Fake news. Alternative facts. The lying media! Enemy of the People!

If you have paid any attention to the public discourse about journalism over the past three years, you know that journalism is under attack by the elements of the government in ways not seen before in United States history. You also probably know that this has inspired journalists and real media outlets to recommit to the values and craft of journalism and to the role that journalism plays in our common life.

What a time to be studying the role of news media in society.

During this semester we’ll explore the attacks on journalism and the free press in this country, the ongoing changes in the news industry 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 elections, spin, media ethics, news selection, and various related topics including:

- What makes news?
- Who decides?
- How do media influence society?
- How does society influence the media?
- How do you know what’s true or not?
- Media ethics – yes, there are ethics
- 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, news, movies. . .

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.”

News reading. . .

You are responsible for reading the online edition of The New York Times and one other major news source. 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 news reading may seem intimidating at first, but it will become a manageable part of your daily routine. As a bonus, people will think you’ve gotten smarter because you can discuss current events with a degree of intelligence.

And of course, the news readings will help you crush the current event quizzes, which make up 30 percent of your grade.

Television. . .

You need to watch 10-15 minutes of cable or network news each night during the course to be prepared to discuss/analyze what you saw. We’ll talk specifics in class. Are the late-night shows like Colbert, Kimmel and the Daily Show news programs? Good question…

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 or extenuating circumstance is a zero.

Grading . . .

30 percent – current events quizzes, always weekly
35 percent – tests on books, discussions, movies and other assignments
20 percent – final project (more details to follow)
15 percent – regular class 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+: 98-100; A: 93-97; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-71; I am sure that no one will need to know what comes after this, but ask me.

**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-based and electronic media.

**Attendance and 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 possible university sanction.**

**How to do well…**

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

**How to flunk this course…**

Don’t post; 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; get the idea?
Remember…

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

Tentative class schedule…

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