

This version of the syllabus highlights aspects of the course that may be of interest to other instructors. It does not contain many of the routine elements found in the official course syllabus. If you are a student enrolled in this course, you should follow the official version posted to Blackboard.

Northern Illinois University

JOUR 485B: Topics in Journalism & Society: AI, Automation & Journalism

Professor: Dr. A. L. Guzman

Course description: In-depth study and discussion of current topics of special importance and interest in the field of journalism and society, including the background of the topics and their relationship to other fields. May be repeated to a maximum of 6 semester hours when topic varies. This specific course will focus on the latest technological trends within journalism and media production, distribution, and consumption: automated news-writing programs, algorithms, conversational agents and robots. Students will learn about these trends, how they are affecting journalism, the larger social and cultural issues surrounding these technologies, and the impact for the future of media.

Course learning outcomes:

- explain trends in the AI automation/augmentation of the production, distribution and consumption of news
- situate these changes in media work within a larger social and economic context
- explain key ethical challenges accompanying AI automation/augmentation generally & within media work
- compare/contrast human-machine communication with human-human communication
- evaluate contemporary journalism practices and products related to AI augmentation/automation
- evaluate the implications of AI augmentation/automation for media consumers
- evaluate the implications of AI augmentation/automation for future media producers

Course design: This is an upper-level course designed to introduce students to the ever-evolving nature of the media industry and the implications of these changes for media producers and consumers. Because it is geared toward future media professionals, the course integrates industry standards into policies and assignments.

Course format: To understand the evolution of media, students must be regular consumers of a broad range of media relative to current events and the topics discussed in this course. Class meetings will consist of a blend of lecture, discussion, and in-class activities. Most of what we do in the classroom will apply our knowledge from course readings and media consumption i.e. the professor does not repeat everything from a reading in lecture. It is critical that all students complete readings, activities, and assignments before coming to class.

Resources available: Any student whose performance in this course may be affected by challenges in securing food, housing, or other needs is urged to contact the Division of Student Affairs, 815-753-1573, Student_Affairs@niu.edu. The [Student Affairs website](#) provides information on free services such as the Husky Food Pantry. NIU Counseling also has a wide range of services available for you or to help others, 815-753-1206. Please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable her to provide any other resources that she may possess.

Students requiring accommodation: If you need an accommodation for this class, please contact the Disability Resource Center as soon as possible. The DRC coordinates accommodations for students with disabilities. It is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building and can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu. Also, please contact the professor privately as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations. Please note that you will not be required to disclose your disability, only your accommodations. The sooner you let your professor know your needs, the sooner they can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Professor communication with students: The professor communicates with students in-person and via students' official NIU e-mail addresses and Blackboard. Grades will ONLY be discussed in-person during office hours. The professor is willing to help students devise strategies to learn, but student complaints will not change grades.

Assessment: Information below is a general overview. Individual assignments will be posted to Blackboard.

Engaged Participation: Engaged participation is when students bring their thoughts and questions, informed by course content, into the classroom dialogue. Students earn participation points for each class session they attend and actively engage in discussion and class activities. Students cannot earn participation points on days that they are absent.

Journals: Students will write regular responses and reflections regarding course materials and meetings. At midterm and the course's end, students will synthesize and reflect upon what they have learned by drawing on course materials. On occasion, journal writing will take place during class. If a student is not in attendance that day, they cannot earn points for that journal activity.

Current event connection: Students will identify a current event or issue related to course material and will lead a brief class discussion regarding the event/issue. The student also will write a short paper explaining the connections between the event/issue and course materials. Students will be assigned a due date during the first few weeks of the course.

Emerging Media Project (group): Students will work in groups to learn more about a subject related to the course and develop a paper and multi-media presentation that will help to further the knowledge of their peers. The project will require students to analyze research from academic sources and synthesize their research with course materials.

Application Paper: Students will apply the knowledge they have gained from this course and additional research from academic sources to evaluate a "real-world" scenario regarding the integration of AI technology into journalism.

