

Washington Focus Seminar
“Knowing Washington DC”
UCI UCDC 180 / UCR HASS 191W
REVISED SYLLABUS
Professor Randolph C. Head
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Class meetings: Thursdays, 10 AM – 1 PM
Room 317

Office hours, Room 339: Thursday 3-5, Friday 9-11, or by appointment
(evening appointments are available)

Course Theme

What do you know about Washington, DC? What do people in Washington DC – residents, political actors, visitors – know? This course will explore our city through various reflections of these two questions, bringing them together while separating the imaginary city that various communities know about from the very real circuits of information that make Washington the vital local, national and global nexus that it is.

Our analysis will include readings, films, online material, and visits to sites where knowledge of different kinds about the city is mediated to various audiences. By thinking hard about who is communicating what to whom in various Washington DC circuits, the course will provide you with a richer understanding of what goes on in Washington, and improve your ability to act in an informed way as a denizen of Washington, and of the nation. Our investigations will connect to student internships and the professor’s own research into knowledge systems along the way.

Course ethic

I urge you all to participate in all course activities according to the following set of principles:

1. **Think hard!** The goal of this course is not to transfer any particular information, but to have you practice and reflect on how the mind’s work can contribute to your internship, to your personal vocation, and to the general good.
2. **Go find out!** The Washington knowledge environment is rich and multilayered. You will succeed in the course and in Washington (or wherever your future takes you) if you reach out to explore that environment through the media, the web, through books and articles, and through interactions with informants, approaching all of these critically but with sympathy for the diverse positions of the many different people involved.
3. **Civil discourse.** People in Washington and around the nation disagree, often passionately, about policy and about the truth. This course is intended to provide a space

to focus on Washington and its contentious reality without being part of the contention. Rather, the Washington Focus seminar is a place to work out, explain and refine your understanding of the city and the world, persuasively and passionately but with respect for the diversity of opinions among the others participating.

4. **Intellectual honesty.** Intellectual honesty has two parts, internal and external. Internal intellectual honesty means that you believe that what you are saying or writing is true or justified. External intellectual honesty requires giving credit for any ideas, texts, words, images and any other stimulus you received from another. Avoid **plagiarism** by providing a reference – in a form appropriate to the perspective you are writing or speaking in – for any material you take from another source. Avoid **copyright infringement** by following the rules for fair use in an educational setting, which allows considerable use of copyrighted material but not in ways that would harm the copyright holder.

5. **Confidentiality and discretion.** Many of you work at internship sites where confidential material of various kinds may circulate. Please remember that you should **never** violate the confidence of your workspace for this class, and should respect that all members of the class probably have some information they cannot discuss. To ensure that you're not 'leaking', make it a habit to reflect consciously before telling anecdotes or making use of information you acquired at your internship. Often, it's all right to do so: but **only** after conscious thought.

Course assignments

The course consists of weekly meetings for discussion, presentation, and field trips. Attendance is required. Assigned reading should be done **before** each class meeting. Participation, engagement, and in-class contributions are a vital part of the course for every student.

In addition, students will write a series of short assignments, make an in-class presentation, and write one longer essay. You may choose one of three perspectives for each of your written and presentation assignments:

The literary: making use of language (or images, sounds, and media) to **evoke the city's reality** for your audience, and to engage your audience with some vital aspect of the 'real' Washington.

The scholarly: by framing questions and seeking out evidence, perform a **critical analysis** of an aspect of Washington as a nexus of communication and cultural capital.

The policy-oriented: **propose specific steps** that an institution you identify with should take to communicate and activate its agenda, in light of the Washington knowledge environment.

Requirements and grading:

1. Attendance and participation (25%)

Attendance at each class meeting is required. If a high-priority event at your internship site conflicts with attendance, please contact Prof. Head *in advance as early as possible* to make arrangements. For *emergencies and illnesses*, please inform Prof. Head as early as possible.

Participation means taking part in the discussion on the basis of completed preparation, contributing ideas, facts, opinions and positions in keeping with an ethic of civil discourse. I will also include discussion during my office hours as part of your course participation.

2. Reading and preparation

Short reading assignments or movie assignments for reading *before* each class are listed in the syllabus. These form the essential shared foundation for discussion each week. One way to find a topic for your short writing assignments is to pick one point you found intriguing or unexpected (or that you found disturbing or mistaken) from the reading and exploring it in a pithy essay.

The formal assignments are only part of your preparation requirement. In addition, you should spend at least **2 hours per week** pursuing deeper engagement with the Washington information environment. I strongly recommend avid reading of the major national media and Washington papers on a regular basis. In addition, I encourage you to explore the world of theoretical, political and policy blogs about national and local politics. Find three or four blogs or outlets that you find lively and filled with persuasive posts and comments, and draw on these, as well, as you seek topics for short assignments an perspectives on each week's theme. Ask people at your internship site, your peers and your professors for suggestions, and make sure to explore outlets that convey positions you disagree with, too.

3. Short writing assignments (25%)

One goal of this course is to give students practice in writing quick but penetrating short pieces, as people working in Washington often have to do. The goal of these pieces is not to be comprehensive, but rather to address a single point in a literary, scholarly, or policy-oriented way. These short essays should run around 200-300 words (about one page, double-spaced). They can be longer if you wish, but should not be shorter.

