

Syllabus

Course Title

Leaks and whistleblowers

Subtitle

Information wars and public communication in the post-journalism era

Course Number

JOUR-UA 9503 / MCC-UE 9111

Instruction Mode: Blended/Remote/In-person

Fall 2021

If you are enrolled in this course 100% remotely and are not a Go Local/Study Away student for NYU Buenos Aires, please make sure that you've completed the online academic orientation via Brightspace so you are aware of site specific support structure, policies and procedures. Please contact [ALIAS OR EMAIL] if you have trouble accessing the Brightspace site.

Syllabus last updated on: [8/9/2021]

Lecturer Contact Information: TBA

Office hours: tuesdays 11:30-12:30 (U.S.eastern time)

Prerequisites

[none]

Units earned

4

Course Details

- [Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:45]
- All times are [US Eastern] (Daylight Saving Time ends [Date]).

Location: Rooms will be posted in Albert before your first class.

Remote Participants: Your instructor will provide you with the Zoom link via NYU Classes.

- COVID-related details: In the interest of protecting the NYU [SITE] community, we are closely following CDC guidance around COVID-19 and adjusting our recommendations and policies accordingly. Your health and well-being is our top priority.
 - o If you are attending in person, you will be assigned a seat on the first day and are expected to use that seat for the entire semester due to NYU COVID-19 safety protocol. Please note that you are expected to attend every class meeting in-person; however, this may change during the drop/add period if in-person student registration increases significantly or at any point during the semester if local COVID-19 regulations require additional physical distancing.
 - o Additionally, in-person students will be split into cohorts who will attend sessions [AS INDICATED HERE].

Course Description

In 2010, WikiLeaks, a non-profit organization that publishes submissions from anonymous whistleblowers, in partnership with some of the most important news publications, began releasing thousands of classified diplomatic cables sent between the U.S. State Department and consulates and embassies around the world. Three years later, former National Security Agency subcontractor Edward Snowden leaked top secret information about surveillance activities by the NSA. More recently, the Panama Papers became the biggest data leak in the history of journalism:

over 11 million documents containing financial information about offshore entities were revealed. These events signal the beginning of the Big Leak era, which this course will focus on. We will analyze the role of media concentration and technological innovation as twin driving forces in the inception of this Big Leak era over recent years. We will study the consequences of these changes at three different levels:

- the legal consequences for whistleblowers
- the resulting birth of global networks and partnerships that expose technical, cultural and economic limitations for traditional media
- the geopolitical implications, as a breach in a government's security apparatus is a victory for that government's opponents.

Finally, we will confront one larger question: whether the Big Leak era means that transparency could replace fairness as journalism's main paradigm.

Course Objective

Utilizing the big leak phenomena, the course will attempt to develop students' academic and journalistic skills, such as analytical reading, investigation and research, journalistic writing, communication, debate, and presentation techniques, all of which are key for students in the fields of journalism and media & communication. To accomplish these goals, students are expected to attend all sessions, complete all the reading and assignments and actively participate in discussion in every class.

Assessment Components

You are expected to attend class in person or remote synchronously. Failure to submit or fulfill any required component may result in failure of the class, regardless of grades achieved in other assignments.

Teaching & Learning Philosophy

There will be a midterm (2000 words) and a final paper (3000 words) that will involve case studies which emerge from class readings and discussion. Each student will pick a leak and analyze its different dimensions (background, size, quality, source, leaker, short and long range impact, outcome) The final paper will consist of writing an original news article based on updating the leak and its

protagonists. In order to ensure meaningful participation of students in class, they will be required to submit weekly one-page responses to the assigned readings. The responses will not be graded but will be considered as class participation and evaluated as such. Combining academic study and journalistic techniques, we will study how a particular leak calls into question embedded notions, rules and practices of traditional journalism, or how it sets forward new ones for the future. Grading will be applied as follows:

Final exam: 50%

Midterm exam: 25%

Class participation: 25%

Required Text(s) (If not available online at NYU library instructor will provide pdfs of relevant sections)

The Wikileaks Files: the Word According to U.S. Empire (compilation; Verso - Reprint edition, 2016)

Cypherpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet. By Julian Assange and Jacob Appelbaum (OR Books, 2012)

Wikileaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy. By David Leigh and Luke Harding (Guardian Books, 2011)
Available online NYU library

No Place to Hide: Snowden, the NSA and the U.S. Surveillance State. By Glenn Greenwald (Metropolitan Books, 2014)

