

Journalism 61-???
3 credits

Quest I
Explore Culture

Signature Question:
Civic Knowledge
& Engagement

“How do people understand and engage in community life?”

Beyond Fake News:

How Journalists Do Their Work



COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course will help you understand the methodologies of working journalists with the goal of equipping you to be a more informed, and more discriminating, consumer of the news. Our goal will be to gain a deeper understanding of how news reporting comes about and shapes the civic sphere, adding to our knowledge about our community and enabling our engagement with it. As an incoming student, you will find that this course will help you in evaluating news as well as other kinds of information you encounter on campus. This course will also improve your ability to observe, understand, and take part in the social and political processes of a given community.

Course Information

Instructor: Miles Maguire **Office:** Sage 3607 **Email:** maguirem@uwosh.edu **Phone:** x7148
Classroom: **Class times:** **Office hours:** XXXXXXXX and by appointment
Peer mentor: XXXX XXXXXXXX **Peer mentor email:**

Course Materials

Advanced Reporting: Essential Skills for 21st Century Journalism by Miles Maguire (Routledge, 2014).

The Internet Trap by Matthew Hindman (Princeton UP, 2018).

* *Spotlight* by Tom McCarthy, director (Participant Media, First Look Media, et al., 2015).

* We will watch this in class. You do not need to purchase it.

USP Overview

Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

The University Studies Program (USP) is your gateway to a 21st Century college education at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. Beyond Fake News is a **Quest I** course, the first in a series of courses you will take to introduce you to the campus, the vibrant Oshkosh community, your own small learning community, and the challenges/opportunities of academic life as you pursue a liberal education.

Two key aspects of a Quest I course are that it is paired with another course to form a learning community and that the students in the class will have access to a peer mentor, a student who has experience with the USP and can help you make the most of it.

As you progress in the USP, you will take a **Quest II** course, which integrates knowledge, skills, and responsibility into student learning through the incorporation of disciplinary content, a signature question, and ethical reasoning. Students are engaged in the process of ethical reasoning by identifying situations with a significant ethical component and determining their own course of action. The Quest II course provides opportunities for students to plan their future in college, work, and life.

Your USP experience will also include a **Quest III** course, in which students extend their classroom into a community setting, working with a local non-profit, community group, or campus partner. This experience allows students to apply their classroom learning to a real world, practical experience, and then return to the classroom with a higher proficiency.

The Quest classes are designed to provide a solid foundation for the rest of your education here, no matter which major you choose. All **Quest** courses are also **Explore** courses. Explore courses guide students in exploring the liberal arts and sciences in three areas—Nature, Culture, and Society—and make up a majority of a student’s USP requirements.

For further information about the unique general education program at UW Oshkosh, visit the University Studies Program website at <https://usp.uwosh.edu/>.

In your Quest courses, you’ll be exposed to three “Signature Questions” that are central to a UW Oshkosh education:

- How do people understand and engage in community life?

- How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?
- How do people understand and bridge cultural differences?

Civic Knowledge & Engagement Signature Question

This Quest I course tackles the Signature Question addressing how people understand and engage in community life. In order to address this question, we must understand the role and importance of civic knowledge and civic engagement in the process of community (de)(re)construction. Here is a definition of civic knowledge:

Civic knowledge consists of an awareness and understanding of the various political and social processes that impact the nature and quality of life in local, state, national, or global communities. It also encompasses the cultivation of skills which may be useful in public life, like effective communication and ethical reasoning. Civic engagement means having an appreciation for and applying the values gained from civic knowledge in real world settings, directed at improving the quality of life in the communities of which one is a part. Civic knowledge and civic engagement emphasize learning, reflection, and action in order to create better communities.

Course Content

In this course we will examine the question of *how people understand and engage in community life* by focusing our attention on the news media and the mechanisms that they use to provide the information that is the basis for engagement with and in a given community.

One of the most important ways that we gain civic knowledge is through the news media, which bring us information about crime, government, political issues, arts and culture, sports, the weather, and many other topics. Your understanding of your community and your ability to engage with it are highly dependent on the quality of information that comes to you through news accounts.

Over the last 45 years, the news media—and the journalists who work for them—have arrived at a position of enormous influence over how citizens understand their communities and their place in them. The power of journalists to define communities and to provide pathways of engagement derives essentially from the ability of journalists to describe, and define the significance of, events, individuals and social trends. In this course, you will be exposed to the skills that underlie this entire dynamic.

By learning about these skills, you will gain a greater understanding of how the news media serve as a conduit for commercial and political messages, some of which are embedded in articles and some of which appear as paid advertisements. The insights that you gain will make you a more knowledgeable citizen as well as a more informed and discriminating consumer of media.

In more recent years, developments in technology and politics have undercut the traditional standing that journalists have enjoyed and subjected them to charges of creating

“fake news.” While it is certainly true that journalists report stories that turn out to contain factual errors, those who work for mainstream organizations, whether on the left or the right of the political spectrum, do not intentionally set out to provide their audiences with fake news.

