

UH 300-001:

Politics, the News, and You

Spring 2021 | R 2:30-3:30 pm
Classroom: Brewer Hall B100

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross

Office: Brewer Hall 220B

Office Hours:

T: 11:00 am-12:30 pm & 2:30-4:00 pm

R: 11:00 am-12:30 pm & 3:30-4:00 pm

Virtual: M/W/F: 3:00-5:00 pm

And by appointment

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“One believes things because one has been conditioned to believe them”

- Mustapha Mond, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932)

“With school turning out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkerers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word ‘intellectual,’ of course, became the swear word it deserved to be.”

- Captain Beatty, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (1953)

“Last night I had a vision / Of people asking questions / Instead of talking without listening / And admitting that the news was new”

- Frank Turner, “Get It Right” (2018)

Course Description & Rationale:

College newspapers across [time](#), [location](#), and [medium](#) argue students lack it; and [educational resources](#), [professors](#), and [news outlets](#) agree. What brings these diverse groups together? They all think students lack sufficient knowledge of current affairs.

But the problem is larger than these publications suggest. People of all ages, partisan identifications, and education levels lack knowledge of current events. Most Americans cannot pass a quiz concerning basic knowledge of [current affairs](#).

The one group that does barely pass this quiz – college graduates! When asked to determine if a statement is factual or an opinion, however, a majority of [college graduates](#) struggle ([try](#) it for yourself). A critical insight, therefore, is a college education itself is not sufficient to successfully navigate information. Instead, we [find](#) those who are college graduates, digitally savvy, highly politically aware, and trusting of the news media are more likely to distinguish fact from opinion.

Perhaps more fascinating, we find that our political identification interacts with our understanding of the news and information. Both [Republicans and Democrats](#) are more likely to correctly identify factual news as fact, if it aligns with their opinions. Both groups are also more likely to **incorrectly** classify opinions as facts when those opinions match their beliefs. Furthermore, when attributing a factual statement as coming from a [partisan news network](#), we find those that identify with that political party are more likely to classify that statement as a fact. This is alarming, given a [2011 study](#) that finds partisan news networks (e.g. Fox News and MSNBC) decrease our factual knowledge of current events and affairs.

A common theme of dystopian novels – as seen in the quotes from *Fahrenheit 451* and *Brave New World* – is a society that is no longer informed. The society may be conditioned to no longer think for itself, taught to no longer desire intellect, be distracted by entertainment, or more. From our [founders](#) to [recent researchers](#), many think if free government is going to succeed, the people need to be knowledgeable about current events, affairs, and politics. Thus, our purpose this semester is to engage with the media (including [satire](#)) to improve ourselves. Our goal is not to [get it right](#) every time; instead, we will learn about news, politics, and your relationship to these areas so you can participate with both institutions in a more meaningful manner.

Course Goals:

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Describe types of media that exist, different ownership structures, and how these factors influence civic knowledge;
- Explain the difference between mainstream media, narrowcasting, and infotainment, as well as explain where Americans get their news from;
- Comprehend how political values & ideologies shape our understanding of information;
- Identify a trustworthy news source, as well as the process used in its production;
- Clarify how campaigns, members of the government, and other individuals use media to influence political behavior;
- Understand how news can influence public opinion through media effects such as agenda setting, priming, and framing;
- Develop your critical thinking and problem solving skills through the assignments and structure of the course;
- Demonstrate how to explain a current event to a family member, friend, and/or co-worker that is not following the news;
- Acquire a greater sense of your role in society and governing.

Required Texts:

* Iyengar, Shanto. 2019. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. W. W. Norton Company, Inc. New York, NY. ISBN: [9780393664874](#).

Assignments & Grading:

Professionalism	10%
Discussion Leader	30%
Participation	30%
Analysis Paper	15%
Final Project	15%

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100%
B = 80-89%
C = 70-79%
D = 60-69%
F = <60%

Assignment Details:

Honors Policies (Attendance and Credit):

Students missing more than 25% of classes will automatically receive an F regardless of their course grade.

To receive Honors credit, students must earn a B or higher in this course.

Professionalism:

All students begin the semester with 10% of their final grade. To keep this grade, students need to engage in professional behavior within class. Students will lose points from their professionalism grade when they engage in unprofessional behaviors. The professionalism addendum on our Canvas page shares the values of professionals, unprofessional behaviors, and results of these unprofessional behaviors.

I grade students on their professional actions to prepare them to act professionally in their future career.

Discussion Leader:

Three times during the semester, a student will serve as a discussion leader. Being a discussion leader has two components: generation of discussion questions and leading class discussion. During the January 14 class session, all students will sign up for the three class sessions they want to serve as discussion leader.