Available online NYU library

How America Lost Its Secrets. Edward Snowden, the Man and the Theft. By Edward Jay Epstein (Knopf, 2017)

Panama Papers: Breaking the Story of how the Rich and Powerful Hide Their Money. By Bastian Overmayer and Frederik Overmaier (Oneworld Publications, 2016)

Additional materials: Film:

- The Fifth Estate (Assange). [Official trailer](#)
- Risk (Assange) [Official trailer](#)
- Citizenfour. (Snowden) [Official trailer](#)

- [Icarus Official trailer](#)

Books:

- **Julian Assange: Unauthorized biography** (Cannongate Books, 2011)
- **When Google met Wikileaks** by Julian Assange (OR Books, 2014)
- **Inside Wikileaks**, by Daniel Domschiet-Berg (Crown Books, 2011)
-
- **Permanent Record**, by Edward Snowden (Metropolitan Books, 2019)

Resources

- Access your course materials: NYU Classes (nyu.edu/its/classes)
- Databases, journal articles, and more: Bobst Library (library.nyu.edu)
- Assistance with strengthening your writing: NYU Writing Center (nyu.mywconline.com)
- Obtain 24/7 technology assistance: IT Help Desk (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)

Course Schedule

Topics and Assignments

Week 1: Introduction

Session 1, Sept 2: Overview of the course. Shared expectations. Hackers, leakers and spinners, the leak, the plant and the anonymous source. Who does it and why. The thin line between being a traitor and a terrorist like Chelsea Manning, or being a valued and admired informant like Deep Throat. **Readings:** [C.I.A. Warning on Snowden in '09 Said to Slip Through the Cracks](#); [C.I.A. Disputes Early Suspicions on Snowden](#); [U.S. Waged Secret Legal Battle to Obtain Emails of 4 Times Reporters](#) **Assignment Due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 1.

Week 2: Historical perspective

Session 2, Sept 7: A brief history of leaks and whistleblowers. Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers. Choosing a leak. **Reading:** [Daniel Ellsberg, Edward](#)

Snowden, and the Modern Whistle-Blower Ellsberg and Snowden joint interview **Assignment Due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 2.

Session 3, Sept 9: The 9-11 effect. Obama's use of the Treason act against seven informants for leaking to the press. Brief history of the seven whistleblowers indicted for treason under the Obama administration. **Reading:** Obama's war on whistleblowers leaves administration insiders unscathed

Week 3: WiliLeaks I

Session 4, Sept. 14: Julian Assange, the mind behind WikiLeaks. Hacktivism meets journalism. The founding of WikiLeaks. The early years. The War Dispatches. **Reading:** Wikileaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy. By David Leigh and Luke Harding (Intro and chapters 1 and 2, **Assignment Due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 3.

Session 5, Sept. 16: Cablegate. The blow to US diplomacy. What the cables show. The thin line that separates diplomacy and lobby from espionage and foreign intervention. Last day to pick a leak. **Reading:** Wikileaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy. By David Leigh and Luke Harding (chapters 13,14,15).

Week 4: WikiLeaks II

Session 6, Sept. 21: WiliLeaks II. The geopolitical game. Asylum in London with Latin America's support. Post Cablegate leaks. Hillary's email scandal and Rusia's role in the presidential campaign. Wikileaks and Trump. **Reading:** The Wikileaks Files: the World According to U.S. Empire (Introduction by Julian Assange) **Assignment Due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 4.

Session 7, Sept 23: The case against WikiLeaks. The investigation in Sweden. The Chelsea Manning trial. The economic embargo. The AmCham sting uncovered by Anonymous. The Virginia Grand jury investigation. Reading: The Wikileaks Files: the World According to U.S. Empire (The World According to Empire by Sarah Harrison)

Week 5: WikiLeaks III

Sesion 8, Sept. 28: Julian Assange's arrest. Reaction and consequences for Wikileaks and for the mainstream media. **Reading:** Why Assange and Ecuador

fell out Assignment Due: Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 5.

Session 9, Sept.30: The theory behind Wikileaks: The egalitarian effect of transparency versus the power that derives from opacity. The flow of information in the Western World. The Pentagon and Silicon Valley. Strengths and weaknesses in Assange's arguments. **Reading:** Cypherpunks by Julian Assange et al. (Introduction, "Increased communications vs, increased surveillance")

Week 6: Snowden

Session 10, Oct.5: Ed Snowden and the NSC leak. His story. What he did and how he did it. How WikiLeaks got him out of Hong Kong and into Moscow. **Reading:** No Place to Hide: Snowden, the NSA and the U.S. Surveillance State. By Glenn Greenwald (Introduction and chapter "Ten days in Hong Kong"). **Assignment Due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 6.

