

**MERR 60 - 01**  
**Fake News:**  
**Its History and Why We Need Critical Media Literacy**

**Course:** Fake News: Its History and Why We Need Critical Media Literacy

**Instructors:** Nolan Higdon

**Office Hours:** TBD

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**Required Readings:**

- Nolan Higdon, *The Anatomy of Fake News*, (University of California Press, 2020).
- Additional Learning Content is on Canvas

**Course Description:**

Teaches students how to take skillful possession of their power as citizens by participating in community focused news literacy service learning projects. Recently, debates about fake news in entertainment, politics, and news media have centered on the threat American citizens' waning news literacy skills pose to the democratic process. Course develops those skills, focusing on critical thinking, the history of fake news and journalism, differences between journalism and fake news, news and propaganda, news and opinion, bias and fairness, assertion and verification, and evidence and inference. Integrates coursework into collaborative community engagement projects that seek to advance the community's news literacy skills.

All Students can enroll - restriction is waived in summer. From the Instructor: Teaches students how to take skillful possession of their power as citizens by participating in community focused news literacy service learning projects. Recently, debates about fake news in entertainment, politics, and news media have centered on the threat American citizens' waning news literacy skills pose to the democratic process. Course develops those skills, focusing on critical thinking, the history of fake news and journalism, differences between journalism and fake news, news and propaganda, news and opinion, bias and fairness, assertion and verification, and evidence and inference. Integrates coursework into collaborative community engagement projects that seek to advance the community's news literacy skills.

**Learning Outcomes:**

**Students will:**

- learn the relevant history and differences between journalism and fake news
- engage in community news literacy projects that advance participants critical news literacy skills.
- learn strategies for fact-checking and discerning fake news from journalism
- analyze and reflect upon their service-learning participation for the purpose of developing questions for academic study.

- learn approaches to critical news literacy pedagogy in a public setting, and apply them to problems and challenges in the community.

### **My Role:**

I look forward to working closely with you this semester, so I plan to be very active in the class. I will initiate contact by posting announcements at least once a week, participating in class discussions to help you better understand concepts, and providing detailed feedback on big assignments. For discussions, I will participate by posting for the class to see, and this might be my feedback to you. I can also give you private feedback in the Grades area or by email. For other types of assignments (file uploads, quizzes, exams, etc.), you will submit them within Canvas, and you can view feedback for them when checking your grades.

I will try my best to give you a grade and necessary feedback within a week. Make sure you set your Canvas notification setting for Submission Comment (go to Account, click Notifications) to Notify Immediately so you will know when I comment on your submissions. You will give me feedback about the course through surveys that will be available after the midterm and final exam.

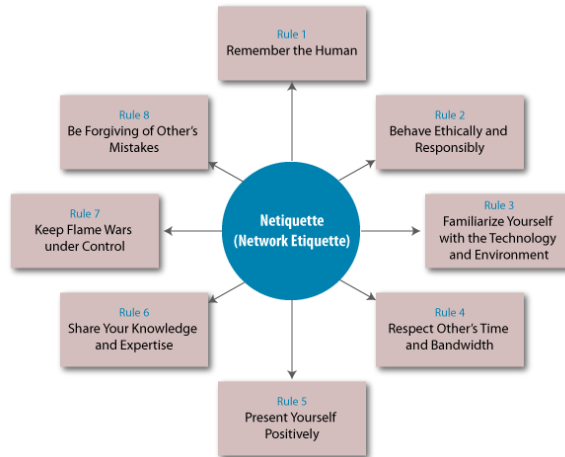
Don't hesitate to initiate contact with me by asking questions. In particular, if you have issues in the class, let me know. If those issues are Canvas-related (e.g. "I forgot my password," "The Canvas app is not working correctly,") contact the technical support desk (weekdays) or Canvas (nights and weekends).

### **Student Communications:**

- **Email:** Through the campus email. Please do not contact me via Canvas messenger.
- **Discussions:** Aside from the discussion boards to which you will post and reply for assignments, you can use the Student-to-Student Questions area to post questions for your fellow students to answer.
- **ConferZoom:** You can use ConferZoom with your classmates when you need to communicate in real time.
- **Netiquette:** Since this is a college classroom, I trust that everybody will treat each other with respect. Netiquette is short for "network etiquette" and essentially describes what you should and shouldn't do while communicating online. Most of it is common sense. If you need more information, you can read [The Core Rules of Netiquette](#).

