Brandeis University

Media and Politics

Experiential Learning Practicum Preliminary Syllabus for 2017

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“There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.”
Socrates

“The most important office… is that of private citizen.”
Louis D. Brandeis

“Journalism provides something unique to a culture — independent, reliable, accurate and comprehensive information that citizens require to be free.”
The Elements of Journalism, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel

Note: This is a preliminary description of the syllabus, subject to change. Students should contact me by email if you have questions.

Course description: A solid grasp of media, politics and the relationship between the two is critical for success as good citizens in an age of political mistrust and media manipulation. The Media and Politics Experiential Learning Practicum is designed to strengthen our ability to judge the reliability of news reports, to recognize political attempts to manage the news and to understand the ways in which the interaction between media and politics influences public policy, for good and ill. This is especially important at a time when the new administration in Washington and the national press corps share little in perspective but their mutual suspicion.

Instructor: Eileen McNamara, Director of the Journalism Program and Professor of the Practice of Journalism in the American Studies Program

Course Goals:
• Follow, debate and analyze current events through a diversity of media outlets.
• Develop an understanding of the history of American Journalism from the drafting of the First Amendment to the rise of social media.
• Meet experts on politics and the media from Brandeis and beyond.
• Make connections to help make the most of your time at Brandeis.
• Develop strong writing and speaking skills.
• Identify campus and local community issues and design journalism projects to address them.
Course Materials:
Below is a partial list of materials for the course. Excerpts from books will be assigned, not full books.
• Media outlets from across the political spectrum
  * The Elements of Journalism, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, 2007, Three Rivers Press
  * The Republic of Spin, David Greenberg, 2016, W.W. Norton and Company
• Films: All the Presidents Man (1977), Buying the War (2003), Spotlight (2015)

Guest Speakers: Throughout the course leading journalists and faculty and will join us to discuss the issues in question. Guest lectures fulfill two objectives: Provide expertise essential to exploring issues of media and politics, while allowing students to get to meet campus figures and begin building relationships with them.
Below is a partial list of possible guest lecturers.
- Rosalind E.W. Kabrhel, Lecturer in Legal Studies. Expertise: civil rights and discrimination, issue advocacy, political investigations, wrongful convictions.
- Maura Jane Farrelly, Associate Professor of American Studies. Expertise: American Journalism and Religion in America.
- Dr. Andrew Flagel, Senior Vice President for Students and Enrollment. Teaches public speaking.
- Anita Hill, Professor of Social Policy. Expertise: Social Policy, Law, and Women's and Gender Studies

Expectations: As a two-credit course, class will meet once a week for an 80 minute session and students will be expected to devote sufficient time to complete reading and writing assignments outside the classroom.

Time and location: 5 p.m. Tuesdays at a place to be determined.

Grading criteria: Students can expect an emphasis on class participation and demonstrated engagement with the topics. Assignments will likely include weekly responses on current events, class presentations, a short paper and a group project.