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**WASHINGTON MEDIA: FAKE NEWS, SOCIAL MEDIA,  
AND THE RESHAPING OF AMERICAN POLITICS**

**Fall 2020 Research Seminar**

**University of California Washington Center**

**Instructor: Marc Sandalow**

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**SYLLABUS (updated 9/24/20)**

**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? 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 – or lie to -- the media, and how the digital revolution has fundamentally restructured the future of political communication, for better and worse. Classes will combine lecture, discussion, and exercises with an emphasis on current developments. Readings include keeping up with campaign 2020 supplemented by an assortment of news and scholarly articles.

Students will complete a major research project on a newsworthy topic which will be written in journalistic form 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, better appreciate what motivates journalists, be able to distinguish between competing forces of education and entertainment, and place the 2020 campaign and other current developments in perspective.

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 advantages and disadvantages 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.

Finally, the course will provide a place to share internship experiences, fostering a sense of community and support for your experiential learning.

**Class Hours**

The course will meet each Thursday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. **It is important that your internship supervisor understands that Thursday is a class day.** Please inform me by e-mail prior to class if you cannot attend.

## **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 more than a decade 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 KCBS radio in San Francisco and Hearst Television. He has been with the University of California's Washington Program since 2008.

## **Office Hours**

I am available for Zoom meetings virtually any day. E-mail me at [msandalow@ucdc.edu](mailto:msandalow@ucdc.edu) to set up a time.

## **Requirements**

1. **Attendance and participation.** Lively discussions on media coverage of political developments 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*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *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 the Washington Program. Web sites such as [www.realclerapolitics.com](http://www.realclerapolitics.com), [www.talkingpointsmemo.com](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com), [www.huffpost.com](http://www.huffpost.com), and [www.breitbart.com](http://www.breitbart.com) are good ways to supplement your reading. A list of recommended political web sites will be posted.

Students are encouraged to discuss examples of spectacular or wretched journalism or propaganda they encounter during the week. Factual errors, dreadful or artful writing, and outrageous hyperbole all qualify.

Attendance is mandatory. If conflicts or technical difficulties intrude, please let me know as soon as you can.

I will call on students who do not voluntarily participate.

2. **Readings** In addition to rabid reading of newspapers or on-line news sites, students are expected to complete assigned readings before class each week. The following books contain multiple chapters to be assigned. It is not necessary to purchase the books, as selected readings will be placed in Canvas or on-line.

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
2. *Key Readings in Journalism*, Elliot King and Jane Chapman, Routledge 2012
3. *On Bullshit*, Harry Frankfurt, Princeton University Press, 2005
4. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, William Zinsser, Harper Perennial, 2016

## **3. Assignments**

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

**--Writing and broadcast exercises.** Students must complete regular assignments aimed at improving writing skills and political communication. These are short assignments to work on skills such as organization, clarity and introductions. (~5 pages)

- 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.
- Weekly class summaries.

**--Overnight debate story.** Students will write an overnight news story on the October 15 Democratic Presidential debate due the following morning. (~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. (~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.)

I will distribute detailed prompts for each assignment along with an explanation of the assignment's purpose.

## **Class contribution and participation**

Students are expected to attend and participate in class discussions each week. Speaking up, while encouraged, is not the only way to contribute. 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.

## **Class Etiquette**

I enjoy open and lively conversation. That means challenging conventional wisdom and at times raising contrarian ideas to promote discussion and thought. I hope class can be regarded as a safe space for students to voice opinions, play devil's advocate and challenge each other -- and the professor -- without fear of judgment. Treat your classmates with respect and try not to take challenges to your ideas as personal criticism.

Any do not refrain from pointing out -- publicly or privately -- anything I might say that you find to foolish, provocative or offensive, let alone typos or mistakes in written material. Student input is invaluable to my perpetually evolving presentations.

## **Zoom Etiquette**

We are all feeling our way through this new environment. My style tends to be casual; eating during class is fine. My preference is that everyone keep their cameras and audio on during class to facilitate discussion. However I recognize there are multiple factors -- from Internet speed to home conditions -- that at times may make that difficult. I will not penalize anyone who wishes to keep their camera off. Feel free to discuss any concerns with me.

## **Grading:**

1. Final project 40%
2. Class contributions, participation, 20%
3. Overnight debate story 10%
4. Campaign coverage assignment 10%
5. Talking points memo 10%
6. Short assignments (leads, punditry, class summaries) 10%

***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 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 grading 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:*** The University of California is committed to creating and maintaining a community where all individuals who participate in University programs and activities can work and learn together in an atmosphere free of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Every member of the community should be aware that the University prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence, and that such behavior violates both law and University policy. The University will respond promptly and effectively to reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and will take appropriate action to prevent, to correct, and when necessary, to discipline behavior that violates this policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence.

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 your internships and 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 or speaking skill.

## 1. September 24 Political Journalism: News or Entertainment?

- Introductions, course overview and survey
- TOPIC: Political Journalism: News or Entertainment
- WORKSHOP: Opening sentences and leads

No readings assigned for first class

## 2. October 1 Media Bias: Left, Right or Stupid?

TOPIC: The subjectivity of objectivity and the media's devotion to conflict.

WORKSHOP: How to approach, scope out, research and frame your final project.

