**MEJO 537**

**The Washington Experience**

Fall 2021

Monday and Wednesday, 2:00-3:15pm, CA 128

**Professor**: Daniel Kreiss

**E-mail**: [dkreiss@email.unc.edu](mailto:dkreiss@email.unc.edu)

**Phone**: 415.238.6924 (mobile)

**Twitter:** @kreissdaniel

**Office**: 377 Carroll Hall

**Office Hours**: by appointment and 3:30-4:30pm, M, W

The Washington Experience is an intensive, semester long course that introduces 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 political communication in an era of social media and technology platforms – which have taken on even greater importance during the COVID pandemic. Students will encounter a number of readings about effective media use in public communications, 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 communicative developments in various policy-related issues – which could range from international affairs, immigration, and the economy to platform regulation and social and cultural issues such as the politicization of the 1619 project and critical race theory. Students will apply practitioner and academic literature to understand real time political processes. In the process, we will create descriptive accounts of policy debates and key actors and their media use, and seek to infer the communication strategies behind the contest over public issues. More broadly, students will come to understand much about media, contemporary culture and social practice, and American politics.

**Accreditation**

The School of Journalism and Media’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%

Policy communication group projects: 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 daily political media of whatever stripe. We will often devote 15-20 minutes of class to discussion of contemporary political issues. 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 in addition to the trip to Washington D.C. this semester. I 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.

*Issue Communications Analysis*

At the start of the semester, you will break into groups to analyze the communications around a public issue of your choosing that you will track throughout the course. Your group will be responsible for making a short, biweekly 5-7 minute presentation on some aspects of the debate over this issue and facilitating class discussion. Presentations should provide a descriptive analysis of the issue, the various actors involved in the debate, and the frames they use to describe the issue, what is to be done about it, and why it is important to address. We are particularly interested in your analysis of the strategy behind the communications approach that policymakers, elected officials, or advocacy organizations take and the platforms they adopt to get their messages out – from political news shows to Facebook. You can also analyze how journalists cover these issues, their development over time, and the evolution of goals, strategies, and tactics from the various actors.

The best presentations will provide examples of policy ideas, frames, and statements, strive to infer strategy, take account of a number of different media platforms, reveal the contexts within which political debate takes shape, show how media efforts affect discourse about the issue, and demonstrate an understanding of the readings in the class.

Presentations can be on all matter of public issues. This can include focusing on local, state, regional, national, or even global policy-making contexts or media – or all of the above. It can include focusing on formal policy-making contexts, or the efforts of social movements to set the public agenda. In short, I am flexible about your approach and focus and encourage you to choose issues, media, and organizations to focus on that your group is most interested in.

*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* analysis of how this career, industry, or organization has developed over time, 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/>

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!

**Laptops**

It pains me to do this, perhaps because I believe we have agency over our psychological desires, but the persistent distraction of social media is just too much to bear. People’s heads buried in their laptops simply diminishes classroom discussion, and is particularly rude during class presentations and guest speakers. Because of this, we all have to digital detox a bit, so no laptops or mobile phones in class. Don’t worry, we will consume plenty of media in class.

**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?**

*Wednesday, August 18th*

Introduction to the course and each other

*Monday, August 23rd*

Discussion of potential guest speakers

Breaking down public debate. Read chapters 1 and 2 of:

Adams, Kirsten, and Daniel Kreiss. *Power in Ideas: A Case-based Argument for Taking Ideas Seriously in Political Communication*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. Available on Sakai.

*Wednesday, August 25th*

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>

## “It Was an Attempted Coup: The Cline Center’s Coup D’état Project Categorizes the January 6, 2021 Assault on the US Capitol” <https://clinecenter.illinois.edu/coup-detat-project-cdp/statement_jan.27.2021>

Watch, *Day of Rage: An In-Depth Look at How a Mob Stormed the Capitol.* <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/politics/100000007606996/capitol-riot-trump-supporters.html>

*Monday, August 30th*

Finkel, Eli J., Christopher A. Bail, Mina Cikara, Peter H. Ditto, Shanto Iyengar, Samara Klar, Lilliana Mason et al. "Political sectarianism in America." *Science* 370, no. 6516 (2020): 533-536.

