims with citation and evidence (on Canvas in the “Discussion” Section) by Thursday at 11pm.

F 7/13 The Politics of Citation

9am-11:30am: (meet in Computer Lab: Watson Center for Information Technology CIT Building:115 Waterman St., Room 265) Action Plan Literature Review, Tip Sheet on Reading and Evaluating Digital Media

**In-class Work:** 1) Review of Wikipedia articles, citations and bibliography, and Wikipedia edit historica and data analytics. 2) As a class, draft a five-point checklist of tips for High School Students Doing Digital Research: What did you wish you knew about filter bubbles, evidence, reliable and unreliable media sources?

11:30-1pm: Lunch

1pm-3pm: Wikipedia, Crowdsourced Knowledge, and Invisible Encyclopedic Biases (Guest Speaker: María Victoria Fernández, Assistant Curator for Digital Outreach, John Carter Brown Library)

**Homework:** Review resources from Newest Americans (Rutgers), Storybench (Northeastern), Knight Lab (Northwestern), and Pew Research Center. Choose one approach to digital storytelling from these readings and come up with an idea for a digital project relevant to your interests (ideally, something related to your Action Plan or a previous topic covered in the course). Additionally, revise Action Plan proposals and Action Plan Key Question(s) (post to Discussions in Canvas by Sunday at 11pm and come prepared to discuss in class on Monday).

Week Two

M 7/16 Digital Storytelling: Multimodal Tools and Contexts

9am-11:30am: Digital Storytelling (Key Concepts) and Action Plan Planning
In-Class Work: How can multimodal contexts be used to inform social justice movements and provide us with new tools and strategies of reading and writing? We'll discuss this in the context of our readings. We'll end the morning by re-visiting your Action Plan Key Question(s) and drafting an “Action Plan Plan” for the week.

11:30-1pm: Lunch
1pm-3pm: (meet in Computer Lab: Watson Center for Information Technology CIT Building: 115 Waterman St., Room 265) Digital Tools Workshop

In-Class Work: Review of Knight Lab digital tools and digital project ideas. Collaborative digital exhibit-building exercise.

Homework: “The Blackness of Meme Movement” (Laur Jackson), Excerpts from Know Your Meme, Excerpts from Select All, Excerpts from Remediation (Bolter and Grusin). Make a meme using one of the images provided in the assignment prompt on Canvas and make a meme that is relevant to your Action Plan Key Question (post both in the “Discussions” section of Canvas by Monday at 11pm).

T 7/17 Media Literacy, Memes, and Social Media

9am-11:30am: Remediation, Old Media and New Media, Action Plan Key Questions

In-class Work: 1) What happens to our understanding of context when images and texts recirculate online? 2) Turn your favorite book into a Facebook status, Tweet, or meme. 3) How does your meme about your Action Plan topic resonate with different audiences? Is it an effective or ineffective way to call attention to this question or issue?

11:30-1pm: Lunch
1pm-2:45pm: Public Speaking Workshop (RI Hall 108)
3:15pm-5pm: Modes of Social Change - Marti Rosenberg (Sal 001)

Homework: Prepare Action Plan Elevator Pitch; Read Excerpts from Twitter and Tear Gas (Zeynep Tufekci), “Hijacking #myNYPD: Social Media Dissent and Networked Publics” (Sarah Jackson and Brooke Foucault Wells), Documenting the Now. Come prepared to give Elevator Pitch presentations on W morning.

W 7/18 Local News and Activism In A Global Network

9am-11:30am: Action Plan Elevator Pitches and Feedback; Crowdsourcing News and Knowledge in The Digital Age

In-class Exercise: Elevator Pitch Presentations and Peer Review; Crowdsourcing feedback and crowdsourcing information relevant to Action Plan research

11:30-1pm: Lunch
1pm-3pm: Hashtag Activism; Introduction to TAGS and Social Media Analysis; The Ethics of Crowdsourcing

*In-class Exercises:* Review work of *Documenting The Now,* discussion of Tufekci, Jackson / Welles. What does activism look like on social media? What are some strategies that activists interested in these spaces should adopt?

*Homework:* Read *Dear Data,* PhotoViz, #makeovermonday; read *The Ghost Map* excerpt and watch Steven Johnson video on “The Ghost Map.” Tell the story of your relationship to your neighborhood in one image (post image to “Discussion” section of Canvas by 11pm tonight).

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**TH 7/19 Media As Data: The Benefits and Limits of Visualizations**

**9am-11:30am:** Data Visualization in Theory and Practice; The Visual Language of Metaphors from Family Trees to Google Maps  
**11:30-1pm:** Lunch  
**1pm-3pm:** Collaborative Exercise: Making Media That Fits Your Message In The Digital Age; Best Practices for Presentation Slides and Visuals; Final Preparations for Action Plan Presentations

*Homework:* Finish Action Plan Presentations and have materials (visual aids and remarks) ready for tomorrow afternoon

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**F 7/20 Farewell to Fake News**

**9am-11:30am:** Media Literacy Fact Sheet; Filter Bubble and Personal Data Re-Assessment  
*In-class Exercise:* Review Filter Bubble and Personal Data Overviews from First Class; Collaborative Exercise: Strategies for Assessing Your Relationship to Digital Media  
**11:30-1pm:** Lunch  
**1pm-3pm:** Closing Event and Action Plan Presentations (Room Assignments for presentations will be given to you)