MEJO 537
The Washington Experience
Fall 2020
Monday and Wednesday, 3:00-4:15pm

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The Washington Experience is an intensive, semester long course that will introduce students to political communication and D.C.-based organizations and careers. Political communication spans everything from political journalism and public relations to advertising and marketing. And, it takes place on social media and television, as well as the webpages of new journalism startups and print pages of newspapers. At the end of the course, students will have a deep understanding of political communication across various fields and platforms, as well as contacts who can help them launch their careers.

A hallmark of this course will be closely analyzing contemporary campaigning in an era of social media – which has taken on new importance during the COVID pandemic. Students will encounter a number of readings about effective media use in campaigning, and analytical arguments and research from academics who study media's role in public debate, electoral processes, and democracy more broadly. The class will be oriented around tracking developments on the campaign trail during the 2020 U.S. presidential election and down ballot races across the country, and students will apply practitioner and academic literature to understand real time political processes. In the process, we will create descriptive accounts of campaigns and candidates and their media use, and seek to infer campaign strategies. More broadly, students will come to understand much about media, contemporary culture and social practice, and American politics more broadly.

Accreditation

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here: http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps Students taking this course will be able to think critically, creatively, and independently, learn how to conduct research and evaluate information, write correctly and clearly, and critically evaluate their own work and that of others.

Readings

Readings for the class will be made available on Sakai.

Grades

Participation: 20%

Campaign communication group project: 40%

Final Class Presentations and Project: 40%

You are assigned letter grades for participation and your class presentations and papers.

A   93-100%
A-   90-92%
B+   87-89%
B   83-86%
B-   80-82%
C+   77-79%
C   73-76%
C-   70-72%
D+   67-69%
D   64-66%
F   Below 64%

Course Requirements

Participation

This course is premised on active discussion. You are expected to come to class having completed the readings and ready to discuss them. In addition, you are expected to be following the daily political media of whatever stripe. We will often devote 15-20 minutes of class to discussion of contemporary political issues as they manifest on the campaign trail. You are required to participate in discussion, and be attentive, respectful, and engaged in all class activities.

Guests

It is my goal to have a lot of guest speakers in this class given that we cannot make our trip to Washington D.C. this semester. The challenge is that there is a lot going on in the world right now and people are really, really busy. To that end, I only ask that you come to every guest speaker event prepared with detailed knowledge of who they are, their career, and the importance of their work – in addition to having questions ready. This will also help you stand out to them! More broadly, I am always available to discuss careers, put you in touch with people that I know for informational interviews, etc. Just reach out.

Campaign Communications Analysis

At the start of the semester, you will break into groups to analyze the content of a campaign across media platforms which you will follow until Election Day. Bi-weekly, your group will make a short, 5-7 minute presentation on that candidate's media and communications presence during the following week. Presentations can provide a descriptive analysis of what the candidate's campaign is doing on media (such as how many tweets they sent and what issues they are promoting, their television advertising strategy, campaign digital events, etc.), your group's perception of the strategy behind the campaign's media use, or your interpretations of its media use and strategy based on the insights from the class or other readings.

The best presentations will provide examples of media by the candidates, take campaigning across a number of different media platforms into account, analyze media as a part of electoral strategy more broadly, strive to infer strategy, reveal the contexts within which media use takes shape, show how media efforts affect discourse about the election in the professional press or in media more generally, and provide a critical evaluation of readings in the class.

Presentations can be on campaigns at all levels of office, although races for president, senate, and governorships will often provide much richer material to work through than local races given their comparatively greater resources. You are also free to choose a party or political organization involved in electioneering efforts and track their media around the election as well, such as the conservative groups Club for Growth and the National Rifle Association, or the progressive Center for American Progress and Planned Parenthood, or the Democratic or Republican parties. The goal is to show how, through various forms of media, these organizations work to shape discourse about the election and, ultimately, its outcome.

