



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

MPJO-854-01: POLITICAL REPORTING

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Thursdays, 5:20-7:50pm | Spring 2017

Instructor: Brooke Van Dam, Ph.D.

Downtown campus, room C230

- Office hours by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

Students will learn, discuss and analyze the techniques of reporting on elected officials and candidates, campaigns, events and issues. Through hands-on writing and reporting assignments as well as the analysis of print, broadcast and digital political journalism, students will learn how to craft informative, contextual and insightful stories on politics.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

- Employ reporting techniques on political candidates, events and issues
- Identify and develop sources in the field of politics
- Create informative, contextual and comprehensive political reports
- Describe the role of the press in a federalist system of governance

REQUIRED READING

Title: Why Democracies Need An Unlovable Press

Authors: by Michael Schudson

Publisher: Polity

Year: 2008

ISBN: 978-0745644530

Students are required to keep up with political news on a variety of cable news outlets- CNN, Fox News and MSNBC; print publications- NYTimes, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal; Radio-NPR; Digital- Politico, BuzzFeed

Other readings assigned throughout the term

ATTENDANCE

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.



This class relies heavily on attendance and participation. Punctual attendance is critical. If you have to miss a class – family emergency, medical emergency or other act of God – you must let the instructor know in advance and work out a proposal for making up whatever work you will miss. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances.

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.

ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise noted. **Journalism requires a strict adherence to deadlines. Late work will not be accepted.** If there is a potential conflict for an upcoming assignment, please let the professor know ahead of time and make arrangements

This class has four stories and one final larger story project. Additionally, there are eight required readings with blog posts throughout the term. The details for each are as follows:

- Reading Blogs
Uploaded to Canvas by 5:20pm on the day of class
- Inauguration Story
Emailed to instructor by 5:20pm on January 26th
- Congressional Representative or Staffer Profile
Emailed to instructor by 5:20pm on February 23rd
- Senate/House Session Summary
Emailed to instructor latest by 5:20pm on March 30th
- Primary or Local Race Story
Emailed to instructor by 5:20pm on April 20th
- Final Executive Cabinet story- Draft and Final
Draft emailed to instructor by 5:20pm on March 23rd
Final emailed to instructor by 5:20pm on May 11th

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:



Class attendance and participation:	5
Reading Blogs	10
Inauguration Story	10
Congressional Rep or Staffer Profile	15
Senate/House Session Summary	15
Primary or Local Race Story	15
Final Story Draft	10
Final Story	20

Total: 100

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
<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; <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 instructor will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Jan. 12 – Introduction to Political Reporting



- Election recap
- Political Typology quiz
- “Objectivity”

Jan. 19 – Facts and Democracy

Reading: Schudson, Chapter 1- “Introduction: facts and democracy”

- Is the fact check dead?
- Who I am vs. What I say
- Political Rhetoric
- Covering the Inauguration: Everyone loves a parade (and parade coverage)
- Developing Sources

Jan. 26 – Understanding Politics

Inauguration Story Due

Reading: Schudson, Chapter 2- “Six or seven things news can do for democracy”

Guest: Hans Noel, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Government, Georgetown University

Feb. 2 -- The 2016 Vote: how Trump did it

Reading: Schudson, Chapter 3- “The US model of journalism: exception or exemplar?”

- Analysis of Election coverage
- What went wrong?
- Diversity (or lack of) in newsrooms
- Comparative models

Feb. 9 – Best Practices in Political Coverage

Reading: Schudson, Chapter 5&6- “Why democracies need an unlovable press” and “The concept of politics in contemporary US journalism”

- Framing
- Story Focus

Feb. 16 – Facts vs. Spin

Reading: Schudson, Chapter 7- “What’s unusual about covering politics as usual”

Special Guest: Chris Frates, CNN

Feb. 23 -- Polls in politics: why they still matter and how to cover them

Congressional Rep or Staffer Story Due

Reading: Schudson, Chapter 8- “The anarchy of events and the anxiety of storytelling”

Mar. 2 – Experts and the Problem of Institutional Distrust

Reading: Schudson, Chapter 10- “The trouble with experts-and why democracy needs them”



Mar. 9 -- NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK

Mar. 16 – Social media, fake news and talking about politics- Controlling the Narrative
Reading: Schudson, Chapter 9- “Why conversation is not the soul of democracy”

Mar. 23 -- Outside groups and special interests: dissed but not dismissed

Final Project Draft Due

Special Guest: tbd

Mar. 30 – Politics in an “Off” Year:

Senate/House Session Summary- Last Day to Submit

- The road to 2020: Democrats already making moves
- New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial campaigns happening now

Apr. 6 -- All politics is local

- Covering local and state politics
- Upcoming primaries in major cities like L.A., Boston, Dallas, Seattle, and more

Apr. 13 -- NO CLASS -- EASTER BREAK

Apr. 20 -- All politics is global

Primary/Local Story Due

- France votes for a new president (on Apr. 23rd) in the wake of Brexit, Trump and more

Apr. 27 -- President Trump's first 100 days: where are we now

May 4 -- NO CLASS -- STUDY DAYS

May 11 -- Final class: final project discussion

Final Project Due