



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY  
School of Continuing Studies  
Journalism

## MPJO-854-01: POLITICAL REPORTING

### GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Thursdays, 8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. | Fall 2015

Instructors: Brooke Brower & David Chalian

Downtown campus, room C122

- Office hours by appointment

### COURSE OVERVIEW

Students will learn the techniques of reporting on political candidates, campaigns, events and issues with a focus on the 2016 presidential election. Through hands-on writing and reporting assignments as well as the analysis of the day's print, broadcast and digital political journalism, students will learn how to craft informative, contextual and balanced stories on politics.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Understand the techniques of reporting on political candidates, events and issues
- Find and develop sources in politics
- Craft informative, contextual and balanced political reports
- Fact-check political statements and campaign ads
- Read and understand federal campaign finance reports
- Develop a working knowledge of the mechanics of the presidential election process and the metrics by which the candidates and their campaigns are evaluated by reporters and voters

### REQUIRED READING

**\*updated as of 8.25.15**

Title: This Town

Authors: by Mark Leibovich

Publisher: Blue Rider Press

Year: 2014

ISBN: 9780399170683

Price: \$10.49(Amazon)

Title: Double Down: Game Change 2012

Authors: Mark Halperin and John Heilemann

Publisher: Penguin Press

Year: 2013

ISBN-10: 1594204403

Price: \$19.08 (Amazon)



**\*updated as of 8.25.15**

Peter Hamby's 2013 Harvard Shorenstein Center paper "Did Twitter Kill the Boys on the Bus?" – available FREE here- [http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/d80\\_hamby.pdf](http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/d80_hamby.pdf)

Daily reading of Mike Allen's "POLITICO Playbook" <http://www.politico.com/playbook/> (You can and should subscribe to receive this via e-mail.)

We will also send links via e-mail to current examples of political reporting prior to most classes. Each student should use a Twitter account to explore its value as a news resource and reporting tool.

In addition to the required readings, students should also read on a regular basis: POLITICO.com, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and NBC News' "First Read" (<http://firstread.nbcnews.com/>).

## **ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is mandatory. As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-).

**Absences for classes beyond the initial two will result in further reduction of the final grade.** If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

If you have a legitimate reason for missing class (e.g., emergency, illness), please let the instructors know prior to the class period to be missed.

## **CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND OTHER GUIDELINES**

This is a graduate-level professional course and will have the appropriate standards and assignments: attendance at scheduled classes, constructive contributions to class discussions, and assignments completed on time. Students should attend each class prepared to discuss the issues covered in the assigned material and the political headlines of the week. These discussions will be about both the content of the political news and how it's being reported. Your comments, questions and curiosity will drive the discussions beyond the prepared material by the instructors.

We will have several guest speakers from the world of media and politics join us at various times during the semester. These are candid and off-the-record sessions meant to better the students' understanding of the material, and students will not relay the discussion on social media either during or after class.

Late work will be subject to a grade penalty, and late work without a documented explanation prior to the due date will be subject to a larger grade penalty.



One reporting assignment will require a visit to either the CNN or NBC News bureaus in Washington for a real-time reporting assignment. There will be multiple timing options, and more details will be provided in class. Students must advise the instructors immediately if personal or professional reasons will prevent them from completing the assignment.

Instructional continuity: In the event of a weather emergency (or any other widespread emergency) that would close the Georgetown Downtown building, we will plan to meet virtually through online videoconferencing tools. More information will be provided on how this will work later in the semester.

### WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

This class has seven regular assignments and one final project and presentation. The details for each are as follows:

- 1) Debate preview story  
**Deadline:** 12:00pmET on Wednesday, Sept. 16
- 2) Poll analysis story  
**Deadline:** By start of class on Sept. 24
- 3) Dispatch from Values Voter Summit taking place from Sept. 25-27  
<http://www.valuesvotersummit.org>  
**Deadline:** By start of class on Oct. 1
- 4) Ad analysis story  
**Deadline:** By start of class on Oct. 8
- 5) State staffer profile  
**Deadline:** By start of class on Oct. 15
- 6) Campaign finance filing story  
**Deadline:** By start of class on Oct. 22
- 7) Fact-check story  
**Deadline:** By start of class on Nov. 5
- 8) TV taping story  
**Deadline:** Three hours after the end of the show that you visit between Dec. 3 and Dec. 9



## FINAL PROJECT

Specifics will be laid out in class on Nov 12, but the final project will include a written report and in-class presentation.

**Deadline:** 5:00pm EST on Monday, Dec 14.

## GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Class attendance and participation:	30 points
Writing assignments:	35 points
Final project:	35 points

**Total:** **100 points**

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

A	100-93	B-	82.99-80
A-	92.99-90	C	79.99-70
B+	89.99-88	F	69.99-0
B	87.99-83		

The instructors will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

## UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program  
202-687-4246  
<http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>
- Academic Resource Center  
202-687-8354 | [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu)  
<http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services  
202-687-6985  
<http://caps.georgetown.edu/>

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY



Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (202-687-8354; [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu); <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. Students are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

### GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

### PLAGIARISM

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

### SYLLABUS MODIFICATION

The syllabus may change at any time to accommodate changes in instructor schedule and discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of our agenda. The instructors will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.



