

MMJC 9200A Fall 2021 Doing Democracy Right or Doing Right by Democracy: Ethics, Theory, and the Public Right to Know

Instructor: Dr. Romaine Smith Fullerton

Class comprises asynchronous content mounted on Owl, and synchronous one hour discussion sessions in class (face-to-face) time on Thursday afternoons.

Office Hours via Zoom: Wednesdays from 10am – 11am or by appointment

Wednesday am link:

<https://westernuniversity.zoom.us/j/98486449728?pwd=QktQSFB0MHErZ0V1WG5yWXZUbkdKQT09>

Email: *best way to reach me romayne.smithfullerton@uwo.ca

I will do my best to answer emails within a 24 hour period, except on weekends. Emails received after 4pm Fridays will not be answered until Monday.

About this course:

Using theoretical frameworks borrowed from ethics, cultural studies, media studies, and political economy, this course explores concepts of democracy and responsibility in story-telling practices and products. Because both journalists and communicators must gather, evaluate, and disseminate information vital to a functioning democracy, it is essential that both groups understand what it means to operate ethically in the public sphere.

The central idea of this course is that we consider together how information is proposed, created, remade, framed, mediated, abused, interpreted, and recast. If you, as an information handler, interpreter, and provider, are familiar with a variety of ways in which information can be formed and reformed, then you will be equipped to problem-solve as flexibly as one can be—whether the task is to inform, persuade, educate, and so on.

While this course examines different approaches to the ethics of story-telling in its broadest sense, it is *your own judgement* that you must learn to develop. Some of the material may help you, while some might puzzle you, or even tick you off, but all ought to be fodder for self-awareness and development. Setting aside time to consider the grey areas of practice now is essential because in the future, at the end of a workday, you'll need to be able to weigh allegiances, consider alternatives, and offer a reasoned explanation about your decisions to your employer and your public.

There aren't "right answers"; there are defensible, thoughtful, and sensitive approaches to story-telling that will increase your credibility, and enhance your professionalism as well as your reach.

A word about content:

This course is a hybrid and I expect you to listen to the lectures and do your readings in advance of our in-person discussions on Thursdays. Given the nature of the topics, we will be addressing issues and looking at examples that may upset or trigger some of you. While I will do my best to let you know in advance about such happenings, it is not always possible to avoid exposure to disturbing content in one form or another. Please keep in mind that you have chosen to educate yourselves to become public story-tellers, and that the nature of the work you will do in the fields

of journalism and communication, will be demanding. It will necessitate familiarity with sometimes distressing situations, and that is part of the career you've chosen.

How the course will work

All the material for each week's class will be available on OWL one week before we 'meet' on Thursdays. Each week, we will address a separate topic or theme, and when you log in to our site, you'll see that there are links to the readings, to my Power Point slides (in numbered sections) and video lectures (to correlate with the slides), and to media examples, and a variety of materials submitted by student researchers. You must do your best to consider all the materials for each class so that you can both contribute to our discussions and have questions to ask of me and other students. I am not going to police you—you're graduate students and I assume you understand the value of making a commitment to your future self. This isn't a cooking class, and there is no exact recipe to follow to become an ethical, thoughtful and well-informed public story-teller. That said, there are frameworks to assist you in thinking through dilemmas; there are codes of ethics and style guides that will outline best practices, and broad principles. There are also readings—journalistic and academic—as well as lots of media examples (good and bad) that will allow us to explore how best to do your jobs when you get them.

About face-to-face class time and my expectations about our interactions:

This is a discussion-based course, and that's hard to do virtually, or in big groups. To try to facilitate thinking and talking, I have divided the class in half (list is at end of syllabus). Group 1 will attend the class discussion on Thursdays from 1:30-2:45pm and Group 2 will attend from 3:00-4:15pm. You can't switch groups; these are fixed. I firmly believe that together, we can foster an environment of trust and community, and that we can share our ideas as well as our worries and concerns, in a respectful and generous manner.

Suggested Text(s)

Covering Canadian Crime: What Journalists Should Know and the Public Should Question. Eds. Chris Richardson & Romaine Smith Fullerton. Toronto: U of Toronto P. 2016.

Entire book is available through Omni, or here:

http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1234250&site=ehost-live&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover

Other articles, websites, podcasts, and so on will be shared on OWL under the correlating lesson week.

