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

We are saturated as a culture with information. Untrained, unaccountable and unprofessional peddlers of “news” fill the blogosphere, Twitterverse, Facebook and the airwaves. Think about some of the items that may have hit your Facebook news feed: the fake deaths, innuendo about politicians and celebrities, the end of the Mayan calendar, health, wealth and just about anything else.

We have more sources of information than ever before and more ways to find out what we think we want to know. But in some ways, this is all like that old Bruce Springsteen song: There’s 57 channels and nothing on.

Here’s the bottom line: we need news, maybe now more than ever. We need sources of reliable, accurate information that requires more work to gather than sticking a hashtag on a catchy phrase. News matters, and the impact that news has on society makes a difference in our culture.

During this semester, we’ll explore the foundations of the news industry and look at the changes in the media landscape. 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

- **UnSpun**, Jackson and Jamieson
- **The Elements of Journalism**, Kovach and Rosenstiel
- **The Sociology of News**, Schudson (second edition)
- **What is happening to news** Fuller
- **Blur**, Kovach and Rosenstiel
Daily media

Although you can get free print editions of the New York Times on campus, it is a good idea to subscribe to the digital edition (get the student discount) and sign up for the daily email headline service. I'll show you how to do this in class. Generally, you need to read the first six paragraphs of major stories under the headline service subheading or section front stories in the print edition.

You will also need to read major local news stories from the online edition of the Richmond Times-Dispatch (timesdispatch.com).

You are required to watch 30 minutes of TV-based news each night before class the next day. That gives you flexibility to watch online broadcasts instead of staring at a TV screen, if you choose. Try to work some variety into your viewing by watching different networks. For a good commentary on news events, and some fun, watch “The Daily Show” as often as you can.

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.

Invest yourself in the news and you will see that investment pay off in better quiz grades.

Deadlines

Make your deadlines. 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, which includes written class assignments

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.
Grading 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; Do you really need to know what comes after this?

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. You can also earn 10 quiz points for attending a cultural event and writing a one-page summary about it. You can do any of those for a total of 30 extra credit quiz points. We'll discuss details in the first week.

The final project

The final project is to produce a media analysis paper that examines how a specific news topic is covered by various forms of journalism. Look for more details to come on this through a separate handout.

Participation

Come to every class ready to discuss news. Come to every class prepared to talk about the text readings. I will call on you randomly and I expect you will be able to contribute well to whatever discussion we’re having. Participation makes up 10 percent of your total grade, which could mean a letter grade difference at the end of the term.

Attendance is not optional. If you miss, you will fall behind. 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.

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. 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. I am usually pretty flexible and we can discuss things in person, by phone or through email at all reasonable hours – and some unreasonable hours, too.

Tentative class schedule

This could change as the semester progresses depending on news events and other possibilities. We may move faster or slower or adjust for guest speakers as needed.

**Week 1:** Introduction, value of media, journalism basics, news controls
**Week 2:** “UnSpun,” source control, spin examples, “Sociology of News”
**Week 3:** “UnSpun, “Thank you for Smoking,” spin exercise
**Week 4:** Social control, **first test**
**Week 5:** “Sociology of News,” broadcasting/electronic media, “Broadcast News”
**Week 6:** “Sociology,” corporate control
**Week 7:** “Sociology,” corporate control, “The Insider”
**Week 8:** Advertiser control, corporate control, **second test**
**Week 9:** Spring Break
**Week 10:** “Elements,” internal control
**Week 11:** “Elements,” news decision-making exercises
**Week 12:** “Blur,” government control, PBS news wars
**Week 13:** “Blur,” “What is happening to the News?”
**Week 14:** “What is happening to the News?” “All the President’s Men”
**Week 15:** Review, **third test**