Press and Politics, Fall 2012
Jour 311, 12863
Tuesday and Thursday, 9:00-10:15 a.m.
Ryland Hall, Room 213
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Office hours: 1:30-5:00 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday; other times by appointment
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No textbook.

What a great semester to be taking a course on press and politics. Not only will there be a presidential election but the elections for Congress will be nearly as important.

You will be expected to consume a lot of media this semester. You will need to read the New York Times on a daily basis. In addition, you will become regular watchers of CNN, Fox, MSNBC, CBS, ABC, NBC and the NewsHour on PBS. We will decide on the fly which bloggers and social media we’ll need to monitor. And, oh yes, and the Daily Show with Jon Stewart.

We will focus our attention on several themes:

First, who sets the agenda? Do the candidates, or the media? And how is that done?

Second, we will learn about polls. How they’re done, how to interpret them and how to write about them accurately.

Third, follow the money. We will learn about the role money plays, and how to report on it. We’ll also observe how the media handles this issue.

Fourth, what constitutes fair and balanced coverage? And who does the best job of being even handed?

Finally, how does the media cover political advertising?

You will write papers on each of those topics. Here are the dates they will be due. Each paper will be approximately 750 words. More details about the specifics to be covered will be provided in class.

Polls: Sept. 13
Agenda setting: Sept. 28
Follow the money: Oct. 11
Fair and balanced: Oct. 25
Political advertising: Nov. 1
There will be a term paper. Each of you will submit a proposed topic for your term paper no later than Nov. 8. Term papers will be due the last day of class, Dec. 6. The paper will not exceed 2,500 words.

**Paper preparation:** Papers shall be submitted as Word documents attached to an e-mail. The subject line will be the topic of the attached paper. Please follow that protocol. It makes it a lot easier for me to keep track of who has done what. You must use your university e-mail account (that way I don’t have to guess who hotdog323@yahoo.com is). The papers will be at least 12 point type size and double spaced. I will mark them using Word notes.

**Grading:** Grading will put emphasis on clarity of expression and the quality and originality of the ideas expressed. Papers will earn an “A” by meeting those standards and by avoiding all spelling and grammar errors. You cannot get an “A” if you misspell any word in the paper. A “C” paper will reflect a kernel of an idea whose development lacks clarity and originality. The easiest way to get an “F” is to turn a paper in late. “B” and “D” papers falls somewhere in between.

**Attendance:** Missing a class is not an excuse for failing to do the work assigned in that class. Ask your classmates or ask me what the assignment was. If there’s a good reason you missed the class, talk to me. But it had better be good. We have only 40 class sessions and a lot of ground to cover.

**Deadlines:** No late assignments will be accepted. Part of learning to be a journalist is meeting deadlines. Use your time efficiently.

**Punctuality:** You are expected to be in class on time. Each class will start promptly. If you cannot get to class on time, please drop the course now. The door will be closed at the start of class and you will not be allowed to enter.

**Cell Phones:** No cell phone use, either voice or text, is allowed during class. If your cell phone goes off, you will be asked to leave the class and not allowed to return.

**Reaching me:** I will be in my office from 1:30-5:00 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. Feel free to call me at 804-484-4759 Monday through Saturday from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. If you need me in person at other times that can be arranged by appointment. You may e-mail me at rhodiern@richmond.edu. But a special note about e-mails to me: Treat them like the business communication they are. Begin with a conventional salutation (Dear. Prof. Hodierne) and end with a polite closing (Sincerely, Jane Doe). Write in complete sentences with proper capitalization and punctuation. I don’t think emoticons are cute. Finally, I don’t respond to text messages, IMs, Facebook postings or Tweets.