A note about your written work for this course: All your work for me must be yours and yours alone. If you borrow material, words, an idea, you must cite the source. If you quote people (and I encourage you to reach out to experts and use material from your own interviews), you need to attribute. Since you are choosing to be a public story-teller, there is an added level of expectation in this regard. Please check Western's notes about plagiarism. This also means that you cannot submit or have submitted your work for any other course at this or any other institution. **The penalties for not complying are tough and will be enforced.**

Assignments (details below)

Quiz on the syllabus content

5%

Group research submission package (due Monday, the week prior to presentation)	20%
Individual close reading of one product or practice from the research package	20%
Weekly readings questions (best three weeks submitted at end of term)	10%
Major written assignment on a topic <i>other than your research theme</i> (you choose, due two weeks after theme is presented in class)	35%
Professionalism	10%

Details on Assignments

Quiz—during your first week of classes, there will be a short multiple choice quiz to confirm that you’ve read the syllabus. It will be administered through the Owl site and is worth 5% of your overall grade.

Group Research Submission Package (Consists of Parts 1 & 2, due the week before I present the topic in class):

You and your group will work on an area that correlates with one of the themes/topics outlined below. I expect you to function alongside me as ‘researchers’ for that week. I will make my material available to you, and you do additional background prep--consider what the time-slot should cover, what sorts of examples illustrate the central points, update some of my examples, and then create some Power Point slides (please offer a few ‘thoughts’ on these—contextual notes, but not too detailed). You submit this entire package to me Monday afternoon by 4pm in the week that PRECEDES your presentation date by ten days (i.e. if your presentation date is Thursday, October 14, then all materials are due to me Monday, October 4 at 4pm). I will have a look at your submissions on Tuesday, and get back to you if there are any issues, and then I’ll choose a **selection** of your material along with my own. We will work together, but I will organize and mount the final set of materials for the class. Please note, however, that you **MUST** be in class **in both discussion sessions** on the day your material is presented; it’s ‘your’ seminar. I am simply the designated presenter, or speaker. The penalty for being absent without acceptable accommodation is a zero on this assignment.

Please have a look at the list of topics at the end of the syllabus, and send me your top four choices, in order of preference, via email before **Monday, September 13 at noon**. If you have a particular reason for requesting a certain topic, please let me know and I will take that into consideration. I will do my best to give you the topic that you most want, but if there are more people for a topic than there are slots, I will draw names. Don’t be disappointed if you don’t get your first choice for the seminar; keep in mind that in addition to the seminar assignment, you must also write a paper for me on a separate topic, so you can **always** write about what interests you most, regardless of which seminar topic you draw.

Part 1 Group Assignment: generate an annotated but manageable **bibliography/reading list** (I would say between 10 and 20 sources per group—scholarly and practical articles, book chapters, commentaries, podcasts, websites, etc.), and have a critical look at this material. In an annotated bibliography, along with the citation [and online link] is a paragraph (maybe 200 words or so) describing **what the central argument is for each submission**, and **whether/not you found it useful and why**. If you find a source (reading, podcast, video) that you think is particularly well done and would be helpful to share with your classmates, please let me know and we can arrange to post it on OWL. I strongly encourage you to meet often and to work together as a group –

discuss what you find, what your thoughts are about the critics you've read, what you think is covered well, and what is left out. Sharing, useful discussion, and evaluation of information are important skills for you to develop as professionals who will function often as part of a team—in a newsroom or in a communications office. This material will provide a great starting point for others who may write essays on your topic.

You will turn in ONE GROUP-GENERATED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY as part of your research package.

Part 2 Group Assignment: In the second portion of the project (submitted along with the first part) I want each of you to locate some thought-provoking examples from existing media products (stories) and/or practices (journalistic routines, styles, structures) that illustrate the themes or ideas for the week. Examples can be of work that's well-done, or work that isn't. Offer a few words of context for these examples, and a way to access this primary material—i.e. collect some audio or video clips and provide a link; use textual excerpts from written work via a screen shot or a link to a webpage; find examples of photographs and post the image(s) or links to it/them. You might even interview some professionals who have insights and experiences with the topic; record that interview and provide us with an excerpted transcript or recording. Regardless of the examples you choose, this material must be submitted to me in a format that ensures ease of sharing with the class.

These examples are part of your GROUP submission and will be turned in as part of your research package.

I will evaluate Parts 1 and 2 together and award a 'pooled' group mark that is worth 20% of your final grade. A pooled grade means that everyone in the group does not necessarily receive the same mark; for example, if I believe the research package is worth 80% and there are 3 members in the group, the pooled grade would be 240 marks. You have a choice: you may divide those marks up evenly amongst you; that is the default. But there is another option: One person could get 82, one 78 and the third 80. If one person took on a leadership role, or did a larger amount of the slogging than you yourself did, you may wish to reward that person, or those persons, by **giving them some of your own marks**. I trust that you yourselves best know and understand how the work was accomplished, and I respect honesty. That is part of your professionalism component.