Netiquette is network etiquette; a set of rules that encourages appropriate and courteous online behavior. These rules can vary depending on the environment (informal/formal), people (familiar/unfamiliar with each other), activity, and type of technology used. It is expected that discourse will be respectful and model the

highest standards of professional dialogue. This does not mean that you cannot present opposing viewpoints. In fact, you are encouraged to challenge each other's ideas and promote stimulating discussions. However, unprofessional and inappropriate comments (unnecessary flaming and flame wars), as in the regular classroom, are to be avoided online. Any posting that does not appear to adhere to professional standards will be removed. In such a case, it will be the responsibility of the student to provide a replacement posting to meet course requirements. Students are expected to adhere to Virginia Shea's *Core Rules of Netiquette*:



Having netiquette means avoiding screen bravery or keyboard courage: Problematic acts of screen bravery or keyboard courage will not be accepted in this course. Students should be mindful of the recent problematic trend known as screen bravery or keyboard courage. It is defined as:

- 1: A quality or characteristic displayed by a person through the written word that this person would not ordinarily possess.
- 2: The confrontational attitude exhibited by someone via an anonymous entry to an internet web-page or posting.
- 3: An attitude demonstrated by someone when they realize that actions taken by them or words written by them across a computer connection will have little, if any, personal repercussions.
- 4: A false bravery possessed by an individual who does not possess the true quality in person.

Please consider that there are human beings on the other side of the screen. I encourage all students to approach any communication, whether it be with the instructor or another student, as if they were engaging with a dignified human being who deserves respect. You can show respect by avoiding name calling, accusations, communication that resembles texting friends, questions that can be answered on the syllabus, asking about grades (which can be found in the online in the gradebook); or offering unsolicited advice for how to teach a course (unless you have some documented experience and expertise as an educator).

### **Student Commitment**

To be successful in this class, make sure to do the following:

- Read the entire syllabus.

- Consistently check email, notifications, and announcements.
- Review the course calendar for due dates, and submit assignments on time.
- Participate in discussions (posts and replies)
- Communicate with your instructor if you have any problems or concerns.

### Technical Support and Resources

- **Copyright:** Materials used in connection with this course might be subject to copyright protection. You can use them for this class only until the end of the semester. Learn more about copyright at the [U.S. Copyright Office web site](#).
- **Others who might access this class:** As a courtesy, I'm letting you know that there might be others, such as guest speakers, course evaluators, and college technical support people, who would have access to this class from time to time.

### Classroom Policies

- **Cell Phone Policy:** Cell phones must be turned to silent or, for emergencies only, be set to “vibrate” during class. In the event of an emergency (and in order to keep from disturbing others), you must leave the classroom to accept an emergency call. You may not answer a call or text in the classroom.
- **Laptop and Mobile Device Policy:** As we will discuss in class, we are working to create a lively intellectual experience. Unfortunately, laptops, tablets, cell phones, texting, email, and other social media are a powerful form of distraction. Please refrain from surfing the internet, playing games, completing other class assignments or sending email during class time. It is okay to use your laptop to take notes or access class materials.
- Stay engaged
  - Remain morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in dialogue
  - Stay present: guard against the learned tendency to disengage.
  - Collectively make the commitment to embrace the conversation/dialogue.
- Experience discomfort.
  - Deal openly and honestly with challenges: open up and examine your own core racial beliefs, values, perceptions, and behaviors.
  - Engage in the dialogue authentically: be personally responsible for pushing yourself into real dialogue.
  - Recognize that discomfort often leads to real growth.
- Make space/take space
  - each participant must be sure to make space for other’s opinions but also take opportunities to share opposing opinions and be heard
- Speak your truth.
  - Be willing to take risks
  - Share honest thoughts, feelings, and opinions.
  - We are experts in defining our own experiences and personal realities.

