

# JOUR267: Introduction to Social Media and Audience Engagement

Summer 2022 Syllabus & Schedule

## Course Information

**Instructor:** Alexander A. Pyles, [aapyles@umd.edu](mailto:aapyles@umd.edu), @aapyles

**Course Type:** Online, synchronous and asynchronous

**Synchronous Meetings:** Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (via Zoom)

**Office Hours:** Tuesday & Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. (via Zoom)

## Course Description

This class will provide students with an overview of how journalists use social media to gather information, tell stories and reach their target audience. Students will develop skills in social content creation, audience engagement and sourcing and verification.

This is a fully online course in which content will be delivered both synchronously and asynchronously. The instructor will reserve synchronous meetings for class discussions and meetings with special guest speakers. Asynchronous instruction will include video tutorials that teach students specific content creation skills.

## Learning Outcomes and Objectives

- Students will understand the role social media plays in the journalism and news media industries, including the various jobs available
- Students will understand how to create compelling content that is optimized for social media.
- Students will become familiar with social media tools and technologies used by industry professionals.
- Students will learn the skills necessary to use social media platforms to maintain a professional presence online.

# Course Tools and Technology

Since this is a social media course, you will be using many social media platforms and tools (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and more). You should be willing to sign up for and use these platforms in order to successfully complete many assignments.

A textbook is not required for this course. The instructor will provide daily free readings that should be completed before attending synchronous course meetings.

## About The Instructor

Alexander A. Pyles is a lecturer at the University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism, director of audience engagement for Capital News Service and contributing editor at The Howard Center for Investigative Journalism. In more than a decade as a journalist, he's covered sports, politics, business issues and more for publications including *The Baltimore Sun*, *The (Maryland) Daily Record*, AOL's Patch.com and *The (Wilmington, Del.) News Journal*. Since 2012, Pyles has taught courses in digital design, social content creation and audience analytics at Merrill College.

## Assignments

You will have several assignments throughout this three-week summer course. Each assignment group is explained and weighted below. Assignments are turned in on ELMS unless otherwise notified.

**Participation (10% of final grade):** This measures students' participation in discussion during synchronous class meetings.

**Job Quizzes (15% of final grade):** Students will hear from multiple guest speakers throughout the semester. After those meetings, students will complete a Job Quiz in which they will have the opportunity to reflect on the kind of work the speaker does, how it relates to tools and techniques in the course and whether the job is of interest.

**#HallofFame and #HallofShame (20% of final grade):** Students are responsible for two "Hall of Fame" and two "Hall of Shame" submissions throughout the semester. Following a rotating schedule assigned during the first class meeting, students will find one social media post that belongs in the Hall of Fame (i.e. it's great!) and one social media post that belongs in the Hall of Shame (i.e. it's awful). Students will submit posts

to the instructor in advance, and the class will discuss the students' submissions during synchronous class meetings.

**Skill Check (25% of final grade):** There will be several skill-check assignments each week that offer students the opportunity to create content using a tool or platform taught in class. The skill check will be graded for completeness, accuracy and creativity.

**Final Project:** Students will follow one journalist on social media for a week and create a short (less than five minutes) presentation on that journalist's use of social media. This should be a traditional presentation (using Google Slides or Microsoft Powerpoint, for example) that allows the student to share examples of what they observed about the journalist. The project will be graded in three parts:

- **Week One (10% of final grade):** By midnight on July 17, select the journalist you wish to follow and submit one paragraph explaining who the journalist is and why you want to follow them.
- **Week Two (10% of final grade):** Spend this week collecting screen shots, contacting the journalist and otherwise researching the journalist's use of social media. By midnight on July 24, submit one screenshot and explain why you plan to use it in your presentation.
- **Week Three (10% of final grade):** By 10 a.m. July 31, your presentation should be complete and submitted. During class, you will present your findings in no more than five minutes. Your presentation should:
  - Identify a journalist and describe, in general, their involvement on social media (On which platforms are they active? How long have they been using social media? etc.)
  - Outline the social media strategies used by the journalist (including content creation, verification, breaking news, etc.).
  - Explain the interaction and community-building strategies the journalist used across their social media platforms.
  - Have an opinion: Is this journalist using social media successfully? What could they do to improve their engagement and overall presence across social platforms? Provide some recommendations, if appropriate.

