“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, 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: fake photographs, viral videos, innuendo about politicians and celebrities, 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.”

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

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

During this semester, we’ll explore the role of the free press, the foundations of the news industry and the ongoing 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

The Elements of Journalism, Kovach and Rosenstiel
Unbelievable: My front-row seat to the craziest campaign in American history, Tur
Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church, Boston Globe
All the President’s Men, Woodward and Bernstein
Movies: “The Insider,” “All the President’s Men” and “Spotlight”

DAILY MEDIA

You are responsible for reading the online edition of The New York Times daily. Focus on section-front stories and major news events that are likely to appear in multiple news outlets. For convenience, you might find it helpful to sign up for the daily email headline service. 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 New York Times 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. Each week we will also focus on a different news outlet as a way to expand your exposure to today’s news media, exploring changes in the news industry and the variety of ways news is now gathered and disseminated. This will include several comedy-based shows that have become leading news sources in recent years for viewers under 40.

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 also will see that investment pay off on your current events quizzes, which make up 30 percent of your grade.

NOTE WELL

We have a no-phones policy in class, and personal laptops and tablets are allowed only with an accommodation approved by CAPS. Violating this policy gets you removed from class for the day and a zero on any assignments that day.

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
35 percent – tests on books, discussions, movies and other assignments
20 percent – final project (more details to follow)
15 percent – regular class 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.

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?

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. Check with me before embarking on any of those adventures.

FINAL PROJECT

The final project is to produce a media analysis paper that examines how a specific news topic is covered by various print-based and electronic media. We will discuss this in more detail.

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 15 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. Do not use anything from the internet, any media source or textbook 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. I am usually pretty flexible and we can discuss things in person, by phone or through email at all reasonable hours.

WHAT IT WILL TAKE

To be successful in this course, expect to devote an average of 10 to 12 hours each week preparing for class and your participation in class sessions, studying course-related materials and completing course assignments.

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. I will let you know about changes.

Week 1: Introduction, value of media, journalism basics
Week 2: Media diets, analyzing TV news, media differences
Week 3: “Elements” 1-3, news controls
Week 4: “Elements” 4-7, propaganda v. opinion, fact-checking
Week 5: Finish “Elements,” talk shows as news or entertainment?
Week 6: “The Insider,” begin Tur book
Week 7: “Insider” discussion, corporate control Tur 1-4
Week 8: Fall break; Tur 5-8
Week 9: Finish Tur; test 1
Week 10: “All the President’s Men” 1-8
Week 11: “All the Presidents Men” 6-13, incremental journalism
Week 12: Watch “APM,” finish on your own, “Betrayal” 1-3
Week 13: “Betrayal” 4-8
Week 14: Finish “Betrayal,” Thanksgiving break
Week 15: “Spotlight” movie night, test review, test 2