For the average citizen, far removed from the places where the news breaks out—whether in a war zone, a legislative hearing, or an accident scene—it is difficult if not impossible to know for sure how accurate an account actually is. Has the reporter misunderstood what is happening? Has the reporter interpreted the event through an ideological lens? Has the reporter provided sufficient context and balance?

This course will teach you the methodologies that reporters use to gather the news and how the best ones apply those methodologies to arrive at thorough and credible accounts. Once you learn this benchmark, you will be better positioned to evaluate any story that comes your way, most of which will in some way fall short of this ideal standard. (Keep in mind that news gathering always happens under deadline pressure and that reporters are almost always forced to cut corners to one degree or another).

This course will also provide you with insights about how news coverage is an important part of the way that communities make decisions, develop their self-image, and find ways to evolve. A lot of news coverage is about the “official” elements of a community, those parts that are involved in policy and government decisions, but a lot of coverage is also a reflection of the more social ways that communities take shape. With a deeper understanding of community dynamics, you will gain a better understanding how individuals like yourself can take a more active role in shaping a community.

While this course will focus on news events and how reporting can lead to a consensus understanding of facts, the ideas that are presented here will help you to evaluate all kinds of information that you may encounter, in the classroom, in your social life, or in other contexts. The fancy word for this is epistemology, which is the study of the nature of knowledge, including the limits thereof.

A major factor that has led to the rise of so-called “fake news” is digital technology, especially social media and search. We won’t be able to get to the bottom of all the ways technology affects journalism, but we will examine some of the major influences.



Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

Class assignments and activities have been designed to help you develop values and competencies that have been identified by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, including the ability to:

- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press.
- Apply current tools and technologies and to understand the digital world.

As a Quest I course, this class also has course objectives related to our signature question on Civic Learning. Learning outcomes related to Civic Learning include the following:

- Recognition that knowledge is dynamic, changing, and consistently re- evaluated.
- Understanding that knowledge is socially constructed and implicated with power.
- Disciplined civic practices that lead to constructive participation in the communities in which one lives and works.

Class Activities & Grading

In this class we will examine individual news accounts and ongoing coverage of issues that are significant to the local Oshkosh community, including the UW Oshkosh campus.

1. Your final grade will be based on a 1,000-point scale. You can earn points as follows:

Up to 200 points for participation.

Up to 200 points for attendance at/written response to two campus events.

Up to 100 points for attendance at/written response to City Hall meeting.

Up to 200 points for a group project and presentation.

Up to 150 points for a midterm exam.

Up to 150 points for a final exam.

Here is a little more detail about some of these activities.

- I. **Participation.** You will be graded on your ability and willingness to contribute meaningful information to class activities and discussions. Class time will be devoted to a mixture of lecture and discussion, and your presence in class is extremely important, both for the sake of your own grade and for what you can contribute to others. **As part of your participation grade, you are required to meet with the instructor as an individual or along with one or two other students. This will occur during my regularly scheduled office hours and must happen before the midterm.**
- II. **On campus events.** You will be expected to attend two on campus events this semester and to consider how these events would be transformed into news stories and how these new stories would affect a given community. You will capture your reflections on these experiences in short papers.
- III. **City Hall meeting.** As a third out-of-class requirement, you will attend a meeting at City

Hall, preferably of the Oshkosh Common Council. If scheduling prevents you from attending a council meeting, you will attend a meeting of one of the many boards and commissions that meet each month at City Hall. As with the on campus events, you will reflect on how these official meetings can turn into news that shapes the community and the ways community members interact with each other and their governmental representatives.

- IV. **Group project.** Working in small groups students will identify an ongoing issue that affects the campus community, conduct some basic research into the contours of the issue and the major players who are involved, and describe how news coverage has affected the further discussion or resolution of the issue.
- V. **Exams.** The exams may include short-answer, true/false, multiple choice, and essay question formats. They will cover the material presented in the readings and class discussions as they relate to how the media contribute to civic knowledge and encourage (or discourage) civic engagement.

Final letter grades will be based on the following scale:

A	930 to 1,000	C	730 to 769
A-	900 to 929	C-	700 to 729
B+	870 to 899	D+	670 to 699
B	830 to 869	D	630 to 669
B-	800 to 829	D-	600 to 629
C+	770 to 799	F	< 600

Course Policies

You will not be able to make up exams or other assignments unless you notify the instructor before class meets and provide an acceptable excuse (as described under the university's instructional policies).

Please be respectful during class. This obviously includes the basics—like not talking when your instructor or other students are speaking to the entire class. It is also important that you use electronic devices appropriately. Taking notes on your laptop is OK, but messaging with a friend is not. Looking up a term on a tablet during lecture is fine, but shopping for a new snowboard is not. **Please turn off all and put away cellphones during class time. I may ask you**

to close your laptops and tablets at any time, so always have a pen and paper handy for note taking.

Academic Integrity

Don't cheat. The university has rules and procedures that could lead to severe disciplinary action, including expulsion, for passing off someone else's work as your own, which is sometimes called "plagiarism" and sometimes called "copying."