Exams: Topics covered in exams include, but are not limited to, course readings, lectures, discussions, peer presentations and current events. Exam format will be announced in class.

Grades: Grades are calculated on a point system.

Assignment	Points
Participation	15
Journal	
Midterm Reflection	10
Final Reflection	10
Current Event Connection	20
Emerging Media Project	40
Application Paper	60
Exam One	45
Exam Two	50
Total	250

Extra Credit: There is one extra credit opportunity that will be announced on Blackboard (approximately 5 points).

A note on grading: Student work is graded based on multiple criteria. First, the professor reviews the work to see if the requirements of the assignment are met. Second, the professor examines how well each element of the assignment is fulfilled. This includes the accuracy and sophistication with which students weave together course concepts and outside research to support a particular argument or their work. Any grade calculation errors must be brought to the professor's attention within 24 hours of receiving the grade. The professor may make copies of student work.

Grading Scale (out of 250 points)

Letter grade	Points	Explanation
A	233-250	The work is exceptional and exceeds all minimum requirements.
A-	225-232	
B+	218-224	The work is above average and has some aspects exceeding the minimum requirements while other aspects are at the minimum.
B	208-217	
B-	200-207	
C+	193-199	The work is satisfactory with most aspects meeting the minimum requirements.
C	175-192	
D	150-174	The work is unsatisfactory with some aspects not meeting the minimum requirements.
F	0-149	The majority of the work does not meet the minimum requirements for this course.

Classroom policies and procedures:

Technology: This course incorporates different forms of technology into the classroom such as humanoid robots, social robots, conversational assistants (i.e. Siri or Alexa). The professor will provide instructions on how to interact with the technologies. At no time is a student to touch, use, or interact with a technology without the professor's express permission. No food or drink, even a covered drink, is allowed in the same space as the technology. Students who do not follow professor instructions regarding classroom technology or who misuse the technology in some way may face disciplinary actions and be financially responsible for any damage to the technology.

Course calendar: The course schedule is based on a class that meets twice a week. The weekly readings are typically assigned to a specific day.

Week	Topic	Reading	Assignment
1	The Culture of Artificial Intelligence	1. Newsrooms must learn how to use AI 2. Artificial intelligence and the future of humans	
2	What is AI?	1. Ancient dreams of intelligent machines 2. Robots guarded Buddha's relics in a legend 3. A history of robots (video) 4. Defining artificial intelligence 5. Hello, AI,	
3	AI & Communication	1. As we may think, 9/10 2. ELIZA: A computer program for the study of natural language communication between man/machine, 3. What is Human-Machine Communication, anyway?	
4	The evolving role of data in journalism	1. Journalistic data mining	
5	Journalism – it's not just for humans	1. A guide for newsrooms in the age of smart machines 2. Automation in the newsroom	
6	Reactions from consumers and journalists	1. How to read a research article 2. Readers' perception of computer-generated news: Credibility, expertise, and readability, 3. When reporters get hands-on with robo-writing,	
7	What have we learned? What next?		Journal. Exam
8	The trouble with AI and algorithms	1. 7 things we've learned about computer algorithms 2. AI Now 2018: The intensifying problem space 3. AI Now 2017: Bias & Inclusion	
9	Ethics, AI, & journalism	1. Ars ex machina: Rethinking responsibility in the age of creative machines 2. Centered on whom? The pitfalls of human-centered artificial intelligence	
10	Sharing knowledge	Emerging Media Project Presentations	Emerging Media Project
11	Reaching and engaging audiences differently	1. The new importance of "social listening" tools 2. Newsbots that mediate journalist & audience relationships	
12	Emerging trends	1. Readings TBD	
13	Automating disinformation	1. The rise of social bots 2. The state of fakery	
14	What's the future of journalism?	1. What will be the lasting impacts of AI on the news?	Journal
15	Pulling it all together		Exam 2
16	Finals Week		Application Paper

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