- Share with humility
  - Talk in first person [I statements only]
  - Avoid generalities
- Expect and accept non-closure.
  - Solution may be revealed in the process of dialogue itself: There is no “quick fix.”
  - Dialogue triggers a moral, intellectual, social, and emotional shift that allows for opportunities.
  - The more one talks, the more one learns; the more one learns, the more appropriate and promising your actions and interventions.
- Maintain confidentiality.
  - Honor privacy by avoiding “who said what.”
  - Uphold discretion.
- Listen with the intent to learn.
  - Listening is a skill.
  - Be present: attend to the conversation.
  - Listening with an openness to learning: reciprocity of sharing creates an opportunity to learn from others.
- Suspend judgment.

### **Course Policies & Expectations:**

- **Attendance/Participation:** The instructor reserves the option to take necessary measures to ensure student participation. Attendance is mandatory. Students are required to complete all assignments by the due dates provided, and are responsible for any material discussed whether mentally present or not. I.e., read the announcements and refer to the syllabus for information about the course. Help each other when possible, but do your own work when submitting assignments for class.
- **Submitting Assignments Late:** Assignments submitted after the due date will not be accepted in this course unless the student can provide a documented excuse. Acceptable documented excuses include a signed letter from a doctor, lawyer, judge, or peace officer. If your parent or guardian reaches out to me, I have, due to FERPA Laws, to ignore their request. An event, such as a wedding or work, may be accommodated by the instructor if notice is provided via email two weeks in advance. Also note that the instructor provides students with 48 hours after the expiration of the documented excuse to submit all late work. For example, if a document excuses a student through the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month, they have until the end of the day the 9<sup>th</sup> to submit all late work.
- **Academic Integrity (AKA Integrity)**
- Apparently, plagiarism is a growing problem on college campuses. One problem with academic dishonesty—cheating, forgery, borrowing ideas without crediting authors—is that it undermines the learning experience. Worse, I think, is that it degrades all involved. I appeal to your sense of honor and dignity to protect us from turning relationships of teaching and learning into ones of policing

and punishing. If you're not quite sure how to incorporate other people's words and ideas into your work, please talk to me and consult:

<https://library.ucsc.edu/help/research/what-is-plagiarism>.

- **Expectations of Instructor Communication:** Information will be posted for readings, links, and assignments listing current and upcoming topics of discussion in the Prompts. Readings from the text will be given and updated weekly (and are already on the Calendar!). Any questions regarding any course policies/assignments/expectations should be directed to the instructor at the earliest convenience. Students interested in extra reading material or cultural sources (i.e. film, literature, music, arts, etc.), please approach the instructor with individual requests.

The instructor will communicate regularly through Announcements, Zoom meetings, and email. Emails are increasingly becoming the dominant mode of communication. This has created new opportunities and challenges. I receive about 500 emails a day or more. As a result, I tend to give short replies. Please do not interpret that as a personal offense. I try to provide the information needed: nothing more and nothing less. The more information you can provide (class, assignment you are referring etc the more helpful I can be in my response). Here is a [humorous example](#) of what not to do:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSNc8F9tqzY>

- **Technological Problems:** No matter what the case may be, you, the student, are responsible for submitting work on time. If the course interface is down for maintenance; not accepting the type of document you are submitting; or your wifi is not working, you are still responsible for submitting the assignment on time. It is your responsibility to anticipate and plan for obstacles. Think ahead. If you leave yourself 5 minutes to submit an assignment, you have left yourself 5 minutes to face potential obstacles. That is your decision.
- **Challenging a Grade:** As a student, when you want to challenge a grade - which you have a right to do and I am always happy to consider - the only determinative factors are how the grade you received reflects or does not reflect the assignment requirements, class discussions about the assignment, the feedback from the instructor about your grade, and the content the submitted assignment. What is not useful in a discussion about a grade change is how the student feels; what grades other students received; the students' experiences in other courses; how student thinks grading should be administered; or the students' analysis about the reality of the standards and expectations of the course. If you want to challenge a grade, you need to provide a well thought out explanation of how your submission contained each required portion of the assignment and then refute the instructor's determination about how your submission aligned with those requirements. That is how you make a convincing case for a grade change. Students do it all the time, and I change grades all the time.

