

**JOUR 100  
News Media and Society  
Spring 2023**

**Instructor: Betsy Mullen  
Phone: (804) 301-5616  
emullen2@richmond.edu  
Office: Weinstein 426**

*“Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.”  
-- Thomas Jefferson*

Let’s talk about the bottom line first. We need news. We need reliable, accurate news now more than ever. We are absolutely saturated as a culture with information, and much of that information is coming to us through untrained, unaccountable and unprofessional peddlers of “news” who fill the blogosphere, Twitterverse, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and the airwaves. We have more sources of information than ever before and more ways to find out what we think we want to know. But where is the reliable information? Where should you turn for news? Think about some of the items that may have hit your social media news feeds recently: allegations and innuendo about politicians and celebrities, false information about the coronavirus, fake photographs, viral videos, and hoaxes of every kind. Now think about some of the attacks leveled at the media in the past few years by government officials. “Fake News” has become a daily mantra in some circles. And these attacks on the media have inspired journalists and reliable news outlets to recommit to the core values of journalism. Journalism scholar Roy Peter Clark points out that “without journalism, democratic life dies from lack of oxygen. Without democracy, journalism loses its heartbeat.”

Now think about all of this against the backdrop of the pandemic, the recent protests and the polarizing politics that have become part of the daily national news cycle.

This is an incredible time to study the role of news media in a democratic society.

During this semester, we’ll explore the role of the free press, the foundations of the news industry, the ongoing changes in the media landscape and the way news impacts our society. We’ll talk about spin, manipulation, bias, ethics, controls on the media and the role of the media and social media in the increasing divisiveness and polarization in this country. We’ll study examples of media at its best, uncovering corruption and giving voice to the voiceless, and media at its worst, presenting irresponsible and incorrect information and mislabeled opinion. We’ll talk about why it’s important to be a good news consumer and how being informed will help you to be a better participant in society. Consider, too, that employers are increasingly adding awareness of current news and events to what they seek in prospective employees.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

**The Washington Post, online edition, free through UR**

**The Collegian, online**

**The Elements of Journalism 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2021)**

**She Said, Kantor and Twohey (2020)**

**Other text material and articles that will be available through Blackboard**

**Materials from other media sites assigned throughout the semester**

## DAILY MEDIA

You are responsible for reading the online edition of The Washington Post daily. This is now available to you for free through the UR library at <https://libguides.richmond.edu/newssources>. On the Post website, you will subscribe to several daily email newsletters, which will help you organize and prioritize your current events. The required newsletters are: The 7, Evening Edition and the first seven categories of Breaking News Alerts – National, Politics, World, Health/Science, Exclusive, Tech, Economy/Business. Spend time on the Post site each day and feel free to sign up for other newsletters as well. Your goal is to be conversant enough with current events to gain a basic awareness of news that would be impressive to a potential employer.

The Washington Post will be our consistent source for current events. However, as we will discuss, it is never a good idea to be a one-source news consumer. During most weeks this semester, we will also focus on a different news outlet as a way to expand your exposure to today's diverse news media, exploring changes in the news industry and the variety of ways news is now gathered and disseminated.

This level of daily news consumption is likely to be a change for many of you and you may find it intimidating to start. Stick with it and you will soon see how to make it a reasonable part of your daily routine. Besides, if you do, you will seem smarter to other people, including other professors.

You are also required to keep up each day with news in The Collegian – [thecollegianur.com](http://thecollegianur.com).

Invest yourself in the news from all of these sources and you also will see that investment pay off on your weekly current events quizzes, which make up 30 percent of your grade. More on that below.

## NOTE WELL

We have a no-phones policy in class, as well as a no-laptop policy unless required for something during class. Misusing electronic devices will get you removed from class for the day and a zero on any assignments that day.

Also, you are expected to get to class on time and to remain in class. These expectations are designed to reduce disruptions and also enhance the type of journalistic engagement that we will discuss further in class.

There could be updates on classroom guidelines and protocols depending on the ongoing pandemic.

## DEADLINES

Make your deadlines. **I do not accept late assignments. A late assignment without prior approval is a zero.** The key here is communication. I will work with you, but you must communicate with me in a timely fashion.

## **GRADING**

30 percent – current events quizzes, always weekly, sometimes more  
30 percent – tests on books, discussions, movies and other assignments  
20 percent – final project  
20 percent – regular class participation, written assignments and group projects

Percentages are approximate and subject to revision. We will discuss details of each assignment before it is due. FYI, I don't give grades – you earn them.

