

**MEJO 537**  
**The Washington Experience**  
Fall 2023

Monday and Wednesday, 2:00-3:15pm, CA 143.

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The Washington Experience is an intensive, semester long course that introduces students to careers in journalism and political communication and D.C.-based organizations and people. 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.

This course will be organized into three primary components. In the first, we take a deep dive look into 1) the state of U.S. media and politics and how we got to this moment and 2) the changing nature of U.S. media and journalism. In the second, the class will be broken into groups that either a) are responsible for running political candidates during a mock general election or b) covering those candidates. The third component of the course is its signature trip to Washington D.C. over fall break for three days where students will visit various media and political organizations and meet UNC alumni, as well as learn professionalization skills. This component of the course also includes the development of a professional portfolio.

### **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%

Candidate/journalism group projects: 40%

Professional Portfolio: 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 assignments 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.

### *A Special Note on Guests*

I ask that you come to every guest speaker event/site visit 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!

## Candidate/Journalism Group Projects

In September, the class will break into groups to either a) run candidates for office or b) cover those candidates. The final candidate public presentation and vote will take place on **Wednesday, November 13<sup>th</sup>**, which journalists will cover. This exercise is organized as a campaign simulation – to get as close as realistically possible to the elements of running a candidate for office and covering an election.

### *Candidates*

Beginning **Wednesday, September 13<sup>th</sup>**, we will form groups who will be running candidates over the course of the semester. Think of this as being a political consultant simulation – your responsibility is to steward a candidate through the announcement of their candidacy, craft campaign materials including bio videos, social media content, and press releases, respond to journalistic inquiries, and ultimately present an entire portfolio for a ‘public vote.’

*Candidate Selection:* You are welcome to choose any current or former House or state legislative candidate. Imagine that you are a campaign consultant running a candidate for Congress – where you are fashioning someone’s raw materials (their biography, previous campaign materials, legislative or professional record, etc.) into something new. The best candidates are those you can have the most creativity with (candidates can include everything from current House members to candidates who are not well-established.)

*Party:* Candidates can be from either party. We will approach this a bit artificially as a multi-candidate race.

*District:* On September 13<sup>th</sup>, we will let you know the district you are running in. This will be a real House district. You are responsible for finding data for your House district, including census, economics, industries, partisanship, political history, etc.

*Campaign Materials:* We will outline a weekly schedule for your candidates for the materials you *must* produce. These will include fundraising and communications plans, a campaign website, a biographical statement and video, video scripts and storyboards, social media accounts and routine content, emails, digital advertising, press releases, op-eds, etc. You will also have to be responsive to requests from journalists. You will also be responding to events on the campaign trail *in real time*. This means that outbreaks of war, developments in pandemics, ongoing global events, climate disasters, economic indicators, etc. are all things that you should be responding to on a regular basis. You will also be responding to what the other candidate is producing and what journalists are writing.

### *Journalists*

Students in the journalist group will be responsible for one story and related materials (i.e.: cross-platform promotion) each week about race. Consider yourselves working for different publications in the same region/state/nation. These weekly stories should cover the candidates –

this is a mix of being responsive to what the campaigns themselves are producing while also driving your own coverage agenda based on the candidates, race, district, big issues, and your audience (i.e.: what the public needs to know). Journalists will also produce two longer features over the course of the campaign featuring some aspect of the race (this can include long form articles about the political climate in the district, the national political context, the candidates and their biographies, how an external event such as war is shaping the race, etc.) You should model all of these stories on what the News and Observer, a hyperlocal news site, a partisan media outlet, a substack writer, or a lifestyle site would produce in its coverage of politics. If you tell us your model of what you want to write for, you can have creative freedom to pursue it. Our advice is to write for the job you want.

On **Monday, November 13<sup>th</sup>** a group of alumni from this class will vote on candidates and select one journalist for a 'Pulitzer.'

### **Professional Portfolio**

For your final project, we ask that you put together your materials for job searches. This can include anything you want feedback on, but at a minimum a resume, cover letter, LinkedIn profile, and some set of creative/professional work to submit for consideration. During the final exam time, you will 'introduce' yourselves to the group in a short presentation that sings your praises.

