University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

MEJO 244 – Fall 2020  
TTH: 03:00 PM-04:15 PM/ Remote on zoom

**TALK POLITICS:**

**Critical Writing & Thinking**

**In Politics, Policy and Journalism**

**Instructor: Ferrel Guillory**Office: Carroll Hall 354

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**Office Hours**: Mon-Tues-Thurs. 11 am-noon

**The Course:**

This course is a hybrid, fueled in part by journalism and in part by policy issues, public opinion, and political dynamics that drive democracy in the United States. It is about how ideas move through election campaigns, government policymaking and society at large; and, it is about how ideas get communicated to the public through the news media. It is also about candidates and campaigns in action from the national political conventions through the General Election of 2020.

As a hybrid, the course will attempt to accomplish three goals:

1. To elevate and broaden your understanding of the interplay of politics and policy, ideas and ideals in a representative democracy.
2. To give you experience in reading, writing and analyzing interpretive journalism.
3. To foster a deeper appreciation for ethics, citizen-leader relationships and the complexities of wielding power, through reading and discussing *All the King’s Men* by Robert Penn Warren.

Throughout the course, you will read, think, talk and write about political and journalistic activities and trends in the United States. As you follow the presidential campaign and the races for U.S. Senator and Governor in North Carolina, you will consider leadership, journalism, and citizen participation. You will look at newspapers and magazines, at radio and television, and at news websites. You will also read speeches and position papers, and you will have a chance to meet people involved in politics and commenting on politics.

This course seeks to give you a deeper appreciation for American democracy, to prepare you for further study in the university and beyond, and to give you awareness and confidence in developing your own creative aspirations for citizenship and leadership.

## **The Class:**

The class is designed to function much like a seminar. It requires active discussion, participation by all students. We will talk about politics every class period. You must follow the news, daily, and you also must come prepared by having read assigned readings. The more you prepare, the more you will develop as a political analyst and a potential thought leader.

Together, we will discuss journalism-related practices, policies and issues that arise from the coverage of state and national news. You are expected to come prepared to offer observations and your insights about what’s going on, and about how events are being covered. Because the course involves talking about politics in real time, you will also get reading assignments drawn from contemporary newspapers, magazines, online publications and think-tanks.

* Because the class has a large enrollment, you will be assigned to study-discussion groups – I call them “book clubs’’ -- that will lead class on assigned days. In mid-semester, book clubs will prepare a TV-type panel or a podcast for presentations to the class.
* You will have two commentary-type writing assignments. These assignments will be due at the moment class begins on the day of the specified deadline. *You shall meet deadlines.* For these assignments, turn in your articles by email to me in a word-document. Please double- or triple-space your copy, with your name and the date clearly on the first page.
* You are encouraged to contribute to *The Daily Tar Heel, Media Hub* and otheron-campus and off-campus publications. Indeed, nothing prepares you for a job-search more than having examples of published work. However, do not turn in previously published articles, or revised versions of papers for another class. You are expected to fulfill assignments with original work.

While breaking news and discussions of current events may impel a shift in schedule, here is a calendar outline for your guidance:

1. Aug. 11-14 – Introduction to class and political landscape, preparation for 2020 conventions and debates.
2. Aug. 17-24 – Watch and discuss Democratic National Convention, Republican National Convention
3. Sept. 1-15– Guest speakers, readings on 2020 election issues, podcasts
4. Sept. 17-29 – Discussion of All the King’s Men. Paper due Oct. 1.
5. Oct. 1-22 – Watch and discuss three presidential debates. Guests and podcasts.
6. Oct. 27 – Pre-election paper due.
7. Nov. 3 – General Election Day. Watch TV coverage.
8. Nov. 5-17– Discussions of exit polls, elections significance and aspirations for the future. Guests and podcasts.
9. Nov. 23 – Final exam period. Post-election paper due.

**Please note:**

I keep an open door, figuratively speaking these days. I am accessible for cell or email. If you need individual assistance and you genuinely want to improve your performance, seek help as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

**Grading:**

This course seeks to help you develop the skills of forming judgments, behaving ethically, providing background and context, speaking cogently and writing analytically. You are expected to complete all writing assignments and to take part in class discussions.

***Let’s be clear: You will not get a passing grade if you fail to complete all writing assignments, or if you commit a serious ethical violation.***

You will receive a numerical grade on each paper, as well as editing and comments. I assign grades with this construction in mind:

\* 94 and above (A) means a fully publishable article

\* 93-90 (A-minus) means almost ready for publishing

\*86-89 (B+) means strong but in need of a few revisions,

\*85-82 (B)

\*82-78 (B-minus)

\*78-70 is a C.

\*Below 70 (D)

\* You get a F for failure to try to think or to complete the assignment.

**Because the class is large, roll will be taken. Because participation is essential, more than three absences will necessarily reduce your grade by three points for each day missed. Do not come to class with a contagious condition. Illness happens, giving you a good reason for an absence. All the more incentive, therefore, not to cut class for no good reason. Keep me informed.**

Because it entails assessing accuracy, quality of writing, background research, quotations from sources -- the accumulation of information and insight -- grading is necessarily subjective. Grades and critiques are designed not to lead you to failure but to help you succeed. Participation includes reading real-time journalism assignments, discussion in “book clubs,’’ and taking part in class.

Here is a general guideline of how your final grade will be calculated:

Class Participation and Podcast………………………………….20 percent

All the King’s Men Reflection…….…………….….………..….30 percent

Pre-Election Campaign Analysis …………………………….…20 percent

Post-Election Analysis ...…………………….…….…………...30 percent

**Honor Code**

All participants in this course are expected to conduct themselves within the guidelines of the University Honor System (http://studentconduct.unc.edu/ ). All academic work should be completed with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. All participants in this course are expected to complete their own work. There is no leniency for cheating. Anyone in this course who has concerns about the Honor Code or the role it plays in this course are encouraged to meet with the instructor, Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Students Charlie Tuggle, or a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

**Diversity**

The University’s policy statements on Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination are outlined at http://policy.sites.unc.edu/files/2013/04/ nondiscrim.pdf. UNC-Chapel Hill 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.

**Harassment**

UNC does not tolerate harassment based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture, disability, or for any other reason. It is also a violation of the Honor Code and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Title IX of the Educational Amendments. If you need assistance with a harassment issue or problem, bring it to the attention of the instructor or The Office of the Dean of Students, dos@unc.edu or (919) 966-4042.

**Accreditation**

The UNC-Chapel Hill Hussman School of Journalism and Media is accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. The ACEJMC outlines professional values and competencies students should demonstrate by graduation. <https://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc>

While no course can cover all aspects of a broad field of study, this course seeks to fulfill several core values and competences defined by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, especially:

* Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, including the right to monitor and criticize power.
* Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
* Think critically, creatively and independently.
* Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.