#### **Campus Calendar & Resources**

- **Calendar** <https://registrar.ucsc.edu/calendar/key-dates/index.html>
- **Basic Needs** Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, is urged to contact Slug Support (<https://basicneeds.ucsc.edu/>) or the Dean of

Students ([deanofstudents.ucsc.edu/covid-19-operations.html](http://deanofstudents.ucsc.edu/covid-19-operations.html)) (831-459-4446). At this time, Slug Support can also help with basic tech needs like borrowing a laptop or buying a webcam. If you are comfortable doing so, please let me know if you are struggling with basic needs. This will enable me to provide support and understand issues affecting your performance in the course.

- **Tech Needs & Strategies for Distance Learning**  
<https://its.ucsc.edu/covid-19/students-remotely.html>  
<https://keeplearning.ucsc.edu/additional-resources/remote-learning-strategies>  
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/210707503-Virtual-Background>  
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115001077226-Hiding-or-showing-my-video-on-my-display>
- **Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)** is committed to meeting students' needs and will continue to provide services, primarily remotely through phone or video. Get more information about online services and remote appointments (<https://caps.ucsc.edu/news/caps-covid-19.html>).
- **Advising** is now being done remotely. To make an online appointment, visit [the undergraduate advising website](#) to find out how.
- **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities** If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please get an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit it to me (via email or office hours) within the first two weeks of the quarter. DRC is operating remotely at this time. For students needing accommodations, please set up an appointment. Contact DRC at <https://drc.ucsc.edu/about/contact-us/index.html>, 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY).

### **Course Assignments & Submission Processes**

- **Submitting an Assignment:** All Assignments for this course, unless stated otherwise in class, are submitted through the course interface.
- **Grade Calculation:** The course interface includes a grade book. Please use this grade book to examine which assignments I have received and graded. **DO NOT** use this grade book to calculate your final grade. Use the syllabus to determine due dates, points, percentages, final grades, and related grade content. The course interface is not substitute for the syllabus. If ever something is missing or incorrect in the course interface or instructor grade book it is up to the students to provide a graded copy of the work in question **AND** prove it was submitted on time properly.
- **Submitting an Assignment** All Assignments for this course, unless stated otherwise in class, are submitted through the course interface.
- **Final Grades are based on the following final calculation of percentages in the course:**

#### **GRADING and ASSIGNMENTS:**

There are 100 possible points for the course. Grades will be available online through Canvas

There is no curve.

98-100% –A+

95-98% –A

90-94% –A-  
87–89% –B+  
84–86% –B  
80–83% –B-  
77–79% –C+  
74–76% –C  
70–73% –C-  
67–69% –D+  
64–66% –D  
60–63% –D-  
Pass: 70-100%  
No Pass: 60-0%

### **Course Assignments:**

- **Midterm Exam Paper (25 points) 25%:** The midterm exam will ask students to write a college level essay using specific content and prompts from the course.
- **Final Exam Paper (20 points) 20%:** The final exam will ask students to write a college level essay using specific content and prompts from the course.
- **Note-Taking Assignments (5 points each for 3 Assignment) 15%:** The note taking assignments evaluates students on a combination of how well their notes
  - adhere to the note taking guidelines;
  - and reflect the information in the learning content for the module.

When a note taking assignment is due, students are expected to provide notes on all of the learning content from that module.

- **Module Exit Tickets (5 points each for 3 Exit Tickets) 15%:** The exit ticket is a free write opportunity with minimal guidelines where students communicate with each other and the instructor about their understanding of the broader themes from that module. When an exit ticket assignment is due, students are expected to comment on the broader themes of the learning content from that module. Exit tickets help seal into memory information and ideas that might otherwise be forgotten. Research tells us that we forget much of what we hear, often forgetting half or more of the information within a matter of an hour or so. Writing stuff down helps you retain that information. Taking notes is one form of sealing lectures into memory. "Exit tickets" are another. Because they ask you to think about what you've just heard, and (often) apply what you've heard, they help you retain information and activate it for future use.
- **Response, Participation, and Discussion Board Posts (25 points – 5 points per response) 25%** Students are expected to complete 4 Responses throughout the term. The responses are found in the Discussion Boards on the course interface.
  - **How do I submit my assignment?** The instructor will grade your submission if it adheres to the following guidelines: You will need to post three times with the proper amount of citations and required word count to complete this assignment. Please note that you cannot see other students' posts until you publish your first post. Any student who publishes a blank post as their first post will receive a 0 on the assignment. Furthermore, if you publish less than three posts before the due date, you will receive a 0 for the assignment (there is no partial credit for these assignments).



