Journalism and Society: Science, Politics and the Environment  
JOUR-UA 9503003 / ENVST-UA 9503002  

Fall 2014; Tuesdays 6:15 p.m. to 9:15 p.m., location TBD  

N/A  

This will be a hands-on course examining the idea of truth and spin in Washington D.C., politics, governance, journalism, science, environment and society. It has two special emphasis points this semester: covering politics, the mid-term election; and environmental reporting, especially climate change. This course will be tailored two different types of students simultaneously. It will help with advancing skills and abilities for journalism majors. It will also serve as an introduction to reporting and Washington for non-journalism majors.  

It will be part overview and lecture on topics central to the course and part active reporting and writing. Spin is the Washington art of taking something and making it seem truth-y even when it’s not quite factual. This is a user’s guide for reporters and non-journalists alike. How to spot and dodge the misleading, the incomplete truth, along with the history and reasoning behind manipulation of facts. Advice from those who practice spin and those who successfully avoid it and what it’s like to be stuck as a victim of spin. To take advantage of the unique Washington location and distinct attitude in the city, students will participate in press conferences and go to public hearings on Capitol Hill in reporting roles and then write news-style articles. Invited guest speakers are from NASA, NOAA, the White House Office of Science Technology and Policy, environmental activist groups, energy lobbyists and Washington media. The intersection of the media with science, politics and economics on the issue of global warming will be a focal point of this course and how it is all spun.  

Students will understand how spin plays out in Washington, what the role of reporters, political operatives, government officials and the public are in the spin cycle. You will learn how not to be spun and maybe how to spin. How to find the truth in a world where it is often hard to find and how to write about it. Students will learn how reporters work, what they are after, how to interact with them. Students will be expected to write a coherent and publishable story. Students will learn about how to use statistics and other data to find the truth. Students will learn how to evaluate risks. They will leave this class as stronger writers and have the ability to ask more incisive questions.  

Non-final writing assignments will be 30 percent of grade. Final writing assignment, pre-final exam, will be 20 percent of grade. In-class participation will be 20 percent. Mid-term exam will be 10 percent. Final exam will be
20 percent and it will be an in-class writing assignment.

Writing will consist of news-style stories, with an emphasis on brevity and clarity. Some will be in-class. Some will not. The first few stories will be under 400 words. The final assignment will be a more complex science/environment and politics story that will be about 1,000 words and be 30 percent of your overall grade. In addition to the final story and in-class final, there are several writing assignments; the lowest grade will be discarded; the rest will count. The in-class final will be 20 percent.

Stories will be edited/critiqued by professor or peers in class and then rewritten for a final version. Final grade for each story will be based half on the unedited version and half on the rewritten version. Assignments should be written in Microsoft Word (.doc files), so I can edit them and send them back with comments. They should be emailed as attachments and not have their name on the paper. In all written submissions, certain standards will apply. Misspelled words result in lowered grades. Grammar will be graded.

Students will also regularly critique one story from the previous week’s news. Class participation grades will include: role playing and breaking news, students’ summarizing each lecture at the end of the lesson. And most importantly, students are expected to be prepared for class and to ask questions and participate in discussions. Participation is a major part of this course. You cannot get an A or get anywhere in journalism without asking questions.

And finally a warning: CLASS WILL BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT A MOMENT’S NOTICE DUE TO BREAKING NEWS. IN FACT, CHANGE IS ENCOURAGED AND TO BE EXPECTED BECAUSE THAT’S THE NEWS.

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

**Grade B:** The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

**Grade C:** The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

**Grade D:** The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

**Grade F:** The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.
NYU Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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<th>Numerical</th>
<th>Letter</th>
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<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>93-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>89-87</td>
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Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades.** Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. Beginning Fall 2014, at all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Program Coordinator for Academics in advance of their missed class. For an excused absence, students must produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Program Coordinator for Academics prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. **It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the**
announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

Late Submission of Work

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.
2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Program Coordinator for Academics can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 10-6, M-F.
3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g: A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.
4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.
5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.
6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.
7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

Students with Disabilities

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

Plagiarism Policy

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially
the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity


Required Text(s)

All the Presidents Men, Bernstein and Woodward; Publisher: Simon & Schuster (1974) ISBN: 671-21781-Xh

Supplemental Texts(s) (not required for purchase)

Students will be required to read the following every day and will be responsible for knowing the contents:
The Washington Post front section and the Tuesday science section.
The Associated Press Big Story website: http://bigstory.ap.org/
The Knight Science Journalism Tracker: http://ksjtracker.mit.edu/
Columbia Journalism Review, The Observatory: http://www.cjr.org/the_observatory/
Real Climate: http://www.realclimate.org/

Supplementals will be added as news changes/breaks during the 14 week session.