The first component of being a discussion leader is e-mailing the class (students and professor) a list of five discussion questions that guide us through the readings. **These questions must be sent by 5 pm on the Tuesday prior to your discussion leader session** (e.g., if you are discussion leader on Thursday, January 21, then you e-mail your five discussion questions by 5 pm on Tuesday, January 19). Please see the discussion questions rubric on our Canvas page for how the professor grades this portion of the assignment. Each set of questions is worth 5% of a student's final grade.

The second component of being a discussion leader is leading our class discussion. On the day you are a discussion leader, you will guide the class in examining the reading and your discussion questions. Please see the class discussion rubric on our Canvas page for how the professor grades this portion of the assignment. Each class discussion is worth 5% of a student's final grade.

I assess the ability of students to generate discussion questions to evaluate their ability to engage with the text, foster critical thinking, and produce effective information exchanges. I rate students on their leading class discussion to develop their ability to conduct a group, communicate ideas, facilitate conversation, and be prepared. These abilities prepare students to be effective members and leaders of projects requiring problem-solving skills.

Participation:

The discussion leader provides preparations for a successful class. For the class session to be successful, however, all students need to engage with the preparations. This is why participation is the largest single grade in the course.

Participation includes asking & answering questions, sharing ideas & observations, contributing & actively listening to dialogues, engaging & joining in any in-class activity, and partaking & being involved in any small group work.

I grade participation because it is preparing students to engage in thoughtful exchanges about current affairs. Student participation fosters the development of this necessary skill of active citizenship.

Analysis Paper:

Between February 25 and April 15, students will compose an analysis paper. The analysis paper is a five to seven page double-spaced paper that analyzes the readings of the class session. In addition to the textbook reading, a student needs to read two additional peer-reviewed sources on the topic of the reading. One of these two additional sources can come from the "Further Readings" section at the end of the chapter. The student, on their own, must find at least one of the additional sources.

During the Thursday, February 11 class session, I will provide more information on this assignment. This includes a handout and rubric for this assignment, which composes 15% of a student's final grade.

I assess a writing assignment to determine a student's ability to communicate successfully complex information in a clear, concise, and coherent manner. This is a necessary skillset for many facets of life. Furthermore, this assignment demonstrates the proficiency of a student to find information on their own – through the tools that they have. This skill fosters the ability for lifelong learning.

Final Project:

Instead of a final exam, each student will submit a final project. The final project requires a student to explain a current event for a family member, friend, or co-worker that has not been following the news to any extent. Each student is free to use creativity

to explain the event in a manner fitting their talents. You can write an op-ed, make a PowerPoint or Prezi, produce a video, perform a song, create a painting, record a podcast, or more. This is your time to tap into your creativity, passion, and talents to explain and teach someone else.

I will share more information about the final project during class on Thursday, March 18. This includes a handout and rubric for the final project, which is due on Thursday, April 29. This assignment is worth 15% of a student's final grade.

I am evaluating students on their ability to explain a current event as it brings together multiple goals of this course. In order to complete this project, students will have to find trusted sources of information, evaluate the content for themselves, organize the presentation of that information, and then complete the sharing of their efforts. Thus, this final project is an opportunity to practice engaged citizenship.

Classroom Behavior:

Courtesy and regard for one another should guide classroom behavior. Since this is a course concerning politics, discussion can be passionate at times. During class, we will always treat everyone with respect; especially during debates. This means listening and letting a classmate finish their thought before responding, debating ideas (not people), speaking to each other in a civil tone, and refusing to engage in personal attacks.

During these discussions, I ask you all to respect the ideas of your fellow students. This does not mean, however, that you must agree with these ideas. Political philosophy challenges ideas and ideals; thus, you are welcome to ask your classmates to explain their ideas, to ask them questions you see in their ideals, and so forth.

Students must be attentive during all aspects of class. Students who sleep, read the newspaper, persistently talk with other students, text, use their cell phones, surf the internet, use computers for any other use than note taking or are otherwise inattentive/disruptive in class will be asked to leave the class (as well as lose professionalism points). Students that engage in these behaviors repeatedly are subject to being dismissed from the course, at the professor's request.

Other Policies:

Remote Learning Contingency Plan:

In the event that on-campus meetings are not possible, we will meet on the scheduled dates and time via Microsoft Teams for synchronous virtual class discussion.

Late Work:

I do not accept late work in the course. For the class to function, students must complete their discussion leader assignments on time. Since students have an extensive time window to complete their analysis paper, I do not accept this assignment past its weekly deadline. Finally, students submit the final project during the final exam period. Thus, there is no opportunity to submit this assignment late.

Academic Integrity:

This course does not tolerate academic dishonesty. The professor adheres to and enforces JSU's policy on academic honesty (e.g. cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and sabotage). I address violations of academic integrity in compliance with the procedures laid out in JSU's [student handbook](#) (see page 93).

