

# News in a Digital Age

July 8, 15, 22, & 29, 2020  
6-8 p.m.  
Online via Zoom

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## Welcome!

Never before has the nature of news changed so quickly and dramatically than now, driven by a crumbling economic model, “#FakeNews” attacks, and declining credibility and public support. This four-week online seminar examines the history of news, key principles of journalism that distinguish news from other forms of communications, the current day-to-day practice of news, effects of media on individuals, strategies for becoming a more discerning news consumer, forces that threaten to undermine an independent press, and potential solutions for saving quality journalism for the good of citizens and democracy.

## Readings

All of the readings are provided either as online links from this syllabus (highlighted in blue – just click and your web browser should take you there), or as pdf’s in the course file folder online. For the pdf readings, I recommend increasing the viewing size of the pdf in Adobe Acrobat, Also, optional readings as pdfs are in the file folder.

## About the instructor

I am an associate professor in the School of Journalism, where I also served as director 2011-2018. I covered politics as a newspaper reporter and editor in the Pacific Northwest before earning a doctorate at Washington State University in 2006. More information, including my full curriculum vitae, is available [online](#).

## All politics is local

No doubt politics will come up in this class, given the press’s role in holding government accountable. You may hear discussions in class about news coverage that could be offensive, such as ugly crimes, political controversies or conflicting religious beliefs. As long as we stay respectful it should be a positive experience!

## Online format

Sessions will be conducted live via Zoom. I will email each of you the Zoom address, along with the password, several days before the first class. I encourage attendees to use video, if possible, to improve human connection. Sessions will be recorded and available for viewing later. Everyone will enter the session muted, by default, to prevent background noise. Through the sessions I will provide opportunities for comments and questions in the chat window, during discussion time, and in breakout rooms. We will also have a break midway.

## Week 1: What is News?

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Today we focus on the fundamental elements of news and how it has evolved in the United States, from the colonial leaflets (subscription model) to the 1800s Penny Press (advertising model), to today's chaotic reversion back toward the subscription model. We also discuss the state of news media today and how typical news journalists do their work within legacy media (TV and newspapers) and emerging news organizations.

### Readings for today

- *Beginnings of Journalism*, James G. Stovall (file folder)
- *The Mirror, the Watchdog, the Marketplace*, Davis & Craft (file folder)
- [Pew State of the Media](#) (online, skim various reports)

### Putting knowledge into practice: “Media Log”

Before today's class, in a notebook or computer file record every media message your senses absorb throughout a full day, including news, TV shows, websites, ads, or even music lyrics. Every single message. Then, on another day before this class starts, avoid *all* media messages and devices, including your cell phone (if humanly possible!). The only messages allowed are face-to-face conversations with real humans. After both days, summarize your thoughts:

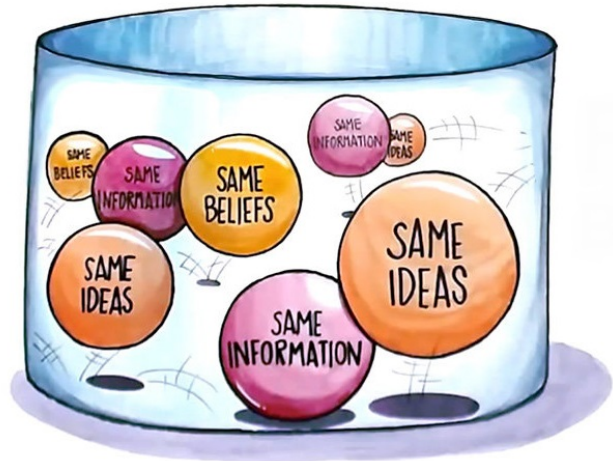
- Note the types of media messages you encountered – those you sought out and those that hit you uninvited.
- How did it feel to go cold turkey without any media messages? What did you miss? What did you do instead? How did it feel?
- What kind of impact, if any, do you think media might have on how you see the world, and how you feel day-to-day?

Be prepared to discuss impressions of the media you consume daily.

## Week 2: Popping the Filter Bubbles

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No longer does the bulk of Americans get their news 6 p.m. each night from Walter Cronkite, sharing the same frame of reality through a homogenous lens. For the past 40 years, news has slowly segmented through technological change. Now people consume news that reinforces their worldviews, leading to increased political polarization and the inability for friends, colleagues and family members to understand each other.