*Wednesday, September 1st*

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, September 6th*

*Labor Day, No Class*

*Wednesday, September 8th*

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/>

*Monday, September 13th*

Barberá, Pablo. "Social media, echo chambers, and political polarization." *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform* 34 (2020).

*Wednesday, September 15th*

Kreiss, Daniel and Shannon McGregor. “Americans are Too Worried about Political Misinformation.” *Slate*: <https://slate.com/technology/2020/10/misinformation-social-media-election-research-fear.html>

Kreiss, Daniel and Shannon McGregor. “Polarization Isn’t America’s Biggest Problem, or Facebook’s.” *Wired.* <https://www.wired.com/story/polarization-isnt-americas-biggest-problem-or-facebooks/>

**Part Two: The Legacy Press and the New Public Sphere**

*Monday, September 20th*

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

*Wednesday, September 22nd*

*Excerpts from* Nikki Usher’s *News for the Rich, White, and Blue.* Readings to be provided in advance.

*Monday, September 27th*

Hoewe, Jennifer, Cynthia Peacock, Bumsoo Kim, and Matthew Barnidge. "The relationship between fox news use and Americans’ policy preferences regarding refugees and immigrants." *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 21

*Wednesday, September 29th*

Skim the Reuters 2021 Institute Digital News Report: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>

*Monday, October 4th*

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

*Wednesday, October 6th*

Harlow, Summer, and Danielle K. Kilgo. "Protest News and Facebook Engagement: How the Hierarchy of Social Struggle Is Rebuilt on Social Media." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (2021): 10776990211017243.

Clark, Meredith. “The Year Journalism Starts Paying Reparations.” *NiemanLab.* 2020. Onnline at: <https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/12/the-year-journalism-starts-paying-reparations/>

**Part Three: Campaigns and Digital Media**

*Monday, October 11th*

Young, Dannagal G. "The Lincoln Project and the Conservative Aesthetic." *Society* 57, no. 5 (2020): 562-568.

*Wednesday, October 13th*

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.

*Monday, October 18th*

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).

*Wednesday, October 20th*

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.

**Fall Break Trip to DC!!!!!**

*Monday, October 25th*

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 27th*

Klonick, Kate. "The Facebook Oversight Board: Creating an independent institution to adjudicate online free expression." *Yale LJ* 129 (2019): 2418.

**Part Four: New Policy-Making and Electoral Contexts: Disinformation**

*Monday, November 1st*

Kuo, Rachel and Alice Marwick: “Critical disinformation studies: History, power, and politics.” *Harvard Misinformation Review.* Online at: <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/critical-disinformation-studies-history-power-and-politics/>

*Wednesday, November 3rd*

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).

*Monday, November8th*

Hannah, Matthew. "QAnon and the information dark age." *First Monday* (2021). Available online at: <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/10868/10067>

*Wednesday, November 10th*

Freelon, Deen, Alice Marwick, and Daniel Kreiss. "False equivalencies: Online activism from left to right." *Science* 369, no. 6508 (2020): 1197-1201.

**Part Five: Where Do We Go From Here?**

*Monday, November 15th*

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.

*Wednesday, November 17th*

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

*Monday, November 22nd*

Austin, Erica Weintraub, Porismita Borah, and Shawn Domgaard. "COVID-19 disinformation and political engagement among communities of color: The role of media literacy." *The Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* (2021).

*Wednesday, November 24th*

*No class, Thanksgiving holiday*

*Monday, November 29th and Wednesday, December 1st*

Because of the intense time commitment of the DC trip, we will use these two days as flexible project days to discuss and work on your final paper/projects.

Final presentations and papers during our scheduled final exam time on:

Friday, December 10th at 4:00pm