Swift Boat Veterans For Truth Ads: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phqOuEhg9yE
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oObCOFiIrDc&feature=relmfu

Fact Check.org on swift boat ads: http://www.factcheck.org/republican-funded_group_attacks_kerrys_war_record.html


Jeffrey Wigand on 60 Minutes: http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7377558n

Stanton, John: A Junkie Named Raymond: https://storify.com/clintonyates/a-junkie-named-raymond


Elizabeth Kolbert, the New Yorker, Annals of Science, Climate of Man part 1, April 25, 2005; http://archives.newyorker.com/?i=2005-04-25#folio=056


Seth Borenstein and Jack Gillum, Oil Drilling Does Not Improve Gas Prices http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/21/us-oil-drilling-study_n_1369356.html


Students are expected to bring their laptops to every class.
Before first class

Assignments to be completed before first class: Explore your new surroundings here in Washington and find something unusual within an 8-block radius of the NYU-DC campus. I just want one or two sentence of what you find and why it seemed unusual to you. I want it emailed to me at sb4314@nyu.edu.

Session 1

[Sept. 2, 2014]

Introductions, Expectations and Overview. We’ll introduce ourselves, talk about what we expect, a bit about Washington and what’s to come.

Opening lecture: Media, politics, the truth and story-telling in Washington and Society. The importance of stories. Stories in journalism. Telling stories. Stories that inform. Stories that spur to action. Stories that entertain. Stories that change. We will discuss the following (this means please be familiar with but you don’t have to read or see them): Hamilton, Jefferson and Callendar. Rachel Jackson. Teapot Dome, Warren Harding. The Jungle. Murrow and McCarthy. Silent Spring. Unsafe at Any Speed. All The President’s Men (this you do have to read). Drudge Report. Inconvenient Truth.

Also: Discussion of the new surroundings assignment and Washington in general.

Assignments: Starting with the third week, every class will include one student presenting a critique of one story from the previous week’s news. The student will provide print-out or links to the story, discuss what worked and didn’t. Why it was or wasn’t news, what seemed truthful. What they would do differently. Professor will give an example of this is session 1.

In the week between session 1 and session 5, read All The President’s Men. In the five weeks between session 1 and session 6, attend a committee hearing on Capitol Hill, observe the proceedings and the press table, the interaction, and read any coverage that may have come from it. Then be prepared to make a short five minute oral presentation, along with a writing assignment about the hearing that is also due session 6.


Session 2

[Sept. 9, 2014]

What is truth? And where do we find it? Reporting. In this class we take what is an entire major or at the very least an entire course and figure it out in one three-hour session. How do we know what is true and what is not? What about incomplete truths? Is a partial truth also a partial lie? Is even the concept of truthiness true Is truth relatives? Are your relatives truthful? If your mother says she loves you, should you check it out (old journalism saying). Who can you trust? How do you trust? Did Washington chop down a cherry tree? Did Columbus sail to prove the world is round? And if your mother says she loved you, check it out.

Also: Students will be assigned their own congressional race to cover on this date. More about this later.

Assignments. For session 3, read Calvin Trillin, The New Yorker: http://www.newyorker.com/archive/1986/02/17/1986_02_17_039_TNY_CARDS_000342687

Session 3

[Sept. 16, 2014]

Writing tricks: How to write quickly. How to write clearly. In class writing exercise; short article writing with information presented. This will be submitted and graded. Professor and other students will critique the writing samples in class. They then must be rewritten and submitted for grade following week.
By session 4, rewrite and resubmit writing assignment.; Read about NASA’s MAVEN mission.

By session 5, visit congressional hearing, turn in writing assignment from hearing.

**The press conference.** How they work. How to get questions in. How to ask the right questions. Mastering the following up. Live note-taking. We will also play a recording of a recent NOAA or NASA press conference and write a story in class on deadline. Also turn in the hearing paper and discuss how it was. There is a good chance we will piggy back on NASA Monday Sept. 22 news conference on Mars mission MAVEN arrival at Mars on Sept. 21 at 10 pm.