Final Group Presentations and Papers

Career, Industry, or Organizational Analysis

For your final class project, you will work in groups or solo to do background research on a career, industry, or even an organization in Washington D.C. This will be an *exhaustive* background look at how this career, industry, or organization has developed over time, a comprehensive overview of the services and products they provide in the political space, the career trajectories of its practitioners gleaned through publicly available sources such as *LinkedIn* or even interviews, the competitors in this space and their market shares, and their projected future growth.

This is the perfect opportunity to pick a career that, as a group or on your own, you would like to pursue – such as communications directors, political journalists, social media directors, or campaign managers. Or, to choose an industry that you might want to work in, such as publishing, political consulting, think tanks, or advocacy organizations. Or, to provide an in-depth profile of an organization you might want to work for one day, such as the Republican National Committee, digital consulting firms such as Blue State Digital, or advocacy organizations such as Planned Parenthood.

The analysis should be comprehensive. There are a number of academic, market research, and journalistic resources that will help you provide a detailed history and overview of the career, industry, or organization of your choosing. The best projects will be comprehensive and detailed, and provide histories and overview descriptive statistics on various aspects of the field, in addition to rich description about the type of work that this career, industry, or organization is involved in and its role in Washington D.C. and democracy more broadly. Additional research, such as interviews with practitioners, is welcome but not required. It might be a great way to make contacts for your future job search.

We will discuss your in-progress ideas during class at various points during the semester. During our scheduled final exam time you will present your final project to the class and hand in your final paper.

Resources

Most of the readings for the class are on Sakai. As students, you have access to all of these resources. In addition, students should pay particular attention to sites that bridge social science and journalism. Here are a few of my favorites:

The Washington Post's *The Monkey Cage:*
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/
Vox's The Mischiefs of Faction: http://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction
Axios: https://www.axios.com/
Acronym: https://www.anotheracronym.org/
The Interface: https://www.theverge.com/interface

Ad Transparency Databases:
    Facebook:
    https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active_status=all&ad_type=all&country=US
    Google: https://transparencyreport.google.com/political-ads/region/US

In addition, there are all sorts of amazing podcasts right now that bring social science perspectives to analysis of electoral politics, or that offer insider perspectives on the political process. If you have a favorite, share it!

Special Accommodations:

This class takes place during a global pandemic, and as such it is a difficult time for all of us. My own approach is to provide maximum flexibility with respect to this course, permitting both remote and in-person attendance, but also leeway on assignments should needs arise. All I ask is that you communicate with me what you need, with as much advance notice as possible. Because I believe that in college you get out what you put in, I do not need detailed reasons. I trust you. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at https://accessibility.unc.edu/

Honor Code:

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (http://honor.unc.edu). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help:

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity:

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Course Schedule

Part One: Where Are We at as a Country and How Did We Get Here?

Monday, August 10th

Introduction to the course and each other

Wednesday, August 12th

Discussion of potential guest speakers

Ezra Klein, "Why We're Polarized." Two excerpts found at:

"Why the Media is so Polarized – and How it Polarizes Us?"
https://www.vox.com/2020/1/28/21077888/why-were-polarized-media-book-ezra-news

'Why We're Polarized by Ezra Klein: An Excerpt"
https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/28/books/review/why-were-polarized-by-ezra-klein-an-excerpt.html

Monday, August 17th

Immerse yourself in The 1619 Project:
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"
https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/

Wednesday, August 19th

Mason, Lilliana. "Losing common ground: Social sorting and polarization." In *The Forum*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 47-66. De Gruyter, 2018.

Monday, August 24th

McAdam, Doug. "Be careful what you wish for: The ironic connection between the civil rights struggle and today's divided America." In *Sociological Forum*, vol. 30, pp. 485-508. 2015.

Wednesday, August 26th

Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood. "The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129-146.

Monday, August 31st

Garrett, Kristin N., and Alexa Bankert. "The moral roots of partisan division: How moral conviction heightens affective polarization." *British Journal of Political Science* (2018): 1-20.

Wednesday, September 2nd

Jackson, Sarah J., and Brooke Foucault Welles. "Hijacking# myNYPD: Social media dissent and networked counterpublics." *Journal of Communication* 65, no. 6 (2015): 932-952.

