THE MAKING OF POLITICAL NEWS

There are few more overlooked features of democratic life than the basic fact that in order for political news to exist it must get made in and through (the often) contentious relationships between journalists and self-described ‘politicos’ – political operatives or people specializing in the everyday life of politics.

At the heart of these relationships lies a basic contradiction: journalists and politicos operate with conflicting institutional interests, while at the same time having to work together in order to accomplish their basic occupational goals (news outlets must publish stories about politicos and politicos need news outlets to publish stories about them.) Yet, as important as these relational dynamics are in determining what ultimately gets reported as news, they are rarely visible to outsiders to the worlds of journalism and politics. The goal of this class is to open up this black-box of political news-making for analysis so as to equip students to think critically about both the promise and perils the “news” holds for contemporary American political life.

To accomplish this, this course will proceed in three ways. First, we will conduct close readings of ethnographies and (auto)biographies of journalists and politicos in order to expose students to the empirical realities that those actors encounter in their everyday lives. Second, we will situate contemporary news-making in historical context, to make manifest the uniqueness of the current constraints under which journalists and politicos operate. Finally, the course will introduce students to a range of theories that will illuminate the social logics that structure the symbiotic relationships between journalists and politicos. Theories to be discussed include interactionism; ethnomethodology; dramaturgy and other forms of cultural sociology, and field theory.

After completing this class, students will: better appreciate the everyday realities that confront journalists and political actors alike; have a greater capacity for critically reading and assessing political news, and be more informed about the challenges that need to be overcome if news-making is to live up to its democratic promise.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Texts:


All other readings for this class will be available via Canvas. Note – there is a good chance I will make changes to the assigned readings throughout the summer session. I will notify you in advance of any changes.

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. No exceptions will be given.

**Readings:** You are expected to finish each of the assigned readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. Failure to complete the readings in a timely manner will be evident in your contributions (or lack thereof) during our in-class discussions. Don’t think I won’t be able to notice the difference! Also – don't be scared by the number of pages you will be reading for some classes. Those days for which you will have the most to read are also those for which I have assigned the easiest texts (and vice versa).

**Participation:** Since much of the content of this class will be covered through our in-class discussions, in-class participation is something I place a great deal of value on and is thus, something that will count toward your final grade.

**Weekly Quizzes:** After class each Thursday (with the exception of our last class meeting), I will post a question about that week’s material that you will then answer and submit electronically to me by 6:00 PM Sunday. Each answer should be roughly two-to-three double-spaced-pages in length.

**Final Paper:** The final for this class will be an eight- (double-spaced) page paper. I will present the topic to you at least a week in advance. You must submit your paper NO LATER than 9:00 AM on Wednesday, June 27.

**GRADING**

Your grade for this class will be calculated as follows:

- Attendance and Participation: 20 percent
- Quizzes: 40 percent
- Final Paper: 40 percent

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**
Students engaging in any behavior not permitted under the university’s academic honesty policy will be treated in accordance with those guidelines. There will be no exceptions. For those unfamiliar with the university’s policies on academic honesty, they can be found online at: http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/academic-dishonesty.

If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be treated lightly. Fortunately, it is easy to avoid, and if you are the least bit careful about giving credit where credit is due, you will not run into any problems.

**DISABILITY SERVICES**

If you are a student with a documented disability who may require specific accommodations, please contact me (as well as the Resource Office on Disabilities, 203-432-2324), so that we can arrange the necessary accommodations.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**May Be Subject To Change**

**Tuesday, May 29: What Is News?**


**Thursday, May 31: On the Changing Modes of Journalistic Production**


Competing Visions of What it Means to Be “Objective”:


**Case Study One:**


Case Study Two:


Tuesday, June 5: On Being a Journalist


Thursday, June 7: Re-Thinking the Economics of Journalism in a Digital Age


**Tuesday, June 12: “Fake” “News”!**


Thursday, June 14: An Introduction to Everyday Political Life (and its History)


Tuesday, June 19: Thinking Conceptually about What Makes Public Life Unique (Part I)


Thursday, June 21: Thinking Conceptually about What Makes Public Life Unique (Part II)


Tuesday, June 26: On the Centrality of (Mis)Understanding in Political Life


**Thursday, June 28: Is There a Better Way to Make (Political) News?**

