

Social Responsibility of the News Media

Journalism 460

Fall Semester, 2007

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Office Hours: Wednesday, 12:00 – 1:45 PM or by appointment

Class: Wednesday, 2:00 – 5:20 pm, ASC 331

In this course students will develop their own well-informed and well-reasoned hypotheses about the roles and responsibilities of the news media in American society today. The course will examine relevant history and theory as a basis for assessing contemporary coverage with special emphasis on the Iraq war and on emerging forms of journalism.

Enrollment is limited, but this class is open to all USC students, graduates as well as undergraduates; those majoring in Communications, Journalism, American Studies and Ethnicity, Public Relations, and Political Science may find it particularly relevant to their fields of study.

The course will be conducted as a seminar. Students will contribute significantly to its content through presentations and short written assignments that will be shared with the class and will form the basis of further work. Attentive participation in class discussions will be essential as the discussions themselves will be examined in some written assignments. The collective inquiry, however, is designed to support individual learning and analysis.

Description:

The social roles and responsibilities of the news media have been redefined in several eras of American history. From the Stamp Act to the rise of the Internet, those moments of redefinition have been shaped by a variety of factors including technology, legal constructs, government policies, business models and journalistic beliefs. Another such period of change is now underway. Evidence of this can be seen in phenomena such as the financial crisis of the print media and the emergence of web-based citizen journalism.

Arguably, the current period of redefinition is closer to its beginnings than its end. This course will offer students some of the knowledge and tools necessary to assess these changes as they unfold and eventually to affect the outcomes.

The course will pursue three trajectories: history, theory and analysis of contemporary coverage. While one trajectory may be emphasized more than others during a given week, all three will develop simultaneously throughout the course. Without attempting a full survey of the history of the U.S. news media, we will examine the contextual factors that influenced some key moments of transformation. The theoretical aspect of the course will focus on the 20th Century ideal of the independent, objective journalist who plays an essential role in a liberal democracy. We will examine formulations of this concept by contemporary journalists and media scholars as well as its legal, political and philosophical underpinnings. The historical background and conceptual frameworks will be applied to assessments of social roles and responsibilities in contemporary news coverage across all platforms. The transformative effects of the Internet and coverage of the Iraq war will be major themes throughout.

The outcomes we are seeking include:

- A familiarity with the contextual factors that have accompanied the major historical reformulations of the roles and responsibilities of the news media in American society.
- A familiarity with the major political, philosophical and journalistic arguments underlying those formulations.
- Knowledge and understanding of the development and application of 20th century journalistic norms as embodied in the ideal of the independent journalist who disseminates objectively derived truth and who plays an essential role in the functioning of a liberal democracy.
- Knowledge and understanding of the major critiques of 20th century journalistic norms and alternative contemporary formulations of the news media's roles and responsibilities, particularly those developing on web-based platforms.
- Develop critical skills in the consumption of news and in particular an ability to assess the extent to which news organizations are fulfilling their social responsibilities.
- Enhanced skills in making brief oral presentations that summarize empirical findings and/or analytical arguments.
- Enhanced skills in writing analytical, researched-based papers.
- Development of one or more hypotheses regarding potential reformulations of the roles and responsibilities of the news media in American society over the next decade.

Assignments

All assignments for the following week will be discussed in class and are subject to change and updating.

Assigned preparatory reading for each class session will be drawn either from the books on the required reading list below or from materials that the instructor will post on the class Blackboard or distribute in class.

Students will undertake three short (750 —1,000 words) written assignments over the course of the semester. These will be brief analytical papers that distill readings and classroom discussions. Rather than draw in new material, these papers will reflect on work already done.

The major written assignment for the course will be a research paper (2,500 —3,000 words) analyzing a body of news coverage in the context of the roles and responsibilities of the news media. This will be an exercise in the critical assessment of news coverage and the application of conceptual frameworks that will develop out of classroom discussions and course readings. Students will propose their target material, which can be contemporary or historical, by mid-semester (Oct. 17) so that there will be ample time to discuss the project with the instructor as it develops. A final draft of the paper will be due on the last day of class (Dec. 5). Each student will make a presentation (10 minutes maximum) on the paper's major findings in class that day and will have the opportunity to make revisions in light of their classmates' comments.

