# Class details

JOUR-UA9503/ENVST-UA9503 Journalism and Society: Science, Politics, and the Environment  
Fall 2016  
Wednesdays 6:15pm-9:15pm  
Room: B109.

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## Instructor Details

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## Prerequisites

*n/a*

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## Class Description

This will be a hands-on course examining the idea of truth and spin in Washington D.C., politics, governance, journalism, science and society. 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 a biased interpretation of an issue or event 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. Learn how to spot and dodge the misleading factoid and the incomplete truths, along with the history and reasoning behind manipulation of information. Advice from those who practice spin, those who successfully avoid it and what it’s like to be stuck as a victim of spin. This is also an introduction to journalism class and how it interacts with politics, policy and society. Students will learn to write in journalistic style, which is quite different from academic writing. It is writing shorter and simpler, but with a distinct style. And most importantly, students will learn to write in an objective even-handed not subjective manner. Students will write frequently, often in class and on deadline. The class will have a heavy emphasis on the 2016 general election and how to cover it. To take advantage of the unique Washington location, events and distinct attitude in the city, students will participate in press conferences and go to public hearings on Capitol Hill. This class will have a special emphasis on the upcoming 2016 presidential election and on environmental/science issues. Invited guest speakers are from NASA, NOAA, environmental activist groups, energy lobbyists and Washington media. The course also will simulate the real newsroom atmosphere in that plans may change at a moment’s notice because of breaking news. The news cycle will at times determine what is discussed and worked on during class. There will be at least one class that is not on the syllabus and will be _ or at least seem to students to be _ out of the blue. This class
will be a broad taste of journalism for the non-journalist and students will learn how to write
news. Be warned, this syllabus is a flexible guide that will be changed frequently. Like the news,
much of the course of our studies will shift with what’s happening in Washington and the world.

**Desired Outcomes**

- Students will learn how to spot and handle spin and understand how and why it is done in Washington.
- Students will learn to write succinctly, strongly, quickly and objectively in journalistic style. There is a rubric to help on this.
- Students will learn how to get to the essence of truth and ask incisive questions.
- Students will learn the role of reporters in Washington, society, policy, politics and science.

**Assessment Components**

Non-final writing assignments will account for 40 percent of grade. In-class participation _ asking
questions, answering questions, contributing insights _ will be graded and will be 25 percent of your final grade. Mid-term exam will be 10 percent. Final writing assignment, due on last day of class, will be 12.5 percent of grade. Final exam will be 12.5 percent.

Writing will consist of news-style stories, with an emphasis on brevity and clarity. Some will be completed in-class. Some will not. The first few stories will be under 400 words. The final assignment will be a more complex politics or science/environment of 900 to 1100 words that shows original research and use of at least one database and it will be 12.5 percent of your overall grade. In addition to the final story and in-class final, there are several writing assignments. The in-class final will be 12.5 percent and it will be written during class in the three-hour exam time period.

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 due for class are due 15 minutes before class starts: 6 p.m. This gives professor time to print them out.

IMPORTANT: Assignments should be written in Microsoft Word (.doc files), so I can edit them and send them back with comments, **please not pdfs or Google docs**. They should be emailed as attachments and students should NOT put their names on the paper. Instead of name, students should attach the digit part of their nyu email. In all written submissions, spelling and grammar standards will apply and be graded. Students are expected to keep up with daily news events.
Indent each paragraph.

There will be one five-minute oral presentation required. Students will also regularly critique one story from the previous week’s news. Class participation for each session will be graded. Students are expected to be prepared for class, asking questions and participating in discussions.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

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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.

Attendance Policy

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. 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 use the online absence reporting form within 24 hours of their first missed class. Students may be required to produce a doctor’s note with that day’s date, especially if the student has missed any classes already that semester or if exams/presentations/papers occurred in the missed class.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Program Coordinator at least 7 days before the missed date(s) in question. If faculty members do not receive notification of an excused absence, 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.

Final exams must be taken at their designated times. Final exams may not be taken early, and students should not plan to leave Washington, DC before the end of the finals week.

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 Academic Program Coordinator can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 9–5, 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.

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**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see [Study Away and Disability](#).

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**Plagiarism Policy**

As the University's policy on "[Academic Integrity for Students at NYU](#)" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." **Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.**

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:
Religious Observances

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the Washington, DC Academics team in writing via email at least 7 days before being absent for this purpose.