By session 6, visit congressional hearing, turn in writing assignment from hearing, read Stanton, A Junkie Named Raymond: [https://storify.com/clintonyates/a-junkie-named-raymond](https://storify.com/clintonyates/a-junkie-named-raymond)

**The bureau.** Just what is the role of a Washington bureau. How do reporters interact with government officials. What are the different roles of reporters and editors. Where does multimedia fit in. Guest speaker will include a bureau management speaker, likely John Stanton from BuzzFeed.

By Session 6; finish All The President’s Men; view Murrow-McCarthy, read chapter 5 of Oreskes and Conway, view 60 minutes Wigand, read ASN on Milloy. If you can view the movie The Insider.

**Case studies part 1: McCarthy, Nixon and Swift Boating.** Lying, truth-twisting, manipulation in politics past and how media handled the issues. We will also be discussing the congressional hearings and the writing assignments. **Case studies part 2: Smoking.** We’ll discuss the concept of doubt and scientific studies. How the idea of putting doubt on trial spawned other spin. Conservatism of scientists. Also, some more in-class writing and editing.


For session 8, study for mid-term

**Mid-term and reporting.** In-class mid-term test: ten questions. No lengthy writing.
Rest of class: Discussion of mid-term election. Students coverage of congressional races. Discussion of breaking news. Be prepared for something else.

**Risk, perceptions and fear.** From terrorism to nuclear power to natural disasters. Cost benefit analyses and the value of your life. How do the professionals analyze risk. How is risk communicated by politicians and officials. How do the media play risk. Which is riskier: terrorism or the flu? Each year more people die of flu than in 40
2014 years of global terrorism. Yet the government spends far more money on terrorism than the flu. Guest speaker on risk communication. This will be done as a game show.

**Session 10**

**Election Day; Road trip (one building away): Working to have you observe (quietly) The Associated Press newsroom on election Day.**

Between now and session 14: Go to another Capitol Hill hearing and write it up

**[Nov. 4, 2014]**

**Session 11**

**Election post-mortem.** Discussion about election results. How to write post-mortems. What does this all mean. How to look ahead.

Advance notice. Between now and session 14: Go to another Capitol Hill hearing, write it up.

**[Nov. 11, 2014]**

**Session 12**

**The spin cycle.** Guest speakers includes energy lobbyist and environmental activist/lobbyist who are friends but often lobby same issue on opposite sides.

For session 13 read: Elizabeth Kolbert, the New Yorker, Annals of Science, Climate of Man part 1, April 25, 2005; [http://archives.newyorker.com/?i=2005-04-25#folio=056](http://archives.newyorker.com/?i=2005-04-25#folio=056)


**Session 13**

**Climate change, journalism, and science.** Climate scientist guest lecturer. Invited via skype: Michael Mann, author of The Hockey Stick and The Climate Wars; key figure in “climategate” and litigant. Victim of the spin cycle. Editing of Climate webinar story in-class. Edited stories to be returned by session 14.

For session 14, go to another capitol hill hearing.

**[Nov. 25, 2014]**

**Session 14**

**Case study: Deepwater Horizons oil spill and crisis communications.** Lecture about country’s biggest oil spill, the challenges covering it from one of the AP’s Polk Award winning team. Contrasts with guest speaker: the former chief spokesman for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The two people _ reporter and pr person _ were both long-time sources at odds during the on-going crisis.
Final story due Sunday before final exam. Between 800 and 1,000 words.

**Session 15**
[Dec. 9, 2014]

**Guns, Ethics and putting it all together.**
As the gun control debate evolves, we’ll examine how guns, violence and the Second Amendment fit with what we’ve learned. Have gun rights advocates learned from the cigarette and climate battles? Then what about ethics. What can you do with this knowledge? What should you do? What shouldn’t you do? How this all fits in everyday life. What can you do with reporting and writing skills and not be a journalist. What it all means.

Final story due Sunday before final exam. Between 800 and 1,000 words.

**Session 16**
(Dec. 16, 2014)

**Final Exam.** It will be an in-class writing assignment. Done live. You will get information. You can conduct email interviews. Writing assignment will be due at end of class.

With a small class size and the nature of journalism, participation is not just encouraged, it is required. Cell phones off, unless required for work. There will be a break halfway through class.

Two Capitol Hill hearings will be attended on your own time. One news conference, a telecon you dial into, will also be required on your own time. The media telecon is TBA and not scheduled in the syllabus.

Work may be put in a blog for the NYU DC center.