

**New York University**  
Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute  
Syllabus: JOUR-UA 505.001  
**THE FEMINIST JOURNALIST**  
**Summer 2019**  
Instructor: Lauren Duca  
Tuesday/Thursday, 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
Office hours by appointment

**Course Description**

Media coverage of our current political climate has been plagued by the mental Napalm that I call “both sides-ism.” This is a kind of classic “he said, she said” form of journalism where the reporter tries to give both sides of an issue, even if one side is completely bogus. You’ll also hear it referred to as “balance,” although in many cases it’s “false equivalency,” because attempting to appear balanced just serves to create more distortion.

The truth is not a math equation. In the midst of the ongoing American dumpster fire, there is, I believe, only one side to journalism, and it is motivated by building a truer, more equitable democracy. As this course will establish, not only does this effort allow for feminist journalists, it renders feminist journalism a moral necessity. We cannot build to social justice without adequate representation of intersectional perspectives.

Through two writing assignments and a fully-conceptualized social media presence, the Feminist Journalist will establish the imperative of interconnected motivations in the ideology of feminism and practice of journalism in the totality of the writer’s communication with the world. Our goal will be to create a concrete set of ethics for guiding radical transparency: rather than attempting to pretend the brain is a white board that might be erased, as is the misinterpretation of objectivity, we will aim to share as much as possible, detailing the precise vantage point from which the truth is shared.

**Learning Objectives**

In this course, students will:

- Demonstrate awareness of journalism’s core ethical values
- Write clear, accurate and engaging prose in an audience-appropriate manner
- Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society
- Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diverse perspectives
- Build a fully-formed social media presence built out of journalistic communication

**Course Structure**

Each week will include a mix of lecture, discussion, and workshop

**Readings**

The required books for the course include:

“Elements of Journalism” by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel  
“So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed” by Jon Ronson  
“Slouching Towards Bethlehem” by Joan Didion  
“Women in American Journalism: A New History” by Jan Whitt

All other articles can be found online and are listed with each session.

### **Course Requirements**

I want this class to be dynamic and built out of our discussions. Some of these readings may be subject to change. I’ll verify the assignments for each week as we go, as there may be some additions and subtractions, but this is loosely how I envision our journey together.

For each session, submit a written response to the readings, unless otherwise specified. These should include a pull quote that you found significant, 2) a question to consider in class discussion, and 3) 150 words or more unpacking how the piece will affect the way you approach your journalistic practice. The assignments listed with each session are due the night before class.

You’ll notice that the participation grade is extremely high. This number reflects the full scope of your participation in discussions and across assignments, which specified along with each session below. I’m not going to be draconian about it, and there is always room for discussion, but it is crucial that you are actively invested in coming out of this class as a more thoughtful and empowered journalist. If that sounds lame, this isn’t the course for you.

You can miss one class without concocting a family emergency, though you should still submit the assignment, or it will affect your participation grade. Each additional absence will cost 10% of your total grade. It’s important that you participate in the discussion each week. I’m not going to tally it exactly, but aim to raise your hand at least two times each session. The full breakdown of grading is below.

### **Grading**

Final grades will be calculated as follows. Please see the weekly schedule for the full description of each assignment.

**Class participation** (including attendance and weekly assignments throughout the session): 30%

**Op-ed**, due July 23: 20%

**Professional Twitter account project**, due August 6: 20%

## Journalistic essay, final draft due August 13: 30%

### Week 1

#### 1) Tuesday 7/9/2019: The basics of journalistic ethics

- “Elements of Journalism” by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel
- “I went on a date with Aziz Ansari. It turned into the worst night of my life” (Babe)
- “A Rape on Campus: A Brutal Assault and Struggle for Justice at UVA” (Rolling Stone)

Hopefully, you’ve read this book before. If it’s been a minute, please read it again. It’s important to have a firm grasp on your guiding rules before you can get experimental with what is possible in terms of journalistic communication. The most essential of this practice is objectivity of method. Once you have your guiding rules in place, you will be able to explore new realms of journalistic communication, in terms of experimenting with your writing, and sharing with readers in mediums and forums beyond published pieces.

To begin, I would also like us to process our preconceived notions regarding what is possible in journalistic communication. Three questions will guide our discussion: What does journalism mean to you? What does activism mean to you? What does artistry mean to you as it relates to journalistic writing?

**Assignment(s):** Let’s skip the reading response this week. Instead, please submit three pieces of work (can be articles or books) that have moved you or shaped your approach to journalistic writing in some way. For each, please write a minimum of 150 words explaining how interacting with the work has shifted your perspective.