## CLASS SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1 (THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3)

Introduction and Overview

#### Introduction and Overview of 2016 and the post-Obama presidency

We'll go over the plan for the semester and also take a look at the 2016 landscape as well as what 2012 and 2014 taught us.

**Assignment:** Begin daily read-in on political news

### WEEK 2 (THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10)

#### Debates

We will examine how debates affect races – from setting expectations to gaffes and post-debate spinning.

**Writing Assignment #1:** Debate preview story

**Deadline:** 12:00pmET on Wednesday, Sept. 16

### WEEK 3 (THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17)

#### Polling and debate recap

We will react to what happened in the CNN debate the night before and examine some of the coverage of it. We will also explore the science of polling and how we use it as reporters. We will discuss the recent changes in polling methods and new technology that's changing the way media handles polls and less scientific surveys.

**Writing Assignment #2:** Poll analysis story

**Deadline:** By start of class on Sept. 24

### WEEK 4 (THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24)

#### Outside groups and interest groups

We will look at the large landscape of outside groups (SuperPACS and others) that has grown significantly in recent years and plays such a central role for presidential campaigns while being officially detached from them. We'll also look at interest groups that candidates court for support.

**Writing Assignment #3:** Dispatch from Values Voter Summit taking place from

Sept. 25-27 <http://www.valuesvotersummit.org>

**Deadline:** By start of class on Oct. 1

### WEEK 5 (THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1)

#### Advertising and social media (by campaigns and reporters)

The world of paid advertising, as well as free media, is enormous. We'll look at how it works, how it's run and how it's constantly changing.



**Writing Assignment #4: Ad analysis story**

**Deadline:** By start of class on Oct. 8

**WEEK 6 (THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8)**

**Primary state politics, staffing and organization**

We'll dig deeper into the primary state strategies of the candidates and look at the organizational and outreach efforts that they're making. We'll also look at how those state level staffs shape coverage and conventional wisdom about the race both for local and national reporters.

**Writing Assignment #5: State staffer profile**

**Deadline:** By start of class on Oct. 15

**WEEK 7 (THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15)**

**Fundraising and finance reports**

We'll learn about how to read and write about FEC reports and the battle for campaign cash.

**Writing Assignment #6: Campaign finance filing story**

**Deadline:** By start of class on Oct. 22

**WEEK 8 (THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22)**

**Big Data: The Science Behind Campaigns**

We'll look at how campaigns have evolved enormously in recent years to know so much more about voters and potential voters through polling, voting records, social media, consumer habits and much more – and how that data plays into political reporting.

**Assignment:** read "Double Down" by start of class on Nov. 12

**WEEK 9 (THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29)**

**Fact-checking and debate recap**

The business of fact-checking is something that all reporters must master, but it's sometimes a trickier task in political reporting, particularly in the context of a debate (3rd GOP debate on CNBC is the previous night). We'll look at what you can do as reporters and what resources are there to help you.

**Writing Assignment #7: Fact-check story**

**Deadline:** By start of class on Nov. 5

**WEEK 10 (THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5)**

**Covering Election Day**

We'll examine the print, television and digital coverage of how Kentucky and Mississippi voted on Tuesday, Nov. 3. We'll look at what 2016 implications can be found in the results (if any).



**Assignment:** read “This Town” by start of class on Dec. 17

### **WEEK 11 (THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12)**

#### **Covering the White House in a presidential election year**

We will talk about what it’s like to cover the White House regardless of who’s in office, how it’s changed in recent years, and what makes it different in an election year.

**Assignment:** begin working on your final project due by 5:00pm ET on Monday, Dec. 14 (details to come in class)

### **WEEK 12 (THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19)**

#### **Dropping out and endorsements**

While the field spent most of 2015 growing, the story in the next several months will be how it shrinks. We’ll look at how that plays out, how it gets covered, and what endorsements by failed candidates (and others) mean for the candidates marching forward.

**Assignment:** read Peter Hamby’s IOP paper by start of class on Dec. 3

### **WEEK 13 (THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26)**

**\*\*\*NO CLASS ON THANKSGIVING\*\*\***

### **WEEK 14 (THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3)**

#### **Life on the trail**

We’ll look at what’s changed and hasn’t since the days of “The Boys on the Bus” to 2016, the rise of network campaign “embeds,” and the evaporating line between national coverage and state-level coverage. We’ll also talk about Hamby’s paper.

**Writing Assignment #8:** In order to make up the class time due to holidays and study days, each student will pick a time and day between Dec. 3 and Dec. 9 to attend a live program at either the CNN or NBC bureaus in Washington to cover a newsmaker interview and write a story in real time.

**Deadline:** Three hours after the end of the show that you visit

### **WEEK 15 (THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10)**

**\*\*\*NO CLASS DURING STUDY DAYS\*\*\***

**Assignment:** Polishing up final project

**Deadline:** 5:00pmET on Monday, Dec. 14

### **WEEK 16 (THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17)**

#### **Final class**

We will share final project experiences and closing thoughts on the semester. We’ll also talk about “This Town.”





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