All written assignments are to be delivered by Blackboard to the instructor as MS Word documents.

Over the course of the semester each student will prepare and deliver one five minute briefing summarizing the major points of an assigned reading.

Active participation by all students in class discussions will be a required and essential element of the course. If not volunteered, such participation will be assigned.

The class will conclude with a final exam.

Requirements and Grading:

1. Final exam:	20%
2. Research paper:	35%
3. Short Assignments :	30%
4. Briefings	5%
5. Other classroom participation :	10%

Required Readings:

Books

Kovach, Bill, and Tom Rosenstiel. The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007.

Bennett, Lance W., Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston. When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007.

Overholser, Geneva, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. ed. The Press. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

Gillmor, Dan. We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People. Sebastapol, CA: O'Reilly Media, 2004.
Available online at <http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/wemedia/book/index.csp>

Gillmor, as noted, is available on line. The other three books are available in paperback editions, and a copy of each will be on reserve in the Annenberg Resource Center throughout the semester. The course schedule below includes a tentative schedule of reading assignments which will be updated and confirmed weekly.

Other reading

The [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](http://www.projectforexcellenceinjournalism.org/news_index) provides a concise summary of what is being covered by major news organizations. (http://www.journalism.org/news_index)

Additional required readings will be assigned during class and will either be posted to the Blackboard or will be distributed as hard copies. Most of these readings will be comprised of current news coverage and commentary. We will be analyzing these materials in class discussions and written assignments.

Students are highly encouraged to be active consumers of news during the course of the semester aside from the required materials. Reading, watching and assessing news from multiple sources will greatly enhance performance in classroom discussions, written assignments—and in your lives as informed citizens. A list of Internet news sites will be maintained on the class Blackboard, and students will get instruction on how to access and search the Lexis/Nexis news database.

Students are also encouraged to monitor [Jim Romanesko's daily column](http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45) on the Poynter Institute website (<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45>). It aggregates news and commentary about journalism from a multitude of sources, and just about every controversy regarding current news coverage, including many directly relevant to the coursework, surfaces in Romanesko's postings.

USC- Annenberg School of Journalism Academic Policies

PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own; in journalism, this includes appropriating the reporting of another without clear attribution. The following is the Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the university catalogue: "Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to the school's policy."

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Any students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. The office is located in the Student Union room 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776.

INTERNSHIPS

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the total available semester points for this course.

Course Schedule

August 29: Introduction

Initial discussion of the roles and responsibilities of the news media in American society. Outline of the course and its goals. Overview of the factors that shape the news media's functions and society's expectations of it. We will begin to discuss how roles and responsibilities are changing today.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week.
2. Overholser & Jamieson:
 - a. Chapter 7: What Democracy Requires of the Media pp 120-140
 - b. Chapter 8: The Marketplace of Ideas pp144-156
 - c. Chapter 9: The Agenda Setting Function of the Press pp156-168
3. Kovach and Rosenstiel:
 - a. Introduction pp 1 -8
 - b. Chapter 1: What is Journalism For? pp 9 - 34
4. [Views of Press Values and Performance](#), Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, August 9 2007

September 5: News Media Functions in a Democracy (1)

Overview of some contemporary views of the news media's functions in democratic governance with a focus on its roles in policy debates.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Overholser & Jamieson:
 - a. Chapter 10: The Watchdog Role pp169-188
 - b. Chapter 11: Informing the Public pp 189-203
 - c. Chapter 12: Mobilizing Citizen Participation pp 203-220
3. Kovach and Rosenstiel:
 - a. Chapter 2: Truth: The First and Most Confusing Principle pp: 35-60
 - b. Chapter 6: Monitor Power and Offer Voice to the Voiceless pp 139-161
4. Two Decades of American News Preferences, Michael Robinson, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Parts 1 and 2
<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/574/two-decades-of-american-news-preferences>

September 12: News Media Functions in a Democracy (2)