NOTE: they are called “posts,” not attachments. Do not attach your submission. An attachment will result in 0 points.

- **When do I submit my assignment?** The first post (your response to the prompt) is due at 11:59pm on Tuesday of the week it is assigned, it must include 6 citations minimum, and each piece of learning content must be cited at least once. The second post (a response to another student’s first posts) & final post (a response to another student’s response to a first post) are due by 1159pm on the Thursday of the week they are assigned.
- **What are the expectations for my posts?** Your first post, which is 250 words minimum, must answer the prompt. In your subsequent posts (post 2 &3), you are expected to type 100-150 words with two citations minimum for both the second and third post (that results in a minimum of four citations total for your second and third post). Your second and third post must address each of the claims made in the student’s first post and why you agree or disagree with their arguments and the evidence they use to support it.
- **What is the instructor looking for in my post?** Students will be graded on how well they understand the course concepts and content. The use of ANY OUTSIDE SOURCES will result in an automatic zero on the assignment. Similarly, if a post lacks in-text citations, it will receive 0 points. The posts will be graded on substance, quality, familiarity with concepts in the learning content, and ability to follow directions.
- **Where Can I find feedback from the instructor?** When the instructor grades an assignment in this course, they will provide commentary on the submission. This commentary, which is provided on every submitted assignment, can be accessed through the course grade book.
- **How should I cite the course content?** All submissions must have in-text citations. They can be cited in Chicago or APA format only.
  - Here is a Chicago Style Guide:  
[https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)
  - APA Style Guide:  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html)

## Course Calendar:

-----June 19-25-----

### Modules:

- Module 1 – Testing you Media Literacy Skills
- Module 2 – What is News Literacy?

### Learning Content:

- Media Literacy Guide: How to Detect Bias in News Media
- We Need Way More Censorship: A Plea to Big Tech to Save Us All by Nodgih Nalon (and Censored Guest) Thursday Apr 1st, 2021 11:40 AM
- Higdon, N., Butler, A., & Swerzenski, J. D. (2021). Inspiration and motivation: The similarities and differences between critical and acritical media literacy. *Democratic Communiqué*, 30(1), 1.

- Olivia Riggio, Not All Media Literacy Programs Are Created Equal—And Most Have Yet To Be Created, December 15, 2020,
- *The Anatomy of Fake News* Introduction

**Assignments Due This Week:**

- Introduce Yourself by 1159pmPST Monday
- Reading Response 1 (Post 1 due by 1159pmPST Tuesday, Post 2 due by 1159pmPST on Thursday, and Post 3 due by 1159pmPST on Saturday)
- Note taking Assignment 1 is due at 1159pm PST on Wednesday
- Exit Ticket 1 (Post 1 due by 1159pmPST Thursday, Post 2 due by 1159pmPST on Friday, and Post 3 due by 1159pmPST on Friday)

----- June 26-July 2-----

**Modules:**

- Module 3 – Introduction to Journalism
- Module 4 – The Faux Estate

**Learning Content:**

- The Anatomy of Fake News Chapter 1-2
- Trust and the Media: A Discussion with Matt Taibbi and Mollie Hemingway
- Noam Chomsky - The 5 Filters of the Mass Media Machine
- The Monopoly On Your Mind, Part 1: Consolidation Craze & Illusion of Choice Six companies control 90% of what you read, watch, and hear. Here's why that's dangerous. Rebecca Strong Apr 12
- The Monopoly On Your Mind, Part 2: Billionaires Bet Big On The News But what's in it for them? Rebecca Strong Apr 28
- The Monopoly On Your Mind, Part 3: Advertisers' Invisible Strings The media relies heavily on money from advertisers. So, how much sway do these sponsors have over the narratives? Rebecca Strong May 26
- United States of Distraction

