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.

**Agenda**

**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: **Panel 1 - Teaching Tools and Techniques for the Current Technological Environment**
Moderator: Julien Labarre. *(Challenges and opportunities of generative AI; social media in the classroom; innovative techniques for assessment of student performance; alternatives to traditional assignments; use of video and the “flipped classroom” post-COVID, when so many of us came to hate video-based pedagogy…)*

6:30pm: Dinner at **The Club & Guesthouse**, UCSB campus

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**Friday, Oct. 6**

9:00am: **Panel 2 - Teaching in the Crisis of Democracy**
Moderator: Lauren Copeland. *(Civility in the classroom in a time of polarization; spirals of silence in the classroom; tolerance of unpopular views; the state of woke-ness; teaching in the context of student distress about the future; can we combat the erosion of democracy in our teaching…)*

10:15am: Break

10:30am: **Panel 3 - A Research Agenda for the Crisis of Democracy**
Moderator: Meredith Conroy. *(Urgent topics not being adequately studied; European perspectives; is there an imperative to be more public-facing and applied, even at the expense of “basic” science?; can we realistically design and test “interventions” in falsehoods, extremism, hate-speech, and so on…)*

Noon: Lunch in the Conference Room

1:00pm **Panel 4 - Obstacles to Public-Facing Research**
Moderator: Jessica Feezell. *(How could the academy be more supportive of public-facing research? tenure and promotion criteria; publishing; funding; backlash, especially threats to women; ethics of working with corporations who are part of the problem…)*

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

**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

**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.