## **GRADE SCALE**

A+: 98-100; A: 93-97; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72;  
Do you really need to know what comes after this?

## **QUIZZES**

The weekly quizzes will usually be given on Thursdays. Most of the questions will be taken from The Washington Post, The Collegian, that week's media add-on assignment and any other reading I've assigned for homework.

I will drop your two lowest or missing quiz grades at the end of the semester. Everyone is entitled to a bad day.

Please note: news quizzes cannot be made up. If you miss one, you're fine. If you miss more than that, we need to talk.

There will be opportunities to earn **extra credit** quiz points throughout the semester. I will announce various opportunities in advance and you are allowed to earn up to 30 points toward your quiz average - that's a letter grade bump on three quizzes.

## **GROUP PROJECT**

You will be part of several group projects this semester related to concepts discussed in class. Most of the group work will take place during class, but there will be at least one project that will require groups to meet outside of class time. This will involve research, analysis and a presentation. We will discuss this project in more detail in class.

## **FINAL PROJECT**

The final project is an analysis of news coverage of a specific issue, based on multiple news sources. It takes the place of your final sit-down exam and will be due on that scheduled exam date. More details to follow.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Please note that I expect robust and civil discussion in this class. Remember, participation makes up 20 percent of your final grade. Also, keep in mind that discussing the news means tackling some difficult and sensitive topics. We cannot shy away from the issues of the day, including those mentioned in the opening words of this syllabus. We will be discussing and debating media coverage of these issues and events, not policy or politics or our opinions of the issues themselves. Within that framework, there is plenty of room for disagreement. We must agree to disagree respectfully. This is an excellent time to practice the art of civil discourse, which is frequently lacking in our culture.

Come to every class ready to discuss news and any assigned homework. I will call on you randomly and I expect you will be able to contribute meaningfully to whatever discussion we're having.

If you are having a problem or issue that prevents you from participating fully in our discussions, please let me know immediately.

## **NO RECORDINGS POLICY**

One of the hallmarks of a University of Richmond education is small classes where faculty and students engage in robust discussions. The goal is always to encourage students with varied perspectives to be heard respectfully. In the journalism department, we frequently discuss and debate the latest events and issues in the news, which affect all of our lives in the current moment. Recognizing all of this, journalism professors will not be recording our classroom sessions. Students are prohibited from capturing, copying, sharing, publishing, and/or posting on social media any recordings (audio or audio/video) in whole or in part or captured images of the class during any in-person or Zoom session or images of students or faculty in the course. Any violations of this policy will be referred to the Westhampton and Richmond College deans with the possibility of sanctions.

## **HONOR CODE AND PLAGIARISM**

Do your own work unless I tell you otherwise in the case of group or team projects. Carefully attribute information that comes from other sources. Do not use anything from the internet, any media source or text book without attribution. Ask me if you're not sure about something. Presenting fictional interviews, quotes, etc., as factual is an honor code violation, as well as a grave breach of trust. **Plagiarism is grounds for failure in this course and possible university sanction.**

## **OFFICE HOURS, EMAIL, ETC.**

Please let me know if you have questions about something we discuss in class or are having trouble with any of the material. The best way to reach me is through email and I am usually pretty flexible on scheduling.

## **WHAT IT WILL TAKE**

To be successful in this course, expect to devote an average of 10 to 14 hours each week preparing for class and for your participation in class sessions, studying course-related materials and completing course assignments.

## **TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE**

This is a general outline and could change as the semester progresses depending on news events and other possibilities. We also may move faster or slower and adjust for guest speakers and campus programs as needed. I will let you know about changes.

**Week 1:** Introduction, value of media, journalism basics, media diets

**Week 2:** Media differences, spin

**Week 3:** News judgment, characteristics of news

**Week 4:** Elements of Journalism 1-3, the purpose of journalism, concepts of truth

**Week 5:** Elements of Journalism Ch. 4-6, verification vs assertion, watchdog, fact-checking

**Week 6:** News controls, State of Play

**Week 7:** Elements of Journalism, Ch. 7-9, **Test 1**

**Week 8:** *Spring Break week*

**Week 9:** Fake News, begin group project

**Week 10:** Attacks on the media, race and representation in the media

**Week 11:** Group presentations

**Week 12:** She Said, Ch. 1-5

**Week 13:** She Said, Ch. 6-9

**Week 14:** **Test 2**

**Week 15:** Wrapup