The topic of each short assignment is open, but should connect with the week's assigned reading and discussion. They are due by **5 PM the day before each class** (by e-mail to Prof. Head). I will regularly ask students who wrote particularly impressive short pieces to pitch them orally to the class during discussion. You may choose as your topic a single

point from the reading, a related issue you discovered in the news or other media, or you may connect the week's general theme to your work at your internship site in developing a topic.

Each short assignment (during weeks 2-10) can earn up to 5 points, and the maximum that can be earned for all of them is 25 points. (Thus, you do not need to submit a short assignment every week – but please DO pace yourself through the quarter.)

4. Oral presentation (20%)

Each student will make a short oral presentation in class. Presentations will be scheduled to begin in week 5, after you have settled into the city and your internship. You should present a feature of your own Washington knowledge environment that you have discovered, and that you find revealing, important, or problematic. I will begin discussing topics as soon as the course starts; a **one-paragraph topic proposal is due on Oct. 11** (bring to class).

Presentations should be about 5-10 minutes. If you want to use graphics, multimedia or handouts, please consult with Prof. Head in advance.

5. Washington focus paper (30%)

Each student will write one longer and more formal essay – ca. 1000-1500 words – that goes into a topic of your choice in greater depth. The best topics will link your internship and the goals of the organization you are working for to the larger Washington knowledge environment. Your papers may take a literary, analytic or policy perspective.

Each student should visit Prof. Head in office hours or by appointment to discuss this paper's topic **before November 1**.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – Sept 20 – Introduction: Knowing Washington DC

Week 2 – Sept 27 – Why Washington City? A historical perspective with modern resonance.

Reading:

Joseph Ellis. *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, Ch. 2: “The Dinner,” pp. 48-80.

and

Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government*, Ch. 1: “President Thomas Jefferson in Washington City,” pp. 4-47.

Writing: short assignments due by 5 PM Wednesday, Sept 26, (if you submit one this week) and every Wednesday. Up to 5 points each, up to 25 points total.

Week 3 – Oct 4 – African American Washington

Reading:

Jill Connors, ed., *Growing Up in Washington, D.C.: An Oral History*, Ch. 1, “Belonging to a Community,” pp. 25-51.
Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, Ch. XII: “Racism must go!”, pp. 176-193.
Hurd vs. Hodge (Read the main decision and at least 2 *amicus curiae* briefs). Available through campus library **Westlaw** links. Part of the assignment is figuring out how to navigate a legal case and its decision!)

Week 4 – Oct 11 – Public spaces in Washington: memory and politics

Reading:

[TBA: Readings assigned by Dr. Sutton]
Michael J. Hogan, “The Enola Gay Controversy: History, Memory and the Politics of Presentation,” in idem, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, pp. 200-232.
Herbert Garfinkle, *When Negroes March* (1959 and 1969), Ch. 2, “The March to FECP,” pp. 37-61.
Tea Party 2012 March/Rally information search (student directed)
Occupy Washington information search (student-directed)

Guest: Dr. Robert Sutton, Chief Historian, National Park Service. Weather permitting, we will walk to McPherson Square for the last segment of the class and look at it through different perspectives under Dr. Sutton’s guidance.

Week 5 – Oct 18 – **Field trip:** Newseum: media (and sponsorship!) in action

[NOTE: as an exception, short essay assignments for this week are due **Sunday, Oct. 21 by 5 PM**, so that you can respond to the Newseum lecture and tour.]

Reading:

Katherine Graham, *Personal History*, Chs. 21-22, pp. 416-459.

Week 6 – Oct 25 – Can Washington correct its own faults? (The Watergate scandal)

Watch:

All the President’s Men

Reading:

Katherine Graham, *Personal History*, Chs. 23-24, pp. 460-508.
Browse for information and interpretations of Watergate.

Alumni panel in class: UCI and UCR alumni talk about their internships, about Washington careers, and about life in the city.

Week 7 – Nov. 1 – Washington doing its work

Reading:

FTC 1996 report on regulating the internet (available online)

Pew Research Center report, “Mixed Views of Regulation” (available online)

Guest: Prof. Teresa Schwarz, GWU Law School. Former deputy director, Bureau of Consumer Protection, FTC. Member, Board of Directors, Consumer Union.

Week 8 – Nov. 8 – Golden age of punditry: interpreting the election results

Reading: your 4 (or more) favorite pundits online on the election results.

In class, we will discuss the election outcome (Presidential, Congress, and in the states) from the perspective of your internship site. What will change for your organization? What does the election, overall, mean?

Week 9 – Nov 15 - Washington ritual and ceremony

Read/watch:

Inaugural speeches*:

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1932

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrfirstinaugural.html>

John F. Kennedy, 1960

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkinaugural.htm>

Ronald W. Reagan, 1980

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreagandfirstinaugural.html>

Barack H. Obama, 2008

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Barack_Obama_inaugural_address.ogg

* speeches and texts are also available at many other sites

In class, we will discuss the audience for the next inaugural speech, and discuss what elements it should, *in your judgment*, contain.

(Nov 23: Thanksgiving)

Week 10 – Nov. 29 – Course conclusion

Reading:

Sam Smith, *Captive Capital: Colonial Life in Modern Washington* (1974), Ch. 1:

“Life inside a monument,” pp. 3-36