A note about group work: To be clear, this entire package ought to read as if it were created by one person—work together to make writing style as similar as possible, and copyedit one another's work. In short, you ought to work together to make a seamless project, rather than working separately and then simply amalgamating what each of you has found/written.

Individual close reading: Each of you will choose ONE of your media examples (from Part 2 of your group submission) and offer your OWN close reading/analysis of this media example. I strongly suggest you do not pick a media example of something that's OBVIOUSLY bad (think Fox News). I want you to choose something that offers subtlety. I will post an example or two of close readings from a previous year on OWL for clarity. You may use some of the theorists' points you noted from the readings in your bibliography, or some of those offered in the class readings, BUT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO SO. You can rely solely on your own thoughts and opinions for your evaluation/close reading if you choose. The argument you put forth in this

short analysis must be your own. Please do not paraphrase what critics have written because they ‘say it better.’ Cite people to show up their deficiencies, or to show where they have ‘got it wrong’ or not given quite enough information. In short, write me a thoughtful critique that is yours and yours alone. Please feel free to use first person, and say, “In my media example X, I see Y, and that makes me think of Z....” In terms of length, between 1500 and 2000 words should be adequate, per person, per example. I will call on you in our Zoom meetings that week to answer questions about your perspective(s) and/or make general comments. This individual analysis will constitute 25% of your final grade.

The group research package (parts 1 and 2), **and** your individual close reading are ALL due to me via Drop Box in Owl at 4pm Monday the week before the topic will be discussed in class/appears as a theme on the outline. The penalty for missing this deadline (for the research package and/or the individual close reading) is 5% per day. Please designate one person in the group to upload the research package on behalf of all of you. Each of you must submit your close reading of the media example, and a link to that example, directly to me. Finally, on your ‘seminar’ day, you must attend both zoom class meetings so you can answer questions in both groups and explain your perspectives.

Questions about weekly readings (which you will file via the assignment link on OWL, to me by midnight the night before each class—Wednesday)

I expect you to familiarize yourself with all assigned work before we talk on Thursdays. This material will be posted on OWL or assigned from our text under each thematic week.

Over the term, you must submit at least nine sets of weekly questions (out of thirteen possible weeks); if you submit less, you will lose 2% for each missing submission. Questions are due Wednesdays by midnight, via the assignment link for Thursday’s class discussion. You do not need to submit questions on the readings for the one week where you and your group have done additional work; I will assume you have read that week’s material, since you are adding to it. No exceptions to the midnight deadline. If you miss it, you forfeit that week. At the end of the term, **you must choose three of your best sets of questions for me to grade**, but they must already be uploaded to Owl; in other words, you can’t write any of them after the weekly due dates. Once you’ve picked your best three weeks, email me during the last week of class to tell me which weeks you want me to consider. Then, I will go back into your select original submissions to evaluate and grade.

In terms of my evaluation, I like questions that make clear what the context is (maybe quote a small part of the reading), and demonstrate that you have read and are familiar with the material. If you find it easier, you may include a couple of sentences summarizing the central idea(s) of the readings, and pose a few questions based on your summary. Your grade for your three best efforts will be based on whether you demonstrate your familiarity with the reading/material, whether the questions are provocative and thoughtful and would lead to fruitful discussion, and whether they’re clearly and articulately posed. Yes, spelling and grammar count. I have posted a couple of samples of what I consider to be good questions, in case you’re curious. This assignment will be worth 10 % of your grade.

Major written assignment (essay or op/ed)

In addition to doing research for one thematic week, you must also write a 12- to 15-page paper (3500 words max) based on some aspect of **another seminar topic** from a **different week**. Think of the material offered in this seminar as a springboard, or a starting point. To clarify, if you want to write about media and Indigenous people, and we talked at length in class about the coverage of the shooting of Indigenous activist Dudley George at Ipperwash, and the subsequent trials, you would choose to discuss something for your essay that the in-class material and discussion did not address: like some aspects of the coverage of recent events ongoing events at Caledonia, or the Wet'suwet'en protests, or another situation involving media and Indigenous peoples. Or perhaps the Ipperwash materials presented in class spoke briefly about Indigenous women, and made reference to the coverage of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, but offered few details, and you want to pick up that thread and consider what sorts of representations appear in a selection of mainstream news outlets. That would be interesting. Get the idea? If you want to pitch me your thesis and/or your topic, I'm happy to help. **These papers are due two weeks after the topic was presented in class**, at the beginning of class. You may choose to submit after the two week period—I will accept papers up to a month after the due date—but if you file after the due date, you will receive only a grade and no feedback. I won't deduct marks for lateness. Unless you have made special arrangements with me, papers will not be accepted more than a month after the topic was presented. Also, ALL final papers must be to me by the second last day of our fall class, no exceptions. That date is Thursday, December 2. I strongly encourage you to submit your paper WELL ahead of this. Papers will be submitted via the assignment link in Owl.

