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**CONTEMPORARY POLITICS AND MEDIA**  
**University of California Washington Center**  
**Instructor: Marc Sandalow**  
[msandalow@ucdc.edu](mailto:msandalow@ucdc.edu)

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**SYLLABUS (DRAFT)**

*A final version of the syllabus will be available on the first day of class.*

## **Overview**

What is the difference between “fake news’ ’ and journalism? Why does President Trump call news organizations “the enemy of the American people?” Should the media report what people *want* to know or *ought* to know? Is Anderson Cooper more of a journalist than Rush Limbaugh or John Oliver?

This seminar explores the rapidly evolving relationship between governing, politics and the news media. The course provides an academic framework for students interning in communications, advocacy, government or political offices and perspective to anyone interested in the news media or politics. The course combines research and scholarship with an additional focus on the practice of political communication. The course will feature an examination of the methods, purpose and history of political journalism, how elected officials and candidates both exploit and rely on journalists, the development of modern propaganda and the civic implications of on-line news and social networking.

Washington is the perfect backdrop for such a course, with the opportunity to visit iconic institutions, such as the National Press Club and the Newseum, and the chance to witness the work of journalists and public officials at the top of their profession. The first year of the Trump administration offers rich fodder for exploring the strain between politics, policy and entertainment. The class features lectures, discussions, field visits and guest speakers. Readings include scholarly material as well as first-hand accounts from political figures and journalists.

Students will complete a major research project on a newsworthy topic which will be written as a news report or piece of journalism in addition to shorter writing and speaking assignments. All assignments are aimed at sharpening research and writing skills, with a focus on identifying target audiences and communicating with clarity. Assignments may be adjusted to meet individual campus requirements.

## **Course Goals**

Students will emerge with a sophisticated understanding of the news media’s place in American democracy and be able to distinguish between competing forces of education and entertainment, public service and private profit.

Additionally, students will be able to identify techniques used to frame and manipulate the news, distinguish between credible and non-credible sources, and evaluate the pros and cons of new vs. old media. Students will be well versed in contemporary Washington politics; write with greater clarity; and most importantly be enthused by -- and committed to -- following policy and politics.

## **Class Hours**

The course will meet each Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Hours may be adjusted periodically to accommodate speakers, field trips, or individual conferences. **It is important that your internship supervisor understands that Wednesday is a class day.** Please inform the instructor by e-mail prior to class if you cannot make it.

In the event of a weather emergency, please check your e-mail. The UCDC building follows the federal government's decisions about delays and closure, however I will hold class if I can make it in (and I drive well in snow.)

## **Instructor**

Marc Sandalow ([msandalow@ucdc.edu](mailto:msandalow@ucdc.edu)) is Associate Academic Director of the University of California's Washington Program. He is the author of three books, including "Madam Speaker," a biography of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. He has been a journalist for 30 years, including 21 years at the *San Francisco Chronicle* where he covered California politics and spent 11 years as the paper's Washington Bureau Chief. He is a former columnist and contributing editor for the *California Journal*, and is currently a political analyst for KPIX-TV and KCBS radio in San Francisco as well as Hearst Argyle television stations. He has been with the University of California's Washington Center since 2008.

## **Office Hours**

My office is room 323. I will be available from 2 to 5 each Wednesday and Thursday. In addition, you are free to make an appointment any other time during the week. My door is often closed or only cracked open even when I am there. **Feel free to knock or schedule an appointment anytime.**

## **Requirements**

1. **Attendance and participation.** Lively discussions on political developments and media coverage each week are an important element of the course. Students are expected to be well versed in political news and to actively participate in discussions. Informed participation means daily reading of the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Politico*, and other news sources. The more closely students keep up on current events, the more they will get out of the course and their time in Washington. Web sites such as [www.realclearpolitics.com](http://www.realclearpolitics.com), [www.talkingpointsmemo.com](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com), [www.huffpost.com](http://www.huffpost.com), and [www.drudgereport.com](http://www.drudgereport.com) are good ways to supplement your reading. A list of recommended political web sites is included in the reader.

Students are encouraged to discuss examples of spectacular or wretched journalism they encounter during the week. Factual errors, dreadful or artful writing, and outrageous hyperbole all qualify. Students are strongly encouraged to attend Monday Night Forums in the auditorium from 7:00 to 8:00. Food is always served!

