
CONTEMPORARY POLITICS AND MEDIA
SPRING 2012 Media Research Seminar
University of California Washington Center
Instructor: Marc Sandalow

Overview

This seminar will explore the evolving relationship between governing and the news media, providing an academic framework and instruction for students interning in communications, government or political offices. The course combines research and scholarship elements of the traditional UCDC seminar 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 exploit – and rely on -- journalists, the development of sophisticated modern propaganda, the civic implications of social networking and the demise of print journalism.

Washington is the perfect backdrop for such a course, with the opportunity to visit iconic institutions, such as the National Press Club, the Washington Post and the Newseum, as well as the chance to witness up close the work of journalists, politicians and other political communicators at the top of their profession. The class will feature lectures, discussions, field visits and guest speakers from the ranks of journalism and politics. Readings include scholarly material as well as first-hand accounts from political figures and journalists. Students will be expected to keep abreast of political news by reading newspapers and the Internet daily throughout the term.

Most students will complete a major research project on a newsworthy topic which will be written in the form of a news report. Others may choose to pursue a more traditional research project in consultation with the instructor. All students must complete additional writing and speaking assignments aimed at teaching the craft of journalism and political communication. Assignments will be adjusted to meet individual campus requirements. For semester students (Merced and Berkeley), two additional books and a written assignment are required.

Class Hours

The course will meet each Friday 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 Friday is a class day.

Instructor

Marc Sandalow (msandalow@ucdc.edu) is Associate Academic Director of the University of California's Washington Program and Editor-in-Chief of the California News Service, a UCDC journalism program. He is the author of three books, including "Madam Speaker," a biography of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. He has been a journalist for more than 25 years, including 21 years at the San Francisco Chronicle 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 Hearst Argyle television stations and KCBS radio in San Francisco.

Office Hours

My office is room 323. I will be available from 2 to 5 each Friday. 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 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 the discussion. 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, www.huffpost.com, and www.drudgereport.com are good ways to supplement your reading. A list of recommended political web sites is included in the reader.

Students are strongly encouraged to attend Monday Night Forums in the auditorium. Food is always served!

2. **Readings.** In addition to rabid reading of current events, two books and a course reader are required for purchase: *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel and *Elements of Style*, by Strunk and White. Both are available new through Amazon for under \$10 (as cheap as \$1 used.) Any edition will do. Order immediately to keep up with reading. The course reader will cost roughly \$25 and is available at US Printing and Copying, 1725 M Street (1½ blocks from the UC Center.) Reading assignments should be completed before class begins to prepare students for discussion.

2. **Short writing and broadcast exercises.** Students must complete weekly assignments aimed at learning the craft of journalism and political communication. These are short assignments to work on skills such as writing a news lead.

Students will take part in a television exercise in which they will answer questions before camera and lights in order to appreciate the fear and limitations of punditry.

3. ***Presidential primary story and political memo.*** Students will write a spot news story on the GOP presidential election to be determined with an overnight deadline. Students will also write a political memo advising either their internship boss or a political candidate, on a strategy for a press interview.

4. ***Final project.*** Most students will work on an in-depth news story on a political or policy story 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..

Alternatively, students may opt to work on a more traditional research paper on political journalism or communication in conjunction with the instructor. Students who write the research paper are excused from writing the political memo.

GRADING

1. Participation 25%
2. Short assignments 10%
3. Breaking News Assignment 15%
4. Talking Points Memo 15%
5. Final project 35%

GRADING FOR THOSE WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS

1. Participation 25%
2. Short assignments 10%
3. Breaking News Assignment 15%
4. Final project 50%

Students are encouraged to nominate examples of wretched (or spectacular) journalism they encounter during the week. Factual errors, dreadful writing, or outrageous hyperbole all qualify. Print, broadcast, or Internet stories are acceptable as long as you produce a link so the entire class can see it.

WEEK-BY-WEEK SCHEDULE

Each class will begin with a discussion of the week's news and media coverage, followed by a discussion of the week's assigned reading. A lecture/discussion on a topic in journalism or political communication will follow. A workshop will be held each week on a particular skill.

The schedule may change based on current events and availability of speakers. And class may be shortened some weeks to allow for afternoon conferences.

PART I. THE PRACTICE AND PURPOSE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

April 6: Political Journalism: News or Entertainment?

TOPIC: The role of political journalism

WORKSHOP: Writing a news lead

April 13: The Glamorous Life of a Political Reporter

TOPIC: What drives political journalists?

