

Draft Outline

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

Washington Media: Fake News, Social Media, and the reshaping of American Politics

Summary

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? Does objectivity exist?

This seminar examines the extraordinary changes to communication and journalism over the past half century and the consequences for American politics. The 2020 campaign is a perfect backdrop to assess the news media’s mission, goals, and biases. We will look at the media’s incentives to fuel controversy, politicians’ efforts to manipulate (if not lie to) the media, and how the digital revolution – for both better and worse -- has fundamentally restructured the future of political communication. Each week will feature an hour-long presentation combining lectures, guest speakers and videos to be viewed in advance of the two-hour live class. The live class will combine discussion and exercises with an emphasis on current developments, lectures, and readings. Readings will include an assortment of news and scholarly articles.

Assignments:

1. Research paper on a newsworthy topic of your choice, written in a journalistic manner for a wide audience. *5 pages* (plus *4 pages* of preliminary drafts.)
2. Overnight story on presidential debate *3 pages*
3. Monitoring campaign coverage *3 pages*
4. Talking Point memo for internship *2 pages*
5. Class summaries and other misc. *5 pages*
6. Zoom punditry assignment *oral presentation*

Preliminary week-by-week schedule:

1. Political Journalism: news or entertainment?
2. Media Bias: left, right or stupid?
3. The Boys and Girls on the Bus: the glamorous life of a political reporter
4. Remote Control Democracy: television and sound-bite governance DEBATE STORY DUE
5. Electoral Dysfunction: Campaign 2020 -- polls, debates and other media obsessions
6. Propaganda: How politicians manipulate the press FINAL PAPER ROUGH DRAFT DUE
7. Media Ethics: is there such a thing?
8. Social Media and the Internet: saving or destroying journalism? TALKING POINT MEMO DUE
9. Bullshit: hate journalism, fake news and reality TV
10. The future: an Orwellian nightmare or communication paradise? FINAL PAPER DUE