2. **Readings.** In addition to rabid reading of newspapers or news sites on the Internet, students are expected to purchase a course reader. The reader will be available at US Printing and Copying, 1725 M Street (1½ blocks from the UC Center.) You must call them before purchasing so they have a chance to print it (202-785-9424.) The cost should be less than \$25. A copy of the reader will be made available for check-out at the Res. Life office on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.

In addition to the reader, assignments will be made from the following books. It is not necessary to purchase the books, as selected readings will be posted or distributed. Reading assignments should be completed before class in preparation for discussions.

1. *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2014)* Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, Three Rivers Press (It is available through Amazon for \$12 or \$10 on Kindle.)
2. *Key Readings in Journalism*, Elliot King and Jane Chapman, Routledge 2012
3. *On Bullshit*, Harry Frankfurt, Princeton University Press, 2005

## **Assignments**

E-mail all written assignments to [msandalow@ucdc.edu](mailto:msandalow@ucdc.edu) or [marc.sandalow@ucdc.edu](mailto:marc.sandalow@ucdc.edu) (they are the same.) Include your name and the assignment name in the subject line. If possible, attach as a WORD document (no PDF's) Hard copies are not necessary.

--**Writing and broadcast exercises.** Students must complete regular assignments aimed improving writing skills and political communication. These are short assignments to work on skills such as organization, clarity and introductions. Students will take part in a television exercise in which they will answer questions before camera and lights to appreciate the fun, fear and limitations of punditry. (5 pages)

--**Spot News.** Students will write an overnight news story on an event to be determined. (3 pages)

--**Talking Points Memo:** Students will write a political memo advising either their internship boss or a political figure on a strategy for a press interview. (1-2 pages)

--**Final project.** Students will write an in-depth news story on a political or policy topic of their choice to be completed by the end of the term. Topics, reporting and writing approach will be discussed with the instructor, and a draft will be due in time to revise it before the final deadline. (8-12 pages.)

## **Class contribution and participation**

Students are expected to attend and participate in class discussions each week. Other contributions might include active participation in group activities, attending office hours, sending the professor interesting items to discuss that week, or other steps to demonstrate your engagement.

## **Grading:**

1. Final project 40%
2. Spot news story 15%
3. Talking points memo 15%
4. Short assignments (leads, TV assignment, etc.) 15%
5. Class contribution and participation 15%

***Content, research and clarity are the most important qualities, of all writing assignments, though careful writing, grammar, a lack of typos also count. Late papers will be penalized one third of a grade per day.***

## **Plagiarism**

All work must be original. Any words taken directly from another source should be placed inside quotation marks and attributed. Disregard for this policy will result in severe penalties and possible failure. It is the responsibility of the writer to make sure all submissions contain no sentences or phrases lifted verbatim from another source.

## **University policies**

*Sexual Harassment:* Students who wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct should contact UCDC's Counseling Services at [UCDCCounseling@gmail.com](mailto:UCDCCounseling@gmail.com). To report sexual misconduct to ask questions about UCDC policies and procedures regarding sexual misconduct, please contact the UCDC Title IX administrator, Josh Brimmeier (202-974-6214 or [josh.brimmeier@ucdc.edu](mailto:josh.brimmeier@ucdc.edu)). Because the University of California is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, the confidentiality of reported misconduct cannot be guaranteed.

*Disabilities:* In compliance with the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Public Law 93- 112) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336), University of California policy prohibits unlawful discrimination on the basis of disability in its programs, services, and activities. If you require accommodation for class, please let me know at our first meeting (if not earlier) so the necessary arrangements can be made.

*Policy on Academic Misconduct:* UCDC has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, and any other form of dishonesty. Students should refer to their home campus Student Code of Conduct for the regulations that apply to them. The burden is on each student to know what behaviors constitute cheating and plagiarism. Ignorance of these behaviors is not an adequate defense.

## **WEEK-BY-WEEK SCHEDULE**

Each class will begin with a discussion of the week's news and media coverage, followed by a discussion/lecture on a topic in political communication or journalism, and then a workshop on a writing skill.

### **1. Political Journalism: News or Entertainment?**

TOPIC: Introduction of course. The purpose of political journalism.

WORKSHOP: Writing succinctly: Introductions, leads and the importance of a powerful opening.

### **2. Conflict, Bias & The Glamorous Life of a Political Reporter**

TOPIC: Conflict vs. substance. Horse race vs. policy. Behind the scenes political coverage.

WORKSHOP: Figuring out what to write about.