### Readings for today

- *Allegory of the Cave*, Plato (file folder, and Google online explainers)
- [Media bias map](#) and [explanation](#) by its creator (both sites online)
- [Polarization graphic](#) and skim Pew polarization [studies](#) (both online)

### Putting knowledge into practice: “Tiny Bubbles”

Before class, block out an hour when you can sit down to examine three different news websites at the same time. Call up these three news website homepages:

<i>The New York Times</i>	<a href="http://www.nytimes.com">http://www.nytimes.com</a>
<i>Fox News</i>	<a href="http://www.foxnews.com">http://www.foxnews.com</a>
<i>CNN</i>	<a href="http://www.cnn.com">http://www.cnn.com</a>

Looking at just the homepages, make a tally of the following:

1. Cotton candy stories (celebrities, mayhem, sports, arts, oddities)
2. Broccoli stories (public affairs, world news, investigative reporting)
3. Opinion (columns, commentary, editorials)
4. Advertisements (including so-called “sponsored content”)

Note the subject of the top stories. Think about how the websites are similar (shared stories) and how they are different (what stories they chose to give more prominence and the angle of the stories). Note what information they include and exclude. Think about how the content would, over time, shape an individual who reads that particular news source exclusively. (Note: The New York Times uses an online subscription model at [\\$1 per week](#)).

## Week 3: #FakeNews, News Deserts & Body Slams \_\_\_\_\_



Today the “Lamestream media” are attacked more vociferously than ever – online and physically. The advertising model continues to crumble, driving news organizations out of business. Press credibility is plummeting. In unprecedented ways, the president undermines the credibility of traditional legacy media and its owners (e.g., Bezos). Hedge fund owners slash newsrooms, in some cases closing down newspapers to leave some communities as “news deserts.” Newspapers are cutting legislative coverage, public affairs journalism, investigative reporting, and foreign reporting. Increased government secrecy is making it harder for the public to know what its government is up to. Professionally trained public information officers are more adept at managing reporters and information. More journalists are being jailed, attacked and killed throughout the world than ever before. Journalism education has been diluted by add-on programs, and press advocacy organizations operate on shoestring budgets, poorly coordinated. Is this the end of news as we know it?

### Readings for today

- [U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](#) and [CPJ death tracker](#) (online)
- [Expanding news deserts](#) and national [news desert map](#) (online)
- [Forecasting Freedom of Information](#), Cuillier (online)

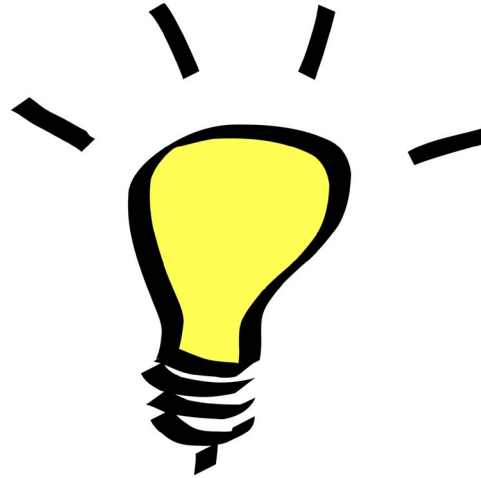
### Putting knowledge into practice: “Star Search”

Before class, get a copy of the Arizona Daily Star, or look at it [online](#). Note the stories that are generated by Star staff – with named bylines and “Arizona Daily Star.” That would not include anything from the Associated Press or other wire services. What if the Star closed shop tomorrow? What stories would you miss, if any? How might a “news desert” in Tucson affect community culture, politics, governance, business, etc.?

## Week 4: Saving Your Right to Know

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All is not lost. New ideas are emerging to save quality journalism, but it won't be easy. On this day we talk about new media economic models, such as online independent non-profits (e.g., [Tucson Sentinel](#)), philanthropic-driven news outlets, educational partnership “teaching hospitals,” and even information taxing districts, where citizens agree to tax themselves to make sure they have news and information to adequately self-govern and stay informed. The [Democracy Fund](#) and other non-profits are investing in new experiments to ensure that communities thrive through healthy and vibrant information ecosystems.



### Readings for today

- *Media Economics* (book chapter) by John Vivian (file folder)
- [Local News Lab](#) (skim stories and reports on this website)
- [Knight Foundation Local and Nonprofit News](#) efforts (skim website)
- [Community Information Taxing Districts](#) (skim website)

### Putting knowledge into practice: “Tucson News Ecosystem”

After reading through the materials for today, as well as incorporating previous days' readings and discussions, think about ways that the Tucson community could build a healthy news and information ecosystem. If you had unlimited power and money, what would you do to make quality news sustainable and shared by people from all walks of life and political persuasions? What steps should local institutions (municipal governments, the university, existing commercial media, nonprofit independent media, etc.) take to ensure a vibrant and factual flow of community information?