Continuing discussion of contemporary views of the news media's functions in democratic governance with focus on the watchdog role. By the end of this class we should have a clear understanding of several key constructs for describing the news media's roles and responsibilities which will provide a framework for further discussion.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. First short paper due: News Media Functions in a Democracy. Students will reflect on one of the definitions of the news media's roles (your choice) that emerge from readings in Overholser & Jamieson in light of what the Pew surveys show about audience preferences. To what extent is that function valued by the audience? How well are the media succeeding?
3. Overholser & Jamieson:
 - a. Chapter 2: American Journalism in Historical Perspective pp17-47
 - b. Chapter 14: Public Policy Towards the Press pp 248-262
4. Two Decades of American News Preferences, Michael Robinson, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. [Part 2](#)
<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/574/two-decades-of-american-news-preferences>
5. Walter Lippman, Public Opinion –selections TBD downloadable at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/Lippman/cover.html>

September 19: Periods of Redefinition: The Rise of the Party Press and the Emergence of the Mass Media

A brief overview of two key moments of redefinition in the roles and responsibilities of the news media: the rise of partisan newspapers at the end of the 18th century and the emergence of mass media at the beginning of the 20th. The discussion will include the political, legal, technological and philosophical factors that influenced those transformations.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Overholser & Jamieson:
 - a. Chapter 23: The Legacy of Autonomy in American Journalism pp 372-384
 - b. Chapter 4: Definitions of Journalism pp 66-80
3. Edward R. Murrow, Keynote Speech to the RTDNA Convention, Chicago, Oct. 15, 1958, downloadable at <http://www.rtnda.org/resources/speeches/murrow.shtml>
4. Kovach and Rosenstiel:
 - a. Chapter 3: Who Journalists Work For pp 51-77
5. Gillmor:
 - a. Introduction
 - b. Chapter 1: From Tom Paine to Blogs and Beyond

6. Highly recommended: watch “Good night and Good Luck.” Screenings will be arranged

September 26: The 20th century ideal of independence and objectivity

An examination of the formulation of the news media’s roles and responsibilities that emerged from the era of mass media. In this view the professional journalist is an independent social actor who applies standards of objectivity to play a constitutionally-protected role in democratic governance. We will discuss the origins and applications of this ideal with a focus on Edward R. Murrow as the paragon of the 20th century ideal.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Kovach and Rosenstiel:
 - a. Chapter 7: Journalism as a Public Forum pp 162 – 186
 - b. Chapter 9: Make the News Comprehensive and Proportional pp 207-225
3. Lecture by former Prime Minister Tony Blair at Reuters headquarters, London, June 12, 2007, to be posted to Blackboard
4. Bennett et al.:
 - a. Introduction pp 1-12
 - b. Chapter 1: Press Politics in America pp13-16
5. Selections from PressThink, blog by Jay Rosen, TBD

October 3: Contemporary Critiques of the 20th Century Ideal

In recent years what is sometimes called the “mainstream media” has come under sharp criticism from several directions. Some critics censure major news organizations for failing to live up to the ideals of objectivity and independent and for not fulfilling social responsibilities. Others assail the ideals and institutional roles of journalism as they developed in the 20th century and demand major change. We’ll examine some of the major critiques and relate them to the framework of roles and responsibilities developed in the course thus far.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Gillmor:
 - a. Selections TBD
3. *Amateur Hour: Journalism without Journalists* by Nicholas Lemann, The New Yorker, August 7, 2006, to be posted on Blackboard.

October 10: The Internet and New Forms of Journalism (1)

An overview of the transformative effects of the Internet on the roles and responsibilities of the news media. An examination of new formulations such as civic, citizen, participatory and hyper-local journalism and a discussion of the challenges and opportunities they pose to established journalistic institutions and norms.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Kovach and Rosenstiel:
 - a. Chapter 11: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens
3. *We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information* by Shane Bowman and Chris Willis, American Press Institute, to be posted on Blackboard.
4. Skobe vs. Rosen, debate over the value of blogs in the LA Times, August 2007, to be posted on Blackboard.