Accommodations:

I am more than happy to accommodate any student with a documented disability. If you have a disability that affects your work in this class, and for which you require adjustments or accommodations, please see a staff member in [Disability Support Services](#) (139 Daugette Hall // (256) 782.8380 // dss@jsu.edu) so your accommodations can be considered.

Please speak with Disability Support Services (DSS) and the professor, as early in the semester as possible. Students that receive accommodation letters or Individualized Post-Secondary Plans (IPP's) should meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Religious Observances:

If assigned work conflicts with your religious holidays, please tell me in advance so we can make alternative plans. Informing me of religious obligations after the fact, however, does not count as an excuse.

Military-Connected Student Statement:

The Office of Veteran Services serves all active duty, guard, reserve, veteran, and dependent students at JSU. If you have any questions about Veteran Services please contact them at (256) 782-8838, veterans@jsu.edu, or at the physical location in the basement of Daugette Hall.

If you are a student currently serving in the military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserves) with the potential of being called to military service or training during the course of the semester, you are encouraged to contact me no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. I may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

Title IX

JSU does not discriminate on the basis of sex in the educational programs or activities that it operates. JSU is required, by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Department of Education regulations to implement Title IX, not to discriminate in such a manner. This requirement to not discriminate in educational programs and activities extends to employment by the university and to admission thereto. This may include sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and other conduct that is addressed in our ["Sex-Based Harassment and Misconduct Policy."](#)

Anyone with knowledge of this type of conduct is asked to immediately report such incidents to the University Police Department at (256) 782-5050 or the Title IX Coordinator at (256) 782-5769. If an individual wishes to keep the information confidential, the individual speak with a counselor at the Counseling Services office at (256) 782-5475 or a medical provider at JSU's Health Center (256) 782-5310.

For more information about Title IX or to report a concern, please visit the JSU Title IX webpage at <http://www.jsu.edu/titleix>.

Questions About Your Grades:

I am more than happy to take questions about your grade in-person during my office hours/appointments. I, however, do not discuss grades over e-mail or phone due to FERPA regulations and protecting your privacy. See [here](#) for more information.

Tutoring resources at JSU:

All JSU students can access online tutoring assistance through tutor.com. To access tutor.com, log into Canvas and click the tutor.com link in the navigation pane.

For more information about tutor.com contact Debra James at dmjames@jsu.edu. For assistance with writing, The Writing Center is available through online appointments: <http://www.jsu.edu/english/jsu-writing-clinic.html>

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, April 2. There are other important dates regarding withdrawing from the course concerning refunding your tuition and if you receive an academic penalty, which you can find [here](#). If you choose to stop attending the course, it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. If you do not withdraw from the course, the professor will enter the grade you have earned as your final grade.

Student Notifications:

I post all notifications on Canvas via the Announcements section of our course. Be sure to check these for all notifications.

E-mail Policy:

I will do my best to respond to all e-mails within 24 hours. **All e-mails that can be answered via the syllabus will receive the response: “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Alf.**

In order to help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take time to construct a formal e-mail with proper etiquette and language. **E-mails constructed in a manner like, “Yo, Dr B i will b 18 4 clas 2day” or using emojis to represent words/ideas will receive the response, “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Godzilla.**

How to be Successful in this Class:

The best way to be successful is to be prepared. Being prepared means reading all of the assignment carefully and, most likely, rereading the assignment after receiving questions from the discussion leader. By reading the assignments prior to class, you will be able to fully participate and get the most out of our classroom experience.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Take [physical notes](#). Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions being asked, and then the responses to these questions, are the most successful. If you only write down the answer the note is meaningless, as it lacks the context of the question.

After class, review your notes to see if they make sense. By reviewing them sooner than later you will be able to remember things from class to sort out any points of confusion in your notes.

Finally, get together with other students to form study groups (even if these are digital meeting). If you get together periodically and go over notes, you are more likely to have a complete set of notes. You will not only be able to go over your notes together to fill in the gaps, but by discussing with each other the topics of the class you might come to new insights.

Tentative Class Schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Required Reading</u>
1/14	Introduction	NONE
1/21	Image is Everything	pp. 1-20
1/28	The Press & the Democratic Process	pp. 21-52
2/4	The Media Marketplace	pp. 53-93
2/11	Reporters, Official Sources, & the Decline of Adversarial Journalism	pp. 94-114
2/18	New Media, New Forms of Communications	pp. 115-153
2/25	Campaigning through the Media (Day 1)	pp. 154-180
3/4	Campaigning through the Media (Day 2)	pp. 180-203
3/11	Campaigns that Matter	pp. 204-239
3/18	News and Public Opinion (Day 1)	pp. 240-261
4/1	News and Public Opinion (Day 2)	pp. 261-282
4/8	Going Public (Day 1)	pp. 283-307
4/15	Going Public (Day 2)	pp. 307-325
4/22	Evaluating Media Politics	pp. 326-344
4/29	Sharing of final projects	NONE