Monday, September 7th

No Classes, Labor Day

Part Two: The Legacy Press and the New Public Sphere

Monday, September 14th

Jonathan Ladd, *Why Americans Hate the News Media,* Chapters 1 and 3 (Available on Sakai)

Wednesday, September 16th

Skim the Reuters 2020 Institute Digital News Report: http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/

Monday, September 21st

Freelon, Deen, et al. "How Black Twitter and other social media communities interact with mainstream news." (2018).

Wednesday, September 23rd

Benkler, Yochai, Robert Faris, Hal Roberts, and Ethan Zuckerman. "Study: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda." *Columbia Journalism Review* 1, no. 4.1 (2017): 7.

Monday, September 28th

Marwick, Alice, and Rebecca Lewis. "Media manipulation and disinformation online." *Data & Society Research Institute* (2017).

Wednesday, September 30th

Freelon, Deen, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith Clark. "Beyond the hashtags:# Ferguson,# Blacklivesmatter, and the online struggle for offline justice." *Center for Media & Social Impact, American University,* (2016). Available at: https://cmsimpact.org/resource/beyond-hashtags-ferguson-blacklivesmatter-online-struggle-offline-justice/

Part Three: Contemporary Campaigns

Monday, October 5th

Kreiss, Daniel, Regina G. Lawrence, and Shannon C. McGregor. "In their own words: Political practitioner accounts of candidates, audiences, affordances, genres, and timing in strategic social media use." *Political communication* 35.1 (2018): 8-31.

Wednesday, October 9th

McGregor, Shannon C. "Taking the Temperature of the Room" How Political Campaigns Use Social Media to Understand and Represent Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* (2020).

Monday, October 12th

University Day, No Class

Wednesday, October 14th

Kreiss, Daniel, and Kirsten Adams. "Navigating the brogrammers and the boys' club: Women's representation and experiences in political technology." *New Media & Society* (2019): 1461444819835573.

Monday, October 19th

Kreiss, D., & McGregor, S. C. (2018). Technology firms shape political communication: The work of Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter, and Google with campaigns during the 2016 US presidential cycle. *Political Communication*, *35*(2), 155-177.

Wednesday, October 21st

Read the Platform Ads, Digital Political Ethics, and Misinformation Policies reports available here: https://citapdigitalpolitics.com/

Part Four: New Electoral Contexts: Disinformation

Monday, October 26th

Read, "The Tactics and Tropes of the Internet Research Agency.' Available online at: https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4326998/ira-report-rebrand_FinalJ14.pdf

Wednesday, October 28th

Freelon, Deen, Michael Bossetta, Chris Wells, Josephine Lukito, Yiping Xia, and Kirsten Adams. "Black Trolls Matter: Racial and Ideological Asymmetries in Social Media Disinformation." *Social Science Computer Review* (2020): 0894439320914853.

Monday, November 2nd

Ognyanova, Katherine, David Lazer, Ronald E. Robertson, and Christo Wilson. "Misinformation in action: Fake news exposure is linked to lower trust in media, higher

trust in government when your side is in power." *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* (2020).

Wednesday, November 4th

No readings. Let's decompress from the election and talk about it.

Part Five: Where Do We Go From Here?

Monday, November 9th

Hart, Roderick P. "The People's Voice During the 2016 Presidential Campaign." *American Behavioral Scientist* (2017): 0002764217707622.

Wednesday, November 11th

Wells, Chris, Katherine J. Cramer, Michael W. Wagner, German Alvarez, Lewis A. Friedland, Dhavan V. Shah, Leticia Bode, Stephanie Edgerly, Itay Gabay, and Charles Franklin. "When We Stop Talking Politics: The Maintenance and Closing of Conversation in Contentious Times." *Journal of Communication* 67, no. 1 (2017): 131-157.

Monday, November 16th

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. "Color-Blind Racism in Pandemic Times." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* (2020): 2332649220941024.

Final presentations and papers during our scheduled final exam time on:
Thursday, November 19th at 4:00pm