READINGS:

1. *The State of the News Media*, Pew Research Center, Summer, 2019
2. Donald Trump Changed *The New York Times*. Is it Forever? Peter J. Boyer, Esquire Magazine March 19, 2019
3. *Journalism: The Democratic Craft*, G. Stuart Adam, Roy Peter Clark, Oxford University Press 2006 Chapter 8 (pg. 57-72)
4. *How to Identify Media Bias*, Citizens Coalition for Responsible Media
5. *A Slobbering Love Affair*, Bernard Goldberg, Regnery Publishing, 2009
6. *Re-thinking Objectivity*, Brent Cunningham, Columbia Journalism Review, July/August 2003
7. *Fair and Balanced? Quantifying Media Bias through Crowdsourced Content Analysis*, Ceren Budak, Sharad Goel, Justin Rao, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 80 January 2016
8. *The Craft of Research, Chapter three: From Topics to Questions*, Booth, Colomb and Williams, University of Chicago Press 2008

**Assignment due: Four leads**

## 3. October 8 Sound Bite Democracy: Television's Influence on Politics and Governing

TOPIC: How TV shapes campaigns and governing.

WORKSHOP: Group discussion of final projects

READINGS:

1. *Bias in Cable News: Persuasion and Polarization*, Gregory J. Martin and Ali Yurukoglu *American Economic Review*, 2017
2. *A Force That Has Changed the Political Scene*, Senator John Kennedy 1957
3. *The Incredible shrinking sound bite*, Craig Fehrman, *Boston Globe* 2011
4. *Entire State Before the Cameras*, Marc Sandalow, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2000

**Assignment due: Budget lines (Wednesday, October 7 10 a.m.)**

#### 4. **October 15 Social Media and the Internet: Destroying or Saving Journalism?**

TOPIC: The consequences of an iPhone nation

WORKSHOP:

- Researching on the Internet
- Writing on deadline
- How to think in sound bites and talk on TV

READINGS:

1. *The End of the Gutenberg Era*, Jason Epstein, Johns Hopkins University Press
2. *Twitter's Influence on News Judgment: An Experiment Among Journalists*, Shannon McGregor, Logan Molyneux, 2018
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
5. *Among U.S. Latinos, the Internet Now Rivals Television as a Source for News*, Antonio Flores, Pew Research Center

**Assignment due: Punditry (in-class)**

**Overnight debate story due (9 a.m., Friday October 16.)**

#### 5. **October 22 Fake News, Bullshit, and Reality TV**

TOPIC It's a Mad, Mad, World

WORKSHOP: Identifying fake news

READINGS:

1. *On Bullshit*, Harry Frankfurt, Princeton University Press, 2005
2. *Rush Limbaugh: The Man Who Ate the GOP*, Michael Wolff, *Vanity Fair* March 2009
3. Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election, Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Spring 2017
4. *The Boys on the Bus*, Timothy Crouse, Random House, 1972 (3-17)
5. *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail*, Hunter Thompson, Straight Arrow Press 1972 (29-49)
6. What the Mainstream Media Can Learn from Jon Stewart, Rachel Smokin, *American Journalism Review* June/July 2007
7. *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

#### 6. **October 29 Electoral Dysfunction: Coverage of Campaign 2020, Polls, Debates, Election Night and Other Media Obsessions**

TOPIC: The rituals of American campaign coverage

WORKSHOP: Interpreting polls

READINGS:

1. Electoral Reckonings: Press Criticism of Presidential Campaign Coverage, 2000-2016, Elizabeth Bent, Kimberly Kelling and Ryan J. Thomas, *Journal of Media Ethics*, Volume 35, 2020
2. [How to Read Polls in 2020 Like a Pro](#), by Nathaniel Rakich, *FiveThirtyEight*, June 15 2020
3. Election Night Coverage as Political Ritual, Marc Howard Ross and Richard Joslyn, *Polity* Vo. 21, No. 2 University of Chicago Press
4. *News Coverage of the 2016 Election: How the Press Failed the Voters*, Thomas E. Patterson, Harvard Kennedy School and the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, 2016

**Assignment due: Media monitoring assignment**

## 7. **November 5 Propaganda: How politicians manipulate the press**

TOPIC: Propaganda: Truth or lies?

WORKSHOP: Sound bites and talking points

READINGS:

1. *Politics and the English Language*, George Orwell, *Horizon* 1945
2. *Trump and the Media, Chapter 6*, Michael Schudson, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2018
3. *Hardball: How Politics is Played, Told by One Who Knows the Game*; (chapter 7: The Press is the Enemy) Chris Matthews, Simon & Schuster, 1999
4. *Mikes, Cameras, Lunacy*, Marc Sandalow, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1996

**Assignment due: Final project rough draft**

## 8. **November 12 Writing for story**

TOPIC: Identifying your audience

WORKSHOP: Clarity

READINGS:

*On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, William Zinsser, Harper Perennial, 2016

## 9. **November 19 Ethics: Do media have them?**

TOPIC: Is being a good journalist the same as being a good person?

WORKSHOP: Writing without knowing grammar

READING:

1. *Stranger: The Challenge of a Latino Immigrant in the Trump Era*, Jorge Ramos Vintage Books, 2018 Chapter 3 “Get Out of My Country.”
2. *Morning Miracle*, David Kindred, Anchor, 2011 (chapter 8, Virginia Tech, chapter 6, Dana Priest and Anne Hull and chapter 19, Obama.)

**Assignment Due: Talking points memo**

**November 26: NO CLASS. HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

## 10. **December 5 Enemy of the American People?**

TOPIC: The Future of News ‘

WORKSHOP: Final edits

READINGS:

1. *Media Failures in the Age of Trump*, Victor Pickard, *The Political Economy of Communication*, 2016
2. *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 (excerpts to be distributed)
3. *The Reconstruction of American Journalism*, Leonard Downie, Jr., Michael Schudson, Columbia Journalism Review, Oct. 2009

**FINAL PROJECT DUE: Friday, December 5 at noon**