October 17: The Internet and New Forms of Journalism (2)

Class visit by Bill Kovach

Bill Kovach, veteran newspaper journalist, co-author of The Elements of Journalism and chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, will be our guest. Though the conversation will be open ended and largely unstructured, our goal will be to learn Mr. Kovach's thoughts on two major points: The major contextual factors affecting journalism today, and how major news organizations are responding. After his visit we will continue our discussion of the transformative effects of the Internet

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Second short paper due: The Kovach Roadmap. In The Elements of Journalism Bill Kovach and his co-author offer prescriptions for how journalists can meet the contemporary challenges of transformation. You will have read much of the book as required reading (and are encouraged to read the rest on your own), and you will have had the opportunity to question Mr. Kovach in person. In this paper you will assess one of his key contentions (your choice) in terms of how well you think his formulation will meet those challenges.
3. Overholser & Jamieson:
 - a. Chapter 15: The First Amendment Tradition and Its Critics
 - b. Chapter 16: Legal Evolution of the Government—News Media Relationship

October 24: The Constitutional View of Roles and Responsibilities

The First Amendment has had many functions in American history. We will examine the way these few words have help shape formulations of the roles and responsibilities of the news media and some of the contemporary debates over the free-press principles.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Attend California First Amendment Coalition Convention sessions TBD
3. Overholser & Jamieson:
 - c. Chapter 1: Presses and Democracies pp 4-16
 - d. Chapter 5: The Minority Press: Pleading Our Own Cause pp 81 91
 - e. Chapter 6: Journalism and Democracy across Borders pp 92--114

October 31: Immigration and Globalization as Contextual Factors

We will look at two of the major contextual factors affecting the U.S. media today: the movement of peoples and the broad array of changes in trade, governance and technology that fall under the rubric of globalization. Discussion of how the media operates in other democracies and of how the particular formulation of the news media's roles and responsibilities in the ethnic or minority media. (Likely class visit by news executive from La Opinon or Univision)

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Overholser & Jamieson:
 - a. Chapter 19: The Military and the Media pp 310-332
3. Bennett et al.
 - a. Chapter 2: The Semi-Independent Press pp 46 -71
 - b. Chapter 3: None Dare Call it Torture pp 72 – 108
 - c. Chapter 4: The News Reality Filter pp 108-130

November 7: Coverage of the Iraq War (1)

News media treatment of the Iraq War and more broadly of the whole of U.S. policy in Southwest Asia and the Middle East will have been topics of discussion throughout the course, but at this point it will become our primary focus. Our intent is not to debate the worthiness of the policies or their implementation, but rather to assess how news organizations have performed their roles and responsibilities in covering these subjects and how contextual factors have conditioned that performance.

We'll begin by discussing how the framework of roles and responsibilities developed thus far in the course applies to the special circumstances of wartime. Also by way of preparation we'll examine some coverage from World War II and the Vietnam War to provide points of contrast.

For next class:

1. [Project for Excellence in Journalism Weekly News Index](#) for the previous week
2. Bennett et al:
 - a. Chapter 5: Managing the News pp131-164
 - b. Chapter 6: Towards an Independent Press pp 165 - 199

November 14: Coverage of the Iraq War (2)

We'll continue our examination of how news organizations have performed in coverage of the Iraq War and related issues.

For next class:

1. Third short paper due: Did the Press Fail?. You will have read critical analyses of news coverage of the Iraq war, particularly in its early stages, in Bennett et al. and other readings. In this paper you will summarize one of the major critiques (your choice) and assess its validity
2. Readings TBD

November 21: Looking to the Future

This class session, which may be rescheduled to accommodate student travel for the Thanksgiving holiday, will be given over largely to a discussion of how new formulations of the roles and responsibilities of the news media are likely to develop in the future.

November 28: Class time for work on research paper

There will be no class session this week and no additional assignment so that students can focus their full attention on the final draft of their research paper. The instructor will be available to comment on outlines and preliminary drafts.

December 5: Student Presentation and Conclusions

During this session students will make a brief (5 to 10 minutes) presentation on the major findings of their research papers, and fellow students will have an opportunity to offer queries, comments and suggestions. We will also take time for some closing thoughts about the course and to discuss the final exam. Revised versions of research papers are due December 10.

December 14: Final Exam 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.