

JOUR 200 – News Media and Society
Fall 2009
Jepson G21 MWF (8 to 8:50 a.m.)
and MWF (9 to 9:50 a.m.)
Office hours: flexible
Please email to arrange meetings

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“**The Daily Show**” has emerged as the leading news source for young people in this country. That means a comedy show on a comedy network is more responsible for informing a generation of people about what’s important than the mainstream media. Does that mean that the show’s Jon Stewart is a News god with more power than the network anchors? Or do we rely on bloggers – untrained and unaccountable to professional standards - to provide us with the information we need. What does all of this say about our news media and society?

During this semester, we’ll explore some of the fast-moving changes in the media landscape and 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 (yes, there are ethics), news selection, and various related topics including:

- What makes news?
- Who decides?
- What comes from those decisions?
- 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
The Sociology of News, Schudson
The Values and Craft of American Journalism, Clark
UnSpun, Jackson and Jamieson

Newspapers. . .

In this course, you are not responsible for reading a daily newspaper. You are responsible for reading **two** daily newspapers – The New York Times and the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Don't faint – here's how you'll do it and why it's important to success in this course and many others. Ask me in class why we're using the print editions.

For the Times, you must read **the first eight paragraphs of stories** that start on section fronts and **the first eight paragraphs of columns on the editorial pages**. For the Times-Dispatch, you need to **read just the section fronts** – don't worry about the jump (where the story continues) unless you are smitten with the story.

Get the print version of both newspapers and also sign up for Today's Headlines from the New York Times. I'll show you how to do that.

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

Television. . .

You are required to watch 30 minutes of international and national news each night during the course to be prepared to discuss/analyze what you saw. Your international 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. Read them and make new friends.

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 . . .

25 percent – current events quizzes, always weekly, sometimes more

35 percent – tests on books, and other reading assignments

20 percent – final project (more details to follow)

20 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 five points on any quiz if you attend a news event on or off campus and produce a well-written, 750-word article about it. You can also earn the same 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.

The final project...

We'll discuss this in more detail, 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, plus, it just 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.

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 possible 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 vital to this course. I am happy to answer questions and assist your quest for success in News Media and Society. I am available in person, by phone or through email at all reasonable hours – and some unreasonable hours, too.

Tentative class schedule...

This may 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'll also have guest speakers for certain topics.

Week 1: introduction, "UnSpun, value of media, journalism basics, forms of media

Week 2: "UnSpun," journalism basics, source control, "All the President's Men"

Week 3: sources, "Thank you for smoking," "Sociology of News," spin exercises

Week 4: "Elements of Journalism," internal control, news decision-making exercises,

Week 5: "Elements of Journalism," self control, ethics, test #1

Week 6: "Sociology," ethics, self-control corporate control

Week 7: "Elements," corporate control, PBS news wars

Week 8: Advertiser control, corporate control, "Broadcast News (DVD)"

Week 9: "International," Sociology," source control, pseudo-events, test #2

Week 10: You spin – plan a PR campaign, public control

Week 11: public control; "Elements," "Values and Craft"

Week 12: government control – various readings, "Wag the Dog (DVD)"

Week 13: government control, "Values and Craft,"

Week 14: Lingering questions, test #3