## Grading Considerations and Deductions

Assignments will be graded for accuracy, fairness, meeting of deadlines, substance, quality of writing, presentation, usability and style. Factual errors have serious consequences; for each instance, a letter grade will be deducted. All assignments are due at the start of class, unless specifically instructed otherwise. A full letter grade will

be deducted for each day an assignment is late, except for the final project, which will receive an F (55 percent) if turned in after deadline. Work not turned in at all receives a 0.

Minus and plus grading will be assessed as follows:

98-100 = A+

93-97 = A

90-92 = A-

88-89 = B+

83-87 = B

80-82 = B-

78-79 = C+

73-77 = C

70-72 = C-

68-69 = D+

63-67 = D

60-62 = D-

0-59 = F

## Academic integrity

Along with certain rights, students have the responsibility to behave honorably in an academic environment. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty and plagiarism, will not be tolerated. Adhering to a high ethical standard is of special importance in journalism, where reliability and credibility are the cornerstones of the field. Therefore, the college has adopted a “zero tolerance” policy on academic dishonesty. Any abridgment of academic integrity standards in a College of Journalism course will be referred to the university’s [Office of Student Conduct](#) and the college’s associate deans. To ensure this is understood, all students are asked to sign an academic integrity pledge at the beginning of the semester that will cover all assignments in this course. Students found to have violated the university’s honor code

may face sanctions, including a grade of XF for the course, suspension or expulsion from the university.

## Religious Holidays

There will be no tests or major assignments scheduled on religious holidays identified by the university. If you expect to miss a class during the semester due to a religious holiday, please notify the instructor in writing before the start of the second class.

## Names and Self-Identification

The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering equitable classroom environments. I invite you, if you wish, to tell us how you want to be referred to both in terms of your name and your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). The pronouns someone indicates are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity. Visit [trans.umd.edu](https://trans.umd.edu) to learn more. Additionally, how you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion and disability, among all aspects of your identity, is your choice whether to disclose (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and I ask you to do the same for all of your fellow Terps.

## Students with Disabilities

Students with a specific disability (permanent or temporary, physical or learning) needing accommodation during the semester should make an appointment to meet with the instructor as soon as possible after the first class. Students will be asked to provide the instructor with the accommodation letter developed for the student by the [Accessibility and Disability Service](#) on campus. To schedule an appointment with the ADS, call 301-314-7682 or stop by the Disability Support Service front desk in the Shoemaker Building, Room 0106. The office is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. [Find more on the process here.](#)

## Additional Support

The [UMD Counseling Center](#) provides personal, social and academic support services for UMD students. This includes individual, group and couples counseling, for anxiety, depression, stress, relationship problems, eating concerns, traumatic events and more.

For more on university course-related policies, please refer to [The University's Office of Undergraduate Studies](#).

## Course Schedule

*The instructor reserves the right to modify the course schedule to address student learning needs and to accommodate guest speakers.*

### Week One | Introduction

**July 13:** Introduction to the course and audience engagement

**July 14:** Introduction to social media platforms

*Guest: Teddy Amenabar, audience editor, The Washington Post*

**July 15:** Social media platforms (continued)

**July 16:** Social media and "Fake News"

*Guest: Erica L. Green, education reporter, The New York Times*

**July 17:** Social media listening, verification and curation

### Week Two | Writing

**July 20:** Audience engagement, acquisition and community management

*Guest: Kalani Gordon, director of audience and analytics, The Baltimore Sun*

**July 21:** Writing for social

**July 22:** Writing for Google

*Guest: Michael A. deVry, SEO specialist, University of Maryland*

**July 23:** Breaking news: Tweeting

**July 24:** Breaking news: Live video

### Week Three | Graphics and Video

**July 27:** Social Graphics

*Guest: Justin Karp, director of social media, NBC Sports*

**July 28:** Social Video

**July 29:** Social Stories

**July 30:** Self-promotion and personal branding

*Guest: Lisa Snowden-McCray, editor, Baltimore Beat*

**July 31:** Final presentations