Early Alert Process

UW Oshkosh conducts an Early Alert program for all 14-week undergraduate courses to provide students with performance feedback early in the term (week 5) so that appropriate action can be taken if needed. Early Grade Reports will indicate if you have academic performance or attendance issues, as well as provide information on specific steps you can take and resources available to help you improve. It is common for students to be unaware of or over-estimate their academic performance in classes so this will help you be aware early on of your progress and provide strategies for success in the classroom. You will receive an email from Academic Advising with the subject Early Grade Report on October 11th. Please read the email carefully and see me if your grade is lower than a C and/or you have not attended class regularly.

Special University Services

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to students with special needs. Please contact the Dean of Students at 424-3100 (voice) or 424-2405 (fax).

The website is <http://www.uwosh.edu/deanofstudents/disability-services>.

The office is Dempsey 125.

Student/Academic Resources

Early in the semester, a representative from the University Advisement and Resource Center will make a presentation in class. But there are many other resources that are available to you as well. Here is a list of some of the main ones.

- The University Studies Program (USP) is committed to your success. Brief descriptions of relevant resources are provided below. Please visit the UWO resource page (<http://www.uwosh.edu/home/resources>) to access information about **all** the campus services available to support your success in the USP, at UWO, and beyond.
- *Center for Academic Resources* The Center for Academic Resources (CAR) provides free, confidential tutoring for students in most classes on campus. Check the Content Tutoring page on CAR's website (car.uwosh.edu) for a list of tutors. To schedule a tutoring session, simply email the tutor, let him/her know what class you are seeking assistance in, and schedule a time to meet. CAR is located in the Student Success Center,

Suite 102.

- *Writing Center* The Writing Center is committed to guiding students through the process of good writing (more than mere grammar checks). Appointments are free, confidential, and at your convenience. For more information, email wcenter@uwosh.edu or view their website (wcenter.uwosh.edu). The Writing Center is located in the Student Success Center, Suite 102.
- *Reading Study Center* The Reading Study Center is an all-university service whose mission is to facilitate the development of efficient college-level learning strategies in students of all abilities. The center offers strategies for improved textbook study, time management, note-taking, test preparation, and test-taking. For more information, email readingstudy@uwosh.edu or view their website (<http://www.uwosh.edu/readingstudycenter>). The Reading Study Center is located in Nursing Ed, Room 201.
- *Polk Library* Mr. Ted Mulvey is an Information Literacy Librarian who is available to assist you as you access, evaluate, and use information in University Studies Program classes. To contact Ted, email mulveyt@uwosh.edu or call 920.424.7329

Peer mentor

One of your best resources on this campus is your peers, especially those who have been there, done that. In this class we are fortunate to have someone who is specially trained and willing to help you become familiar with academic life at UW Oshkosh. The peer mentor will attend campus events with the class, answer your questions about the campus, and refer you to various resources. You should not hesitate to get to know our mentor as (s)he is an important part of the Quest I experience.

Office hours

One of the best learning resources available to you on campus is what is known as “office hours.” These are times that every instructor sets aside each week to be available to students for any questions or concerns that arise about a class.

Many students find the idea of meeting with an instructor intimidating, and most students do not take advantage of this resource, but if you don’t, you are missing out on a valuable opportunity.

You can use this time to clarify the requirements of an assignment, to go back over concepts that may not have sunk in completely, to prepare for an upcoming exam, or to raise questions about topics that were not fully covered during class or about ideas that occurred to you after class.

As part of your participation grade, you are required to make at least one visit to my office this semester, but don't let that be the only time you come to my office (or to the office hours of other instructors). You will likely be surprised at how willing your instructors are to help you in a one-on-one meeting during office hours.

Course Calendar

The calendar on the following page is subject to revision.

Course Calendar

DATE	TOPIC	READING	DEADLINES/DUE DATES DUE
9/7	Course intro	None.	.
9/12	News methodology	M: Chapter 1	
9/14	News judgment	M: Chapter 2	
9/19	Documents	M: Chapter 3	
9/21	Observation	M: Chapter 4	
9/26	Human sources	M: Chapter 5	Campus 1 response paper
9/28	Academic advising		
10/3	<i>Spotlight</i> (part 1)		
10/5	<i>Spotlight</i> (part 2)		
10/10	"Cops"	M: Chapter 6	
10/12	City Hall	M: Chapter 7	
10/17	Courts	M: Chapter 8	
10/19			MIDTERM EXAM
10/24	Enterprise	M: Chapter 9	
10/26	Specialized	M: Chapter 10	City Hall response paper
10/31	Specialized Topics	M: Chapter 11	
11/2	Public relations & media	M: Chapter 12	Small group project proposal
11/7	Impact Journalism	M: Chapter 13	
11/9	Technology	H: Chapter 1	
11/14	The attention economy	H: Chapter 2	
11/16	Cyberspace	H: Chapter 3	
11/21	Dynamics of web	H: Chapter 4	Campus 2 response paper
11/28	Online local news	H: Chapter 5	
11/30		H: Chapter 6	
12/5		H: Chapter 7	Group presentations.
12/7			Group presentations
12/12	Review for final.		Group presentations.
12/14			FINAL EXAM.