Style: You can choose to write an academic essay, or you can choose to write an op/ed (with live links instead of citations and some reliance on outside sources/interviews).

You might consider this assignment as a draft version for the Haak Saan prize, awarded in second term, for the best op/ed about responsible journalism. Information about the award is here: <https://www.fims.uwo.ca/files/mmjcawards.pdf> and an example of the winning submission from 2019, penned by Max Martin, can be found here: <https://www.thespec.com/opinion-story/9359547-reporting-to-make-a-difference/>

Length: Between 2500 and 3500 words. Clarity of meaning, strength of argument, and of course, spelling and grammar, all count. (If you choose to submit your piece for Haak Saan, you will need to provide a much-edited version).

This written assignment is worth 35 % of your final grade. It must be filed by beginning of the class in which it's due via the assignment link in Owl.

Professionalism

To me, attitude means everything. While I likely will not remember the grade you earned in this course, I will always remember how you interacted with me and your peers, whether you were present in our zoom meetings, prepared for discussion, polite, engaged, helpful, and so on. This is a **professional program**, and everything you “communicate” matters; keep this in mind when writing emails (proof read them and make sure they are typo and error-free), asking questions, and so on. Finally, I understand that you're people—that life happens, that problems arise, that sometimes things just don't go as planned. If you find yourself in difficulty and can't attend class

or meet a deadline, please let me know as soon as possible. I (and others) will be concerned if you vanish without explanation. Professionalism is worth 10% of your final grade and if I have no concerns, you will receive the full 10 marks for this.

Weekly Themes and Topics—readings are assigned and uploaded to Owl at least one week in advance of the topic to be discussed. Generally, we spend a week on each topic. But in an attempt to deepen our understandings of the many challenges in covering BIPOC communities, I have devoted two weeks to each of these themes: one week will offer you contextual and historical material that may not be directly connected to media coverage; the second week will focus on representations of, as well as best practices for, covering these communities. The backgrounder weeks – where we will not have a discussion class, but you have material with which you need to familiarize yourself—are MMJC break week October 26 and week of November 11.

Week 1: Sept. 9: intro day; we discuss the course and I'll answer questions about class set-up and assignments. All attend this one session. After this, we divide in half. See end of syllabus for class division list.

Week 2: Sept. 16: Public Storytelling, Facts and Truth

Readings: excerpt from Walter Fisher, "Narration as Human Communication"—read only to end of p. 10; Stanley Fish, "What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?"; listen to Parts 1 and 2 of *Media Indigena* podcast, "Reckoning: The Limits and Possibilities of Journalism." PDFs/links posted on OWL.

Week 3: Sept. 23: Publics and the Public Sphere; Concepts for Story-tellers

Readings: Jurgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedic Article;" Cherri Ketchum, "If a Radical Screams in the Forest, Will She Be Heard?" and Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere"—you do not need to read her section on weak and strong publics. All posted on OWL.

Week 4: Sept. 30: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—statutory holiday

Week 5: Oct. 7 Covering death and suicide. *BONUS marks* for those who offer to be researchers for this week—you will not only be first to go, but also you'll need to work quickly. I will be extra generous in my assessment of your work given these challenges.

Week 6: Oct. 14 Covering the 'range of age' spectrum—whose voices do we hear and why?

Week 7: Oct. 21: Covering sexual harassment and assault (Ghomeshi, #metoo, and more)

Week 8: Oct. 28 MMJC Break--no classes. Background reading about Indigenous peoples. *No researchers for this day—don't list as a research choice*--although you can list the following week

Week 9: Nov. 4: Representations of, and covering Indigenous people/communities (guest to lead discussion)

Week 10: Nov. 11 Background reading about BPOC. *No researchers for this day—don't list this as a research choice* although you can list the following week

Week 11: Nov. 18 Representations of/covering BPOC (guest to lead discussion)

Week 12: Nov. 25 Representations of/covering gender and orientation

Week 13: Dec. 3 Covering crime—how we depict accused persons and convicted persons

Week 14: Dec. 9 Covering crime—how we depict/interact with victims and families

Groups:

Reminder: while you usually attend only YOUR group's discussion, on the week when your material is presented in class, you must attend BOTH meetings.

Group 1:

Group 2:

Note:

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Western's "Health and Wellness" http://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC OFFENSES Scholastic offences are taken seriously. Students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf