“The Daily Show” is the leading news source for Americans under 40. What that means is that a comedy show on a comedy network has more influence on a generation of people about what’s important in the news than professional media. Does that mean that the show’s former host, Jon Stewart, had more power than the network anchors? Are we better off relying on bloggers – untrained and unaccountable to professional standards - to provide us with the information we need? What does all of this say about the news media and its role in our society? And what are our responsibilities to be engaged, informed citizens?

We’ll explore these issues and some of the rapid-paced changes in the media landscape. We’ll discuss why it’s important for you to be an informed news consumer, which in turn helps you to become a better participant in democratic life. Journalism scholar Roy Peter Clark points out that “without journalism, democratic life dies from lack of oxygen. Without democracy, journalism loses its heartbeat.”

We’ll talk about spin, media ethics and responsibility, news selection, and various related topics including:

- What makes news?
- Who decides?
- How do media influence society?
- How does society influence the media?
- What in the world? The influence of international media.
- International media in democratic traditions
- Media ethics? You must be joking?
- Show me the money – do big dollars mean bad journalism?
- Blog this – the citizen journalist and the professional news hound.
- Taming the press? Inside and outside controls on the flow of information.

Which means . . .

...you will become an omnivorous media consumer. You will not just read news articles or watch news shows – you will devour them. If you do your work in this course, you will never look at the news media the same way. You will be better informed, smarter, more socially acceptable, better looking, able to leap tall buildings – you get the picture.
Books, books, books. . .

- The Elements of Journalism, Kovach and Rosenstiel (latest edition)
- Blur, Kovach and Rosenstiel (latest)
- UnSpun, Jackson
- Busted: A tale of corruption, Ruderman and Laker
- League of Denial, Fainranu-Wada

News reading. . .

Subscribe to the digital edition of The New York Times (get the student discount) and I'll show you how to sign up for the daily email headline service. You'll need to read at least the first six paragraphs of major stories under the headline service subheading.

Read the Collegian. All of it.

Sign up for the free major news headline service from The Washington Post and be sure to have a good sense of stories that match or differ from the Times.

The news reading may seem intimidating at first, but it will become a manageable part of your daily routine. As a bonus, people – and potential employers - will think you've gotten smarter because you can discuss current events with a degree of intelligence.

Among other noble reasons, the news readings will help you crush the current event quizzes, which make up 30 percent of your grade.

Television. . .

Watch TV news, local and national/international, and be prepared to discuss what you see and how it might differ from print-based journalism. International TV sources may include BBC World News, Al Jazeera and others; national sources may include CBS, NBC, CNN, ABC, MSNBC and Fox, among others. The Daily Show is funny, but it isn't news. Or is it?

Other reading . . .

I will send you other useful materials to read from time to time. Read them and make new friends
Phones, laptops, tablets…

No phones, period, and laptops and tablets are allowed only with an accommodation notice approved by CAPS.

Deadlines…

Make them. If you miss a deadline without an approved excuse, the assignment doesn’t count. Work is due at the start of class. I do not accept late assignments; a late assignment without prior approval is a zero.

Grading . . .

30 percent – current events quizzes, always weekly, sometimes more
40 percent – tests on books, and other reading assignments
20 percent – final project (more details to follow)
10 percent – participation

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.

The grade scale . . .

A+: 99-100; A: 92-98; A-: 90-91; B+: 88-89; B: 82-88; B-: 80-81; C+: 78-79; C: 72-78; C-: 70-71; I am sure that no one will need to know what comes after this, but ask me.

Extra credit…

You can earn 10 quiz points if you attend a news event on or off campus and produce a well-written, 750-word article about it. You can earn 10 points if you take a national story and localize it for possible use in the Collegian. I will show you how this is done over the first weeks of class. You can also earn 10 quiz points for attending a cultural event and writing a one-page summary about it. We’ll discuss details in the first week or so.

The final project…

We’ll discuss this in more depth as the semester continues, but your final project is to produce a media analysis paper that examines a particular news topic as it is covered by national and international print and electronic media.
Participation.

Is essential to success in this course and it makes things a lot more fun. If you plan to just slink into class and not contribute, reconsider if this course is for you. A lively discussion of media-related issues enhances the learning environment. Attendance is not optional. If you miss, you can quickly fall behind and stay lost. If you are having an issue of some kind that prevents your regular attendance, please let me know immediately. Here are some incentives: If you don’t miss any classes, I will drop your two lowest quiz grades; if you miss no more than two classes, I will drop your lowest quiz grade. **If you have five unexcused absences, you will fail the course.**

Honesty and plagiarism...

Unless I tell you otherwise, do your own work in this course. Attribute information that comes from other sources. When in doubt, ask me. **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 university sanction.**

How to flunk this course...

Don’t show up; don’t do the readings; don’t participate in discussions; don’t do the assignments; don’t show basic civility to classmates or the instructor; don’t be prepared to examine your thoughts about the news media and society.

How to do well...

Read deeply, write clearly, speak intelligently, and act civilly.

Remember...

Communication is essential to success to this course. I’m happy to answer questions and assist your quest for greatness in News Media and Society. I am available in person, by phone or through email at all reasonable hours – and some unreasonable hours, too. If in doubt, err on the side of asking too many questions instead of wishing you had asked one.

Tentative class schedule...

This likely will change as the semester progresses, depending on news events and other possibilities. We may move faster or slower. You’ll have some out-of-class assignments, and we may also have guest speakers for certain topics.
Week 1: Journalism basics, news controls, “UnSpun” readings
Week 2: Source control, “Thank you for Smoking,” “UnSpun” readings
Week 3: Spin exercise, other controls, “Elements” readings (1-3)
Week 4: “Elements” readings (finish), first test
Week 5: “Blur” readings, other controls, “Broadcast News,”
Week 6: “Blur” readings,” PBS “News Wars,”
Week 7: “The Insider,” corporate control
Week 8: Fall break, finish “Blur”
Week 9: internal controls, ethics
Week 10: second test; “League of Denial,” news decision-making exercises
Week 11: “League of Denial” readings
Week 12: Social media issues, “League of Denial”
Week 13: Government control, “Busted” readings
Week 14: “Busted” readings, “All the President’s Men”
Week 15: review, third test