**Assignments Due This Week:**

- Note taking Assignment 2 is due at 1159pm PST on Wednesday
- Exit Ticket 2 (Post 1 due by 1159pmPST Thursday, Post 2 due by 1159pmPST on Friday, and Post 3 due by 1159pmPST on Friday)
- Reading Response 2 (Post 1 due by 1159pmPST Tuesday, Post 2 due by 1159pmPST on Thursday, and Post 3 due by 1159pmPST on Saturday)

----- July 3- 9-----

**Modules**

- Module 5 Satirical News and Political Party Propaganda Apparatuses
- Module 6 Midterm

**Learning Content:**

- *The Anatomy of Fake News* Chapter 3
- Documenting Hate: Charlottesville (full film) | FRONTLINE
- The Post-Objectivity Era Summary of "Hate Inc: Why Today's Media Makes Us Despise One Another" Matt Taibbi Sep 19, 2020
- Matt Taibbi: Hate Inc., Why Today's Media Makes Us Despise One Another
- America's Great Divide, Part 1 (full film) | FRONTLINE
- America's Great Divide, Part 2 (full film) | FRONTLINE

**Assignments Due This Week:**

- Reading Response 3 (Post 1 due by 1159pmPST Tuesday, Post 2 due by 1159pmPST on Thursday, and Post 3 due by 1159pmPST on Saturday)
- Midterm Essay is due by 1159pmPST on Saturday

----- July 10- 16-----

**Modules**

- Module 7 The Roots of State-Sponsored Propaganda
- Module 8 Fake News and the Internet Economy

**Learning Content:**

- *The Anatomy of Fake News* Chapter 4-5
- Theatres of War
- The Facebook Dilemma
- Higdon, N. (2021). The Critical Effect: Exploring The Influence Of Critical Media Literacy Pedagogy On College Students' Social Media Behaviors and Attitudes.
- Fuchs, C. (2018). Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model in the age of the internet, big data and social media. The propaganda model today: Filtering perception and awareness, 71-92.
- CNN+ was just the latest failed attempt of the cable news trailblazer to remain relevant Nolan Higdon, Lecturer of History and Media Studies, California State University, East Bay May 3, 2022·7 min read
- The Virus Came From A Chinese Lab? Headlines and Pre-pubs, Oh My! Documenting The News Literacy Process September 25, 2020

**Assignments Due This Week:**

- Note taking Assignment 3 is due at 1159pm PST on Wednesday
- Exit Ticket 3 (Post 1 due by 1159pmPST Thursday, Post 2 due by 1159pmPST on Friday, and Post 3 due by 1159pmPST on Friday)
- Reading Response 4 (Post 1 due by 1159pmPST Tuesday, Post 2 due by 1159pmPST on Thursday, and Post 3 due by 1159pmPST on Saturday)

----- July 17- 22 -----

**Modules**

- Module 9 Fighting Fake News: Solutions and Discontent
- Module 10 Final Exam

**Learning Content:**

- *The Anatomy of Fake News* Chapter 6-7
- The Case Against American Federation of Teachers' (AFT) Endorsement of NewsGuard Nolan Higdon and Susan Maret
- Higdon, N. & A. Butler. (2022). (Fake) News is Racist: Mapping Culturally Relevant Approaches to Critical News Literacy Pedagogy. *Journal of Critical Education*.
- Teaching Media Literacy Is the Only Real Answer to Fake News We can't stop disinformation, but we can teach students to think more critically. By Nolan Higdon May 14, 2022 7:00 AM
- Higdon, N., & Butler, A. (2021). Time to put your marketing cap on: Mapping digital corporate media curriculum in the age of surveillance capitalism. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 1-21.
- Improve the News
- Project Censored
- Prop Watch
- Media Literacy Guide: How to Detect Bias in News Media

**Assignments Due This Week:**

- Reading Response 5 (Post 1 due by 1159pmPST Tuesday, Post 2 due by 1159pmPST on Thursday, and Post 3 due by 1159pmPST on Saturday)
- Final Exam is Due by 1159pmPST on July 22