Required Text(s)

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


Supplemental Texts(s) (i.e., not required for purchase)

Students will be required to read daily or weekly:

The Washington Post front section and the Tuesday science section.

The Associated Press Big Story website: http://bigstory.ap.org/

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

Chicago Tribune, four-part series on flame retardants:

Murrow versus McCarthy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YOueFbG4g


Vanity Fair: Shattered Glass:

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

Elizabeth Rosenthal, New York Times:

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


AP Fact Check: http://bigstory.ap.org/article/a0eeb48c6c84aaa9cdad9141fbc09c/ap-fact-check-trumps-distortions-clinton


Charles Hanley, The Associated Press, On Endless Ice:
http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory?id=14302161

James Dellingpole, The Daily Telegraph, Climategate, The Final Nail in Coffin of Anthropogenic


Borenstein & Jack Gillum, Oil Drilling Does Not Improve Gas Prices [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/21/us-oil-drilling-study_n_1369356.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/21/us-oil-drilling-study_n_1369356.html)

**Internet Research Guidelines**

If you are using someone else’s work, you must note it in the story, not in footnote form. Such as “XXX,” Ms. Smith told The Associated Press in October 2013.

**Additional Required Equipment**

Bring laptop to every class, unless told otherwise.

**Session 1 – Wednesday, August 31, 2016: Overview**

**Overview.** Everything is about story telling. 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 spur change. We will discuss the following (this means please be familiar with but you don’t have to read or see them): The Jungle. Silent Spring. Unsafe at Any Speed. All The President’s Men. Drudge Report.
Inconvenient Truth. We even discuss Yankee Doodle Dandy.

DUE TODAY: Before our first session, walk in your new neighborhood. Find something strange, unusual, or telling about anything in the nine-block radius around NYU/DC. Before class, email me a one or two sentence description and then be prepared to discuss it in class.

ASSIGNMENTS: For session 2: Read chapters 2 and 3, Simplicity and Clutter, of Zinsser. In the weeks between session 1 and Oct. 7, 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. IMPORTANT: The House of Representatives leaves on Sept. 30 and they have more hearings. The Senate leaves Oct. 7. Then write a story in journalistic style on it (which we will learn in session 2). The story will be due Oct. 12.

Session 2 – Wednesday, September 07, 2016: Writing like a journalist

Writing like a journalist. Keeping it short and simple. Being objective. Hands-on in class lecture and lots of writing. Writing obituaries as a start.


For Session 3, Sept. 14, write your obituary, read Chapters 6 and 9 Zinsser, “Words” and “The Lead and the Ending.” And see movie “Spotlight” via Netflix or borrow DVD from NYU/DC (See Mark Nakamoto). For Session 4, Sept. 21, read at least the first half of All The President’s Men; view Murrow versus McCarthy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YOlueFsG4g

SPECIAL DATE/TIME/ Session 2B – Sunday, September 11, 2016: 1 p.m. Washington DC scandal tour

WASHINGTON’S POLITICAL & JOURNALISM SCANDALS: How truth wins out over hypocrisy sometimes in Washington when it is exposed. A walking narrated tour of some of Washington’s scandal and journalism (and sometimes both at once) spots _ not all, we only have three hours and will still cover more than three miles walking. It’s a further introduction to Washington with an emphasis on how the story was broken, covered and changed life, policy or politics. Scandals include sex, drugs, money and lying. All that’s missing is the rock and roll. Bring pen/pencil and notebook, metro pass and wear good walking shoes and weather appropriate clothing.

Session 3 – Wednesday, September 14, 2016: More writing; editing; press conferences & interviews

We’ll practice more writing. We’ll talk about writing quickly. How to do interviews. We’ll listen to a taped press conference and write from that. We’ll edit obituaries. Objectivity, editing and more writing skills.
For Session 4, Sept. 21, rewrite your obituary, read at least the first half of All The President’s Men and view Murrow versus McCarthy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YOlueFbG4g

Session 4 – Wednesday, September 21, 2016: COVERING CONGRESS and CAMPAIGNS and TRUTH

Guest lecturer: Donna Cassata, AP Congressional editor. She’ll talk about politics and Congress. Then we’ll talk about truth 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 relative? 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? And if that’s not enough, what is the meaning of life? Did Washington chop down a cherry tree? Did Columbus sail to prove the world is round? And then turning it to politics: Hamilton, Jefferson and Callendar. Rachel Jackson. Teapot Dome, Warren Harding. Joe McCarthy, Richard Nixon, George W. Bush and John Kerry.

