

Knowing Washington

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Washington Focus Seminar, Fall 2012

UC Washington Center

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 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 national and global nexus that it is. In a presidential election year like 2012, Washington paradoxically takes its most prominent position in the national imagination, even as it is (temporarily) most removed from the limelight as candidates campaign around the states. We will thus pay particular attention to the knowledge networks associated with national electoral politics in the Fall 2012 seminar.

Our approach will include readings, films, online material, and visits to key sites where knowledge of different kinds about the city is mediated to various audiences. By asking you to think hard about who is communicating what to whom in various Washington DC venues, 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.

The course will fall into three thematic blocks after the introductory week. For each theme, we will read diverse material (as much as possible, available from the Web or else provide electronically), carry out a field trip or have a guest in class, and discuss various aspects of the theme. At the end of each thematic block, students will write an essay taking either a ‘policy’ or a ‘analytical’ perspective that interprets the block’s theme in terms of their own background, major, and (if they wish) internship site. Students must write at least one essay from each of the two perspectives (see the detailed discussion of the course assignments, below).

Theme 1: Washington as a national center of identity

Theme 2: Washington as the center of a global power system

Theme 3: Washington as the focal point of US political contention