Write a brief essay regarding your interest in journalism, what kind of writing you would like to pursue and why. I would like about 500 words, though it doesn’t need to be exact. Please don’t be overly concerned with form. The purpose of this assignment is to be sure you set an intention moving into this class. What do you hope to take from the course?

#### 2) Thursday 7/11: Journalism as the foundation of practical citizenship and cultural participation

- “Is Donald Trump saving the news media?” (WaPo)
- “It’s easy to fact check Trump’s lies. He tells the same ones all the time.” (WaPo)
- “Americans Aren’t Practicing Democracy Anymore” (The Atlantic)
- “We The People Aren’t Even Sure Who ‘We’ Are” (NYT Magazine)

The purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to participate in civic and cultural life. In grounding our ethics, let’s set up a clear

understanding of civic participation, especially in terms of the function of journalism in a democracy.

I want to cover the function of the American project. This course is built from the ethical argument that we ought to strive for building a truer, more equitable democracy. Let's use this discussion to establish a shared understanding of the American political system and journalism's role within it. In the context of our ongoing democratic crisis, how can journalists provide the public with the foundation of truth required to establish people power?

**Assignment(s):** For your reading response, rather than focusing on the content of the articles, I would like you to focus on cultural takeaways regarding media illiteracy. What do you think is the source of American anti-intellectualism, especially in terms of the rise of fake news? What is the antidote for widespread ignorance? How can journalists better work to empower the public with information?

Begin your professional Twitter account as discussed in class. Send me a brief reporting establishing how you envision your brand. Answer the following questions: 1) What is your personal brand overall? 2) How would you describe your tone? 3) What areas of interest and expertise will you be covering? 4) Who is your intended audience? (This is an ongoing effort. You should aim to tweet least once a day for the duration of the course. We will briefly discuss your progress each week.)

## Week 2

### 3)Tuesday 7/16: The matter of perspective

- "Rashoman" (1950)
- Loftus, E. F., & Palmer, J. C. (1974). Reconstruction of automobile destruction: An example of the interaction between language and memory;.Journal of verbal learning and verbal behavior, 13(5), 585-589.
- "The Psychopath Test" by Jon Ronson

I want us to think critically about perspective. We need to be aware of ourselves in order to process how we are making sense of the way we see the world. I want to have a discussion about this from both a philosophical and psychological perspective. It's important to know what things might shape your view, so that you can interact with those factors critically, and disclose them to readers when necessary. From there, how can we think about what it means to peel back the fourth wall?

**Assignment:** Do your response for all three readings combined. Please focus on unpacking the meaning of personal perspective, and how we can be mindful of it when applying objectivity of method.

Write 300 words on the various experiences and preferences that may affect your perspective. How can you be mindful of them moving forward?

#### 4) Thursday 7/18: Moving beyond the math equation of both-sides-ism

- “Portraits from a Caravan” (NYT)
- “How (and Where!) To Pitch Your Writing” (Ann Friedman on Medium)
- Read This From a Teleprompter: Donald Trump Is Unfit to Serve (Teen Vogue)
- The New York Times Hiring Bret Stephens Is Pretty Much "Pulling a Comey" (Teen Vogue)

Now that we have explored perspective, how can we use objectivity of method in effectively addressing the way our preferences / experiences / etc. may affect our point of view? In what way does the media overcompensate for this? What does it mean to perform objectivity versus to pursue the practice? Beyond that, let's have a conversation about the difference between journalistic op-ed writing and polemic. Ultimately, how can we clearly communicate journalism's purpose to the public in all of its forms?

**Assignment(s):** In place of a reading response, please send an example of coverage you have found to be bias. Write a short blurb explaining why, along with what you would do differently, and what the publication should do to correct the error.

Next week, you will write an op-ed regarding an issue that is meaningful to you. This should be between 750 and 1500 words. For today, please send a two sentence pitch regarding your plan for this assignment.

By the end of the course, you will write a journalistic essay between 2500 and 5000 words in length. This may be motivated by expanding your literary skills or activist practice. For class today, submit a thorough pitch including a strong angle as well as a plan for research and reporting. This should be about 300 words in length.

### Week 3

#### 5) Tuesday 7/23: Journalism as an activist practice, and the necessity of of intersectional perspectives

- “Women in American Journalism: A New History” by Jan Whitt
- “The Conversation We Should Be Having” (NYmag)
- “Donald and Billy on the Bus” (NYT)
- “White Plight” (The New Yorker)
- “My Father Spent 30 Years In Prison. Now He's Out.” (Refinery 29)

As we discussed at length last week, the role of the journalist is to empower the public with information. To that end, it is necessarily an activist practice. Beyond the basics of providing a foundation for practical citizenship, we need to think critically about the meaning of the American project. I would argue that the essential end of interrogating the question of how we ought to live together is building a truer, more equitable democracy. In order to work toward that state of equity, we require intersectional perspectives. In short: It is not only possible to be a feminist journalist, we all ought to be.