Session 11, Oct. 7: What Snowden leaked and did not leak. Why he says he did it. The intelligence community's take on what he did and why he did it. The ACLU's defense. Consequences for the NSC and for Snowden. **Reading:** How America Lost Its Secrets. Edward Snowden, the Man and the Theft. By Edward Jay Epstein (Intro, chapters 28 and 29, Epilogue).

Week 7:Mass surveillance

Session 12, Oct, 12:

The cyber wars with Russia, China and Iran. Encryption as a weapon of war and a tool for journalism. Preparing the midterm paper: Leak description, background, leaker, documents leaked, media platform, impact, consequences . **Reading:** Greenwald profile; Chelsea Manning update

Session 13, Oct. 14: Mass surveillance in America and the World. Ways, means, private contractors and the four eyes alliance. Satellites and interoceanic fiber optic cables. "Good" versus "Bad" surveillance. **Assignment due:** Submit the **Midterm Paper** (2000 words; 25% of the final grade)

Week 8: Panama Papers

Session 14, Oct. 19: Background: The war against fiscal havens. Luxleaks and Swissleaks. The ICIJ. The role of non-profits in big leaks. How it happened. Who is "John Doe"? The scope and the magnitude. Teamwork. The main discoveries. **Reading:** Panama Papers: Breaking the Story of how the Rich and

Powerful Hide Their Money. By Bastian Overmayer and Frederik Overmaier (Prologue and chapter1: Start). Giant Leak Of Offshore Financial Records Exposes Global Array Of Crime And Corruption **Assignment due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 8.

Session 15, Oct.21: The geopolitical impact. Winners (U.S.) and losers (Rusia and China). Media coverage of the Panama Papers. Case study: Argentina. **Guest speaker:** Hugo Alconada Mon. **Reading:** Panama Papers Have Had Historic Global Effects — And The Impacts Keep Coming; Panama Papers: Soros Beyond the Reach of Scrutiny

Week 9: Financial whistleblowers

Session 16, Oct. 26: Case studies: Rudolf Elmer and Herve Falciani. **Reading:** Whistleblower Rudolph Elmer given suspended sentence ;Whistleblower Rudolf Elmer on Why a Court Ruling Could Finally Topple Swiss Banking Secrecy;Why HSBC whistleblower Hervé Falciani fears for his freedom;Whistleblower Herve Falciani facing extradition to Europe;Falciani is free, Europe will protect all whistleblowers. **Assignment due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 9.

Session 17 Oct. 28: Case studies: Bradley Birkenfeld and Hernán Arbizu. **Reading:** Whistleblower in UBS tax case gets record \$104 million; Why did the US pay this former Swiss banker \$104M? Argentina Ex-JP Morgan Executive Describes Money Laundering Scheme **Guest speaker:** Hernán Arbizu

Week 10: Big leaks and little leakers

Session 18, Nov. 2: Vaticanleaks and Soccer leaks. **Reading:** Why the new Vatican leaksscandalis different, Vatican leaks: what you need to know; Football leaks is exposing corruption in european soccer. **Assignment due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 10.

Session 19, Nov, 4: Olympic leaks. Readings: "The Kremlin wants me dead": Russia´s sports doping whistleblower speaks out; Russia hackers leak Simone Biles and Serena Williams files

Week 11: Crossing the line

Session 20, Nov. 9: The fall ofRupert Murdoch´s News of the world. **Reading:** Phone hacking trial explained; UK phone hacking scandal fast facts **Assignment Due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 11.

Session 21, Nov.11: The fall of Cambridge Analytica. Counterhacks. **Reading:** Everything you need to know about Facebook and Cambridge Analytica; The Digital Vigilantes who Hack Back

Week 12: Big leaks in Latin America.

Session 22, Nov. 16: Moroleaks: How to derail Lula's reelection in Brazil through lawfare. **Reading:** Secret Brazil archive (parts 1, 2 and 3). **_Assignment Due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 12.

Session 23, Nov.18: Rickyleaks in Puerto Rico: a revolution led by pop singer Ricky Martin. **Reading:** The pillage of public funds in Puerto Rico going on behind on behind the chat Want democratic accountability? Look to Ricky Martin, not Robert Mueller.

Week 13: African leaks

Session 24, Nov. 23: The Fishrot files and the Mauritius leaks. **Reading:** Bribery allegations over fishing rights rock Iceland and Namibia; Company embroiled in the fishrot files scandal exposed to be resorting to dirty tactics; Namibians involved in fishrot scandal sanctioned by US State Department; Treasure Island: leak reveals how Mauritius siphons tax from poor nations to benefit elites; A year later, the tale of Mauritius leaks; **Assignment due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 13

NO CLASS NOV. 25: NYU-New York Holiday

Week 14: Latest leaks

Session 25, Nov. 30: The Fincen files. **Reading:** Fincen files: Global banks defy U.S. crackdowns by serving oligarchs, criminals and terrorists **Assignment due:** Submit a one- page response to the assigned readings for week 14

Session 26, Dec. 2: Pandemic leaks. **Reading:** China plays down 'leaked documents' showing it discussed weaponising coronavirus in 2015

Week 15:Final week.

Session 27: Dec. 7:

Final discussion: As big leaks of highly secret documents become commonplace, and recipients of this information are no longer passive readers, are they more inclined to go directly to the primary source and bypass the

mediation of journalists. As big corporations take over what used to be a family business to make them media empires or multipurpose conglomerates, do the journalists employed by these empires and conglomerates have the same freedom as they did in the 70s and 80s? How do big leaks expose these weaknesses in the old model and usher us into a new era of zero or close to zero privacy, corporate public communication disguised as old-fashioned journalism? As journalists become celebrities and celebrities become journalists, as bloggers and social media unveil journalism's dirty little secrets, as journalism becomes more global and yet more focalized and segmented, has transparency replaced fairness as the profession's main paradigm? **Reading: Cypherpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet. By Julian Assange and Jacob Appelbaum** (From "Censorship" to (including) "Rats in the opera"). **Assignment due:** Submit a one-page response to the assigned readings for week 15

Session 28, Dec 9: Coaching tips before final paper due. Class presentations and final course evaluations by students and instructor.

END OF CLASSES

Finals week

Dec. 17-21: Final Paper due (3000 words; 50% of the grade).

Classroom Etiquette

To optimize the experience in a blended learning environment, please consider the following:

- Please be mindful of your microphone and video display during synchronous class meetings. Ambient noise and some visual images may disrupt class time for you and your peers.
- Please do not eat during class and minimize any other distracting noises (e.g. rustling of papers and leaving the classroom before the break, unless absolutely necessary).
- If you are not using your cell phone to follow the lesson, cell phones should be turned off or in silent mode during class time.
- Make sure to let your classmates finish speaking before you do.
- If deemed necessary by the study away site (ie COVID related need), synchronous class sessions may be recorded and archived for other students to view. This will be announced at the beginning of class time.

- Students should be respectful and courteous at all times to all participants in class.

[Enter further classroom etiquette if applicable; if, for example, it is not permitted to use laptops for note taking, please add the following clause: “Exceptions will be made for students with academic accommodations from the Moses Center.” You may also want to tell your students if and how they should signal to you that they would like to speak.]

Suggested Co-Curricular Activities

Additional readings and film (see above.).

Your Lecturer

Santiago O’Donnell is the Foreign Editor at the argentine newspaper Página/12 and a former Los Angeles Times and Washington Post staff writer. Besides teaching a journalism courses at NYU-Buenos Aires for the last four years, he directs of the Journalism Masters Program at Universidad de Buenos Aires since 2013. He has written four books, including based on cablegate, the best sellers Argenleaks (Buenos Aires, Random House, 2011) and Politileaks (Buenos Aires, Random House 2014) and a third based on the Panama Papers: Argenpapers (Buenos Aires, Random House,2017).

Academic Policies

Grade Conversion

Your lecturer may use one of the following scales of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

A = 94-100 or 4.0

A- = 90-93 or 3.7

B+ = 87-89 or 3.3

B = 84-86 or 3.0

B- = 80-83 or 2.7

C+ = 77-79 or 2.3

C = 74-76 or 2.0

C- = 70-73 or 1.7

D+ = 67-69 or 1.3

D = 65-66 or 1.0

F = below 65 or 0

Attendance Policy

Studying at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers, or online through NYU Brightspaces if the course is remote synchronous/blended, is expected promptly when class begins. Attendance will be checked at each class meeting. If you have scheduled a remote course immediately preceding/following an in-person class, you may want to write to [site alias] to see if you can take your remote class at the Academic Center.

As soon as it becomes clear that you cannot attend a class, you must inform your professor and/or the Academics team by e-mail immediately (i.e. before the start of your class). Absences are only excused if they are due to illness, Moses Center accommodations, religious observance or emergencies. Your professor or site staff may ask you to present a doctor's note or an exceptional permission from an NYU Staff member as proof. Emergencies or other exceptional circumstances that you wish to be treated confidentially must be presented to staff. Doctor's notes must be submitted in person or by e-mail to the Academics team, who will inform your professors.

Unexcused absences may be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student's final course grade for every week's worth of classes missed, and may negatively affect your class participation grade. Four unexcused absences in one course may lead to a Fail in that course. Being more than 15 minutes late counts as an unexcused absence. Furthermore, your professor is entitled to deduct points for frequently joining the class late.

Exams, tests and quizzes, deadlines, and oral presentations that are missed due to illness always require a doctor's note as documentation. It is the student's responsibility to produce this doctor's note and submit it to site staff; until this doctor's note is produced the missed assessment is graded with an F and no make-up assessment is scheduled. In content classes, an F in one assignment may lead to failure of the entire class.

Regardless of whether an absence is excused or not, it is the student's responsibility to catch up with the work that was missed.

Final exams

Final exams must be taken at their designated times. Should there be a conflict between your final exams, please bring this to the attention of the Academics team. Final exams may not be taken early, and students should not plan to leave the site before the end of the finals period.

Late Submission of Work

1. Work submitted late receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100 point scale for each day it is late (including weekends and public holidays), unless an extension has been approved (with a doctor's note or by approval of NYU SITE Staff), in which case the 2 points per day deductions start counting from the day the extended deadline has passed.
2. Without an approved extension, written work submitted more than 5 days (including weekends and public holidays) following the submission date receives an F.
3. Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days late (including weekends and public holidays) without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

4. Students who are late for a written exam have no automatic right to take extra time or to write the exam on another day.
5. Please remember that university computers do not keep your essays - you must save them elsewhere. Having lost parts of your essay on the university computer is no excuse for a late submission.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

As the University's policy on "[Academic Integrity for Students at NYU](#)" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.

NYU takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. Your lecturer may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form, and may check your assignments by using TurnItIn or another software designed to detect offences against academic integrity.

The presentation of another person's words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism. It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you **MUST** inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

[NYU Academic Integrity Policies and Guidelines](#)

[NYU Library Guides](#)

Inclusivity Policies and Priorities

NYU's Office of Global Programs and NYU's global sites are committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. In order to nurture a more inclusive global

university, NYU affirms the value of sharing differing perspectives and encourages open dialogue through a variety of pedagogical approaches. Our goal is to make all students feel included and welcome in all aspects of academic life, including our syllabi, classrooms, and educational activities/spaces.

Attendance Rules on Religious Holidays

Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Students who anticipate being absent due to religious observance should notify their lecturer AND NYU SITE's Academics Office in writing via e-mail one week in advance. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Academics Office will schedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. See also [University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#)

Pronouns and Name Pronunciation (Albert and Zoom)

Students, staff, and faculty have the opportunity to add their pronouns, as well as the pronunciation of their names, into Albert. Students can have this information displayed to faculty, advisors, and administrators in Albert, NYU Classes, the NYU Home internal directory, as well as other NYU systems. Students can also opt out of having their pronouns viewed by their instructors, in case they feel more comfortable sharing their pronouns outside of the classroom. For more information on how to change this information for your Albert account, please see the [Pronouns and Name Pronunciation website](#).

Students, staff, and faculty are also encouraged, though not required, to list their pronouns, and update their names in the name display for Zoom. For more information on how to make this change, please see the [Personalizing Zoom Display Names website](#).

Moses Accommodations Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented and registered disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (+1 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance. Accommodations for this course are managed through NYU [SITE].

Bias Response

The New York University Bias Response Line provides a mechanism through which members of our community can share or report experiences and concerns of bias, discrimination, or harassing behavior that may occur within our community.

Experienced administrators in the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) receive and assess reports, and then help facilitate responses, which may include referral to another University school or unit, or investigation if warranted according to the University's existing Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy.

The Bias Response Line is designed to enable the University to provide an open forum that helps to ensure that our community is equitable and inclusive.

To report an incident, you may do so in one of three ways:

- Online using the [Web Form \(link\)](#)
- Email: bias.response@nyu.edu
- Phone: 212-998-2