For section 5, Write short story in journalistic style off of guest lecture. View Wigand on 60 Minutes, read Americans for Non Smokers Rights on Milloy. If you can view the movie The Insider.

Session 5 – Wednesday, September 28, 2016: CAMPAIGN FINANCE, COVERING WHITE HOUSE

Guest lecture: Jim Kuhnhenn, retired AP reporter, on campaign finance, covering the White House. And how to file a Freedom of Information Act request.

Assignment for Session 6: File a Freedom of Information Act request and cc instructor and write story from guest lecture/

Read: Elizabeth Rosenthal, New York Times:

Chicago Tribune, four-part series on flame retardants:
Session 6 – Wednesday, October 05, 2016: SMOKING & MISINFORMATION

Case study: Smoking. We’ll discuss the concept of doubt and scientific studies. Understand how putting doubt on trial spawned other spin. Discussion of how constrained scientists are in talking about their findings and how that can be used to twist findings. More in-class writing and editing.

For Session 7: Review for short mid-term, Chapters 1-5 of Oreskes, and these:


AP FACT CHECK http://bigstory.ap.org/article/8aef31c43c364ac88975517da0e9c497/ap-fact-check-clinton-misstates-key-facts-email-episode


Seth Borenstein, The Associated Press: Divided America: Global Warming: http://ap.ne.ws/2btMt1S


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

Session 7 – Wednesday, October 12: HOW TO FACT CHECK & MIDTERM; class may start at 6:45 pm

Class may start 30 minutes late because of Yom Kippur holiday. Guest lecture: Cal Woodward, AP writer. He and instructor will talk about how to fact check. Pay close attention. You will use these tools the following week. Then in the last hour short mid-term. It will be open book and just 10 questions.

Session 8 – Wednesday, October 19, 2016: FACT CHECKING PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE LIVE

Class will watch the Presidential debate live from Las Vegas (time may have to change because of this) and we will fact check live as a class.
Session 9 – Wednesday, October 26, 2016; HOW JOURNALISTS COVER ELECTION NIGHT

Guest lecture: Stephen Ohlemacher, who helps run election night vote calling for The Associated Press.

Assignment for Session 10: Write a journalistic style story from guest lecture, come up with topic for final writing project.

Session 10 – Wednesday, November 02, 2016: Pre-election and Risk

Last minute discussion about the election, then we talk risk in a game show format.

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 years of global terrorism. Yet the government spends far more money on terrorism than the flu.

For session 12, Nov. 16, read the following:

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


TWO OPTIONAL NO CREDIT opportunities on election day, Tuesday, Nov. 08, 2016. Details to come.

Session 11 – Wednesday, November 09, 2016: NO CLASS MAKE UP FOR EARLIER SUNDAY TOUR

Session 12 – Wednesday, November 16, 2016; CLIMATE CHANGE

Guest lecture; Mark Eakin, NOAA expert on coral reef. We’ll talk coral deaths, El Nino and climate change. Science and environment doesn’t have sides or opinions, but facts. But is it always presented that way?

Assignment for Nov. 23 (no class, but still due at 6:15 pm): A journalistic story from the guest speaker’s lecture. And for Nov. 30, rough draft of final project: the final project is due Dec. 7.

* We do not meet on November 23 because of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Session 13 – Wednesday, November 30, 2016: Wrapping things up

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. Using reporting and writing skills when you are not a journalist. What it all means.

Your final project is due next week, Session 14, Dec. 7.

Session 14 – Wednesday, December 07, 2016: Dueling Spin (potentially at different location)

The spin cycle. Guest speakers includes energy lobbyist and environmental activist/lobbyist who are friends but often lobby same issue on opposite sides. At an off-campus location and may have to earlier date.

Session 15 (Finals Week) – Wednesday, December 14, 2016

Final Exam. It will be an in-class writing assignment. Done live. You will get information. You can conduct email interviews.

Classroom Etiquette

Given the nature of journalism, participation is not just encouraged, it is required. Cell phones off, unless require for work. Be vocal. Challenge authority. Speak up. Food is permitted in class. There’s a mid-class break.

Required Co-curricular Activities

One Capitol Hill hearings will be attended on your own time. There is a Sunday session early on for a walking journalism and scandal tour. One regular class meeting is cancelled to compensate.
**Suggested Co-curricular Activities**

Not at this time, but some may be assigned later in the semester.

**Your Instructor**