**Assignment:** Do a reading response on the reading of your choosing. Submit your op-ed.

**6) Thursday 7/25: Feminist journalism, especially in terms of radical transparency**

In addition to establishing your journalistic ethics, part of building your voice, brand, and beat, is establishing your worldview. For today's discussion, we will think about the following questions: What matters to you, and what hills are you will to die on? What does it mean to take risks in our current political climate? What is missing right now? How can we start the work of filling the void?

I believe that, especially in the space of op-ed writing, we can get closest to the truth by sharing as much information as possible. This occurs within published writing, and beyond it, in communicating your full perspective to an audience that will, ideally, be engaging with you beyond any individual written piece.

**Week 4**

**12) Thursday 7/30: Artistry in journalistic communication**

- "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" by Joan Didion
- "Generation Why" (The New York Review of Books)
- "I'm Not Black, I'm Kanye" (The Atlantic)
- "Inside the Federal Bureau Of Way Too Many Guns" (GQ)

There is a lot of untapped space for writing that expands the boundaries of what is possible in journalistic writing. This week we are going to get in the weeds on style. In part, this is an offshoot of our founding ethical argument. Journalism is required to empower the public with information. When it is boring or coded in expertise, it alienates the average citizen. Making your work engaging and artistic is crucial. Part of the work includes drawing people in.

**Assignment(s):** Choose any of the readings for your response. Submit the first draft of your journalistic essay.

**8) Thursday 8/1: Individual meetings**

I'm going to break the session into 1:1 meetings with each of you. On Tuesday, we will send around a sign up sheet, so you can select your slot.

**Assignment:** Please come prepared with at least three specific questions for our individual meeting.

**Week 5:**

**9) Tuesday 8/6: The intersection of journalistic ethics and influencer culture**

- “Fyre Festival, Theranos and Our Never-Ending ‘Scam Season’” (NYT)
- “Reinventing Your Personal Brand” (Harvard Business Review)
- Normalizing Twitter: Journalism Practice in an Emerging Communication Space ([https://www.researchgate.net/journal/1461-670X\\_Journalism](https://www.researchgate.net/journal/1461-670X_Journalism))

Earlier in the semester, we discussed creating extended engagement with your audience. This brings up the matter of influencer culture. As journalists, it is crucial that all of our audience communication come from an established foundation of ethics. What are the differences between the two roles as they are typically performed? How can we think about the power of the influencer as combined with the work of journalism?

**Assignment:** Review your partner’s report on their personal brand. Please write 300 to 500 of critique. Did they achieve their objective? Is there a sense of clear voice? What could be improved?

### **10) Thursday 8/8: Participating in the conversation, on and offline**

- “Everyone Is Canceled” (NYT)
- “It’s Time to Cancel FuckJerry” (Rolling Stone)
- “The Backlash to the Backlash at The New York Review of Books” (NY mag)

In beginning to think about conducting an ongoing conversation with your audience, let’s look at the state of the conversation, online and off. What are the perils of the discourse as it typically unfolds? What is the best way to navigate that? Revisiting our work on activist journalism, what does it mean to take risks in this context? How can you conduct yourself across social media, panels, and other forums for discussion in a way that accurately and adequately reflects your perspective?

**Assignment:** Instead of a reading response, pick a time a celebrity, politician, or other cultural figure was “cancelled.” What was the offense? How did condemnation arise? Was there an apology? If so, was it effective? Send me about 300 words addressing these questions.

### **Week 6:**

### **11) Tuesday 8/13: Taking your journalistic brand to the next level**

With our penultimate class, it’s time to thread it all together. We will dive into the best real-world application of activism and artistry building from the foundation of ethics you established at the start of class. Now that you have handed in both of your writing assignments and your professional Twitter account, how can you think about how all of these types of writing intersect? How can we think about the promotion of individual projects? What is the best way to build and sustain an audience over time?

**Assignment:** Submit the final draft of your journalistic essay. Please come prepared to discuss challenges you faced along the way, what you learned about yourself as a writer, and how you hope to improve moving forward.

**12) Thursday 8/15: Let's eat junk food and have feelings about our past six weeks together. <3**

I will plan this week's activities and discussion based on our conversations throughout the session. Also, carbs.

**Accommodations**

Students with disabilities that necessitate accommodations should contact and register with New York University's Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu. Information about the Moses Center can be found at www.nyu.edu/csd. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor.

**Diversity & Inclusion**

The Institute is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment. The Institute embraces a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions.