



The Internet and Democracy in Crisis

October 5 & 6, 2023

UCen Flying A Studios Room
University of California, Santa Barbara

This retreat addresses the role of technology in the democratic crisis. After three decades of unrestrained “disruption” of markets, societies, and politics, the Internet industries are finally facing serious public scrutiny and political debate about regulation. These developments coincide with grave concerns about democratic backsliding, after decades of political polarization, cultural and racial backlash to societal changes, and growing anti-democratic sentiment in the public. The meteoric diffusion of generative AI adds new problems and enormous uncertainty to the picture.

In our time together, we will consider the question of how scholars of political communication should respond through their research and teaching. Research sessions will discuss the challenge of public-facing research. We’ll consider what imperative might exist for the academy to reorient toward solving applied problems associated with technology and democracy, what the most urgent problems are, and how scholars committed to improving the state of democracy can best navigate the academic incentive system, which prioritizes theoretical advance over public problem-solving. In sessions on teaching, we will consider techniques for teaching in a time of polarization, incivility, and intolerance of disagreement. We’ll also discuss the challenges and opportunities of AI in education, and what we learned from the forced experiment of video-based teaching and learning during the pandemic, now that we have mainly returned to the physical classroom.

The retreat is designed for informal discussion and interaction by all. The role of panelists is to initiate discussion among all participants, rather than to present papers. The retreat is occasioned by the milestone of Bruce Bimber’s 30th year at UC Santa Barbara. It is organized by his former and current doctoral students.

Program

Thursday, Oct. 5

- 1:00pm **Welcome from the Organizing Committee and from Dean of Social Sciences Charles Hale**
Keynote Address by Dave Karpf, George Washington University
- 2:30pm **Introductory 5-Minute Speed Talks by All Participants**
(What do you teach? Study? What are you thinking most about? What do you want from this event?)
- 4:15pm **Session 1 - Teaching Tools and Techniques for the Current Technological Environment**
Panel Discussion. Moderator: Julien Labarre. Panelists: Daniel Gomez, Dan Lane, Lisa Parks
- 6:00pm Dinner at [The Club & Guesthouse](#), UCSB campus
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Friday, Oct. 6

- 9:00am **Session 2 - Teaching in the Crisis of Democracy**
Brief Presentations. Lance Bennett, Jennifer Brundidge, Lauren Copeand.
- 10:15am Break
- 10:30am **Session 3 - A Research Agenda for the Crisis of Democracy**
Panel Discussion. Moderator: Ariel Hasell. Panelists: Galen Stocking, Andrea Römmele, Jennifer Earl
- Noon: Lunch in the conference room
- 1:00pm **Session 4 - Obstacles to Public-Facing Research**
Panel Discussion. Moderator: Jessica Feezell. Panelists: Meredith Conroy, Dave Karpf, Brian Weeks
- 3:00pm **Closing Remarks - Bruce Bimber**
- 4:30pm Wine Tasting at [Grassini Family Vineyards](#) Santa Barbara Tasting Room, 24 El Paseo
- 6:30pm Dinner at [La Playa Azul Cafe](#), 914 Santa Barbara Street



Participants

Lance Bennett, University of Washington	Julien Labarre, UC Santa Barbara
Bruce Bimber, UC Santa Barbara	Dan Lane, UC Santa Barbara
Jennifer Brundidge, California State Univ., Chico	Nancy Molina-Rogers, UC Santa Barbara
Daniel Cervantes, UC Santa Barbara	Hannah Overbye, UC Santa Barbara
Meredith Conroy, Cal. State Univ., San Bernardino	Lisa Parks, UC Santa Barbara
Lauren Copeland, Baldwin Wallace University	Andrea Römmele, Hertie School of Governance, Germany
Jennifer Earl, University of Arizona	Rajkamal Singh, New York University
Daniel Gomez, UC Santa Barbara	Galen Stocking, Pew Research Center
Ariel Hasell, University of Michigan	Jessica Timpany Feezell, University of New Mexico
Dave Karpf, George Washington University	Brian Weeks, University of Michigan
Karolina Koc-Michalska, Audencia University, France	Yifeng Wang, UC Santa Barbara

Location, Parking, and Campus Map

The workshop is in the Flying A Studios room, which is located on the ground floor of the University Center (UCen) building. Here is an [interactive campus map](#) for those not familiar with UCSB. For those driving, guest parking is available but it is somewhat widely scattered around campus and is not available in all lots, many of which are reserved for students and employees. Here's a [parking map](#) that can help you decode the system. Look for "Visitor Parking" and kiosks selling permits. Lots #22 and #23 are promising.

Hotels

Please contact [Emily Hickingbottom](#) in the Political Science Department at UCSB for help with hotels and rates.

Organizing Committee

Meredith Conroy, California State University - San Bernardino | Lauren Copeland, Baldwin Wallace University | Jessica Feezell, University of New Mexico | Ariel Hasell, University of Michigan | Julien Labarre, UCSB | Bruce Bimber, UCSB

Staff

Emily Hickingbottom, Charlie Quan, Austin Ye

Sponsors

The retreat is sponsored by the Division of Social Sciences, the College of Letters and Science, the Center for Information Technology & Society, and the Department of Political Science at UCSB. It is also supported by the University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