#### **READINGS:**

1. *How to Identify Media Bias*, Citizens Coalition for Responsible Media
2. *A Slobbering Love Affair*, Bernard Goldberg, Regnery Publishing, 2009
3. *Fair and Balanced? Quantifying Media Bias through Crowdsourced Content Analysis*, Ceren Budak, Sharad Goel, Justin Rao, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 80 January 2016
4. *Is the media biased toward Clinton or Trump? Here is some actual hard data*, John Sides, *Monkey Cage*, *Washington Post* September 2016
5. *Did Twitter Kill the Boys on the Bus?* Peter Hamby, Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy & Policy, 2013 (pages 7-22)
6. *The Man the White House Wakes Up To*, Mark Leibovich, *New York Times Magazine*, 2010

**(WEEK 2 CONTINUED)**

7. *The Boys on the Bus*, Timothy Crouse, Random House, 1972 (3-17)
8. *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail*, Hunter Thompson, Straight Arrow Press 1972 (29-49)
9. *The Good Times*, Russell Baker, Random House 1994 (44-55)

**Assignment due: 3 leads**

### **3. Targeted writing: Identifying your audience**

PAPER CONFERENCES (*time slot to be assigned*)

READINGS: *Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel

**Assignment due: Budget line for final story**

### **4. Remote Control Democracy: Television's influence on politics and governing**

Guest Speaker: Aixa Diaz, Hearst TV

TOPIC: How TV shapes campaigns and governing

WORKSHOP: Talking on TV

READINGS:

1. *A Force That Has Changed the Political Scene*, Senator John Kennedy
2. *The Incredible shrinking sound bite*, Craig Fehrman, *Boston Globe* 2011
3. *Entire State Before the Cameras*, Marc Sandalow, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2000

### **5. Journalistic ethics/Newseum**

Topic: Ethics: Does the news media have them - or need them?

READINGS: *Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel

*Recommended Reading: Morning Miracle*, David Kindred, Anchor, 2011

(chapter 8, Virginia Tech, chapter 6, Dana Priest and Anne Hull and chapter 19, Obama.)

### **6. TV Pundit Assignment**

READINGS: Finish *Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel

### **7. Propaganda: How politicians manipulate the press**

Guest Speaker: Ken Goldstein, past President Kantor Media

TOPIC: Propaganda: Truth or lies?

WORKSHOP: Sound bites and talking points

READINGS:

1. *Politics and the English Language*, George Orwell, *Horizon* 1945
2. *Hardball: How Politics is Played, Told by One Who Knows the Game; (chapter 7: The Press is the Enemy)* Chris Matthews, Simon & Schuster, 1999
3. *Mikes, Cameras, Lunacy*, Marc Sandalow, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1996

**Assignment due: Final project rough draft**

## **PART II. THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION**

## 8. Social Media and the Internet: Destroying or Saving Journalism?

TOPIC: The consequences of an iPhone nation

WORKSHOP: Researching on the Internet

Reading due:

1. *The End of the Gutenberg Era*, Jason Epstein, Johns Hopkins University Press
2. *Campaign Coverage in the Time of Twitter*, Jodi Enda, *American Journalism Review*, August 2011
3. *The Age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement*, Brian Ott, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2017
4. *The Future (We Hope) of Journalism*, John Carroll, Poynter Institute, 2008

**Assignment due: Talking points memo**

**November 22 -- NO CLASS. HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

## 9. Fake News: Who is a journalist?

TOPIC: Fake news, hate journalism and civic responsibility.

WORKSHOP: The art of editing yourself.

READINGS:

1. *Rush Limbaugh: The Man Who Ate the GOP*, Michael Wolff, *Vanity Fair* March 2009
2. *Relief in Hard Times: A Defense of Jon Stewart's Comedy in an Age of Cynicism*, W. Lance Bennett, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2007
3. *Tuned Out, Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News*, David T.Z. Mindich, Oxford University Press, 2004

## 10. Donald Trump's Moment or a New Media Future?

TOPIC: Journalism and communications in the 21st century.

WORKSHOP: How to find a job in communications/How to read the news

READINGS: *Media Failures in the Age of Trump*, Victor Pickard, *The Political Economy of Communication*, 2016

*The Reconstruction of American Journalism*, Leonard Downie, Jr., Michael Schudson, *Columbia Journalism Review*, Oct. 2009

**FINAL PROJECT DUE**