WORKSHOP: Constructing a news story: Clarity, nut Graphs and the importance of perspective.

READING DUE:

- 1, *The Boys on the Bus*, Timothy Crouse, (chapters 1-2, pages 3-49)
2. *Covering 2012, Youth on the Bus* Jeremy Peters
3. *Good Times*, Russell Baker (chapter 5, pages 45-55)
3. *The Man the White House Wakes up to*, Mark Leibovich

ASSIGNMENT DUE: 3 leads

April 20: Media Bias: How Conflict Drives News Coverage (or, The media's liberal bias and other delusions of the radical right)

TOPIC: Horse race vs. policy vs. investigations vs. scandal

WORKSHOP: Speed writing: How to meet unreasonable deadlines.

READING DUE:

1. *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Expect*, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. (Introduction and chapters 1-3)
2. *How to Identify Media Bias*, Citizens Coalition for Responsible Media
3. Blog by Bernard Goldberg , Aug. 2011
4. *Distorting the Lead* (from *Journalistic Fraud, how the New York Times Distorts the News and Why it Can No Longer be Trusted*) Bob Kohn
5. *What Liberal Media:?* Jon Alterman, *The Nation* Feb. 6, 2003
6. *Measure of Media Bias*, Groseclose and Milyo

7. *Objective Evidence on Media Bias* (abstract), David Niven
8. *Lies and the Lying Liars who Tell Them*, Al Franken (chapters 1-4, 12-14)

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Deconstructed news story.

April 27 VISIT TO NEWSEUM

TOPIC: Ethics and history

READING DUE:

1. *Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel (chapters 4,5,6)
2. *Morning Miracle*, David Kindred (chapter 8, Virginia Tech, chapter 6, Dana Priest and Anne Hull and chapter 19, Obama.)

May 4: Remote Control Democracy: The Role of Television in politics and governing.

Guest Speaker: Kate Amara or Traci Mitchell, Hearst TV

TOPIC: How TV shapes campaigns and governing

WORKSHOP: Talking on TV

READING DUE:

1. *A Force that has Changed the Political Scene: U.S. Presidency and Television:* John Kennedy
2. *The Incredible shrinking sound bite*, Boston Globe Jan 2, 2011
3. *Entire State Before the Cameras*, Sandalow San Francisco Chronicle Jan. 2000

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Budget line for final project

PART II. MANAGING THE BEAST

May 11 Spin Cycle: How politicians manipulate the press

Guest Speaker: TBD

TOPIC: Propaganda: Truth or lies?

WORKSHOP: Sound bites and talking points

Reading due:

1. *Hardball, The Press is the Enemy*, Chris Matthews
2. *Mikes, Cameras, Lunacy*, Sandalow, San Francisco Chronicle
3. *The Way to Win: The Freak Show* Harris and Halperin

Assignment due: In-class TV punditry exercise

May 18 : Speechwriting, Elections and Political Messaging

TOPIC: Elections as political entertainment/Media as propaganda soapbox

WORKSHOP: Memo Writing

Reading due:

1. *The Longest Night*, *The Sunday Observer*, November 2000
2. Election night leads, *San Francisco Chronicle*
3. *POTUS Speaks (Inauguration Day 1993)* Michael Waldman
4. *Politics of the English Language*, George Orwell,

Assignment Due: FINAL STORY ROUGH DRAFT DUE

PART III. THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

MAY 25 The Internet: Saving or Destroying Journalism?

TOPIC: The political consequences of an I-pod nation

WORKSHOP: Researching on the Internet

Reading due:

1. *Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 don't follow the News*, Mindich (chapter 1)
2. *Out of Print*, The New Yorker Eric Alterman
3. *Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel (chapter 7-11)

June 1: Jon Stewart: Journalism's Best Friend or Worst Enemy?

TOPIC: Journalism as a civic responsibility.

WORKSHOP: The art of editing.

READING DUE:

1. *Relief in Hard Times: A Defense of Jon Stewart's Comedy in an Age of Cynicism*, W. Lance Bennett
2. *The Future (we hope) of Journalism*, John Carroll
3. *The Reconstruction of American Journalism*, Len Downie, Jr. and Michael Schudson, *Columbia Journalism Review*, October 2009

NO ASSIGNMENT DUE

June 8 The Greatest of Jobs -- the Worst of Professions

TOPIC: Journalism and communications in the 21st century.

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

FINAL PROJECT DUE: FRIDAY JUNE 8