### **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.

There are also 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:**

I treat this course as I would a small graduate course. I expect attendance, participation, and as much effort as you can devote to this course. All I ask is that you communicate with me what you need in any aspect of the course, with as much advance notice as possible. Because I believe that in college you get out what you put in, I do not need 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. 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 Heidi Hennink-Kaminski, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

## **AI**

I urge you all to become familiar with [UNC's Generative AI Usage Guidance resource](#). In keeping with the approach of this class to simulate a real campaign as much as possible, in the context of the campaign assignment you are free to use whatever tool, however you want to use it, without disclosing it. However, you also own the consequences of using whatever tools you choose – mistakes, false information, and even non-disclosure itself can become potential campaign issues in the hands of journalists or rivals (or instructors). Journalists should follow the guidelines of their outlets, ie: disclosure and transparency, if outlets require this. There are no restrictions on AI, or requirements to disclose its use, on any other materials required for the course.

## **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, differential abilities, or an illness. This also applies to group work and group dynamics more broadly.

## **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.

## **One Final Note:**

**This syllabus can (and likely will) change! The dates mapped out here are approximations – from previous experience opportunities come up, people drop in, real world events happen, etc. Because these things are all important parts of the learning experience (and life) this class is designed to be flexible.**

## Course Schedule

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

***Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup>***

Introduction to the course and each other

***Wednesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>***

Discussion of potential guest speakers for the semester and DC-site visits

*Readings:*

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 28<sup>th</sup>***

Kreiss, D., & McGregor, S. C. (2023). A review and provocation: On polarization and platforms. *New Media & Society*, 14614448231161880.

***Wednesday, August 30<sup>th</sup>***

*No class – American Political Science Association Annual Conference*

***Monday, September 4<sup>th</sup>***

*Labor Day, No Class*

***Wednesday, September 6<sup>th</sup>***

*Read through MEJO 537 portfolio materials from Fall 2023. We will discuss these materials.*

***Monday, September 11<sup>th</sup>***

Read the Reuters 2023 Institute Digital News Report:

<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023>

## **Part Two: Electing House Members**

*Additional readings and materials for this portion of the course might be made available with weekly candidate/journalist assignments.*

*Wednesday, September 13<sup>th</sup>*

Formalization of candidate/journalist groups and district reveal

*Monday, September 18<sup>th</sup>*

Read Chapters 1 and 2, *Platforms, Power, and Politics*

*Wednesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>*

Read Chapter 3, *Platforms, Power, and Politics*

*Monday, September 25<sup>th</sup>*

*Wellness Day, No Classes Held*

***Wednesday, September 27<sup>th</sup>***

Read Chapters 6 and 7, *Platforms, Power, and Politics*

***Monday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>***

Read Chapter 10, *Platforms, Power, and Politics*

***Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>***

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

***Monday, October 9<sup>th</sup>***

*Ongoing candidate/journalist assignments*

***Wednesday, October 11<sup>th</sup>***

*Ongoing candidate/journalist assignments*

***Monday, October 15<sup>th</sup>***

DC-Logistics Meeting

***Wednesday, October 18<sup>th</sup>-Friday, October 21<sup>st</sup>***

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

***Monday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>***

*Ongoing candidate/journalist assignments*

***Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup>***

*Ongoing candidate/journalist assignments*

***Monday, October 30<sup>th</sup>***

*Ongoing candidate/journalist assignments*

***Wednesday, November 1<sup>st</sup>***

*Ongoing candidate/journalist assignments*



***Monday, November 6<sup>th</sup>***

*Ongoing candidate/journalist assignments*

***Wednesday, November 8<sup>th</sup>***

*Ongoing candidate/journalist assignments*

***Monday, November 13<sup>th</sup>***

**CANDIDATE VOTING DAY**

***Wednesday, November 15<sup>th</sup>***

Review professional portfolios

***Monday, November 20<sup>th</sup>***

Review professional portfolios

***Wednesday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>***

*No class, Thanksgiving holiday*

***Monday, November 27<sup>th</sup>***

Read selections from, Allen, D. (2023). *Justice by Means of Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

***Wednesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>***

Read selections from, Allen, D. (2023). *Justice by Means of Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

***Monday, December 4<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>***

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

Final presentations and portfolios during our scheduled final exam time on:  
Friday, December 15<sup>th</sup> at 4:00-5:00pm or an otherwise agreed upon time.