

Government 241: Journalism Public Affairs Internship Seminar

Georgetown University and The Fund for American Studies
Capital Semester, Spring 2010

Location: Car Barn (CBN), Room 201
Georgetown University

Instructor: Richard Benedetto

Class Schedule: Mondays 5:50-8:20PM

Office Hours: Before or after class, or by appointment at a mutually convenient time for student and professor.

Course Overview and Goals:

The role of this class is to help students integrate their internships, lectures, panel discussions and site briefings with the general theory and practice of political journalism in the early 21st Century. Emphasis will be on how the theories and practices are applied in everyday gathering, preparing and presenting of the news of government and politics by the various media. Our studies will be supplemented by a series of field trips to media outlets, the Newseum and the National Press Club.

The course also will examine some of the current legal and ethical issues facing journalists today. We will study the changing environment of news as it relates to new media such as the Internet and what it means for the future direction of the journalism profession.

Weekly sessions will cover topics such as basic research sources, accuracy, ethics, objectivity and media bias, use of unnamed sources, investigative reporting and online writing and reporting. We also will discuss the role of the press secretary, political consultant and pollster.

In addition, a regular segment of our time will be spent looking at how the media are covering the Obama administration, the Congress and the federal bureaucracy.

Students are expected to discuss their internships and share their experiences with their classmates and talk about how they are able or not able to do what they think they should be doing in the jobs they have been assigned. By semester's end, each student should take away a well-defined picture of how political journalism is practiced in Washington, for better and for worse.

About Your Professor:

Richard Benedetto is veteran political reporter with nearly 40 years of experience covering local, state and national government and politics. He recently retired from his post as White House correspondent for USA Today and columnist for Gannett News Service. He has taught this course for the past five semesters. He began teaching at American University in the Fall 2006 semester, and continues teaching there now.

University Press of America published Benedetto's memoir of his long reporting career, "Politicians Are People, Too," in May 2006.

A native of Utica, N.Y., Benedetto began his journalism career with the Buffalo, (N.Y.) Evening News, and held government/politics reporting positions with the Utica (N.Y.) Daily Press and Observer-Dispatch. He also worked in the Albany bureau of Gannett News Service covering state government and politics during the Gov. Hugh Carey administration.

Benedetto is a founding member of USA TODAY joining the newspaper in 1982, prior to its debut. He wrote the newspaper's first Page One cover story. USA Today is now the nation's largest newspaper and celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2007.

In Washington, he covered the administrations of Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. He also covered every presidential election campaign since 1984.

Benedetto is a graduate of Syracuse University and holds an M.A. in Journalism from Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communication. SU awarded him a Doctor of Humane Letters degree in 1992.

Among his numerous journalism awards, Benedetto most values his 1998 Media Award presented by the National Italian American Foundation for projecting a positive image of Italian Americans. In 2009, The Fund For American Studies presented him with its first Outstanding Professor Award.

Required Texts:

1.) Mass Media & American Politics, 8th Edition, Doris Graber, CQ Press, 2009

2.) Politicians Are People, Too, Richard Benedetto, University Press of America, 2006

Selected readings will be distributed and additional required reading assignments will be made on a weekly basis. Other readings in the field will be suggested, but not required. Students are expected to arrive in class on time with reading assignments completed and ready to discuss. Quizzes and exams will focus on readings and class discussions.

Basic Requirements

1.) Read political coverage daily in the Washington Post, New York Times or USA Today – in print or online

2.) Be familiar with specialized newspapers and magazines that cover campaigns and politics such as Roll Call, Politico, The Hill, Politics Magazine

3.) National Journal, Congressional Quarterly, Slate (online), New Republic, National Review and The Weekly Standard

4.) You should also be looking at Websites that focus on politics, including Political Hotline (subscription only), realclearpolitics.com and the like. The major political parties also have websites that provide a lot of information on campaigns, as do the candidates themselves.

5.) For critiques on how the media are covering campaigns and politics, there are journals such as American Journalism Review (<http://www.ajr.org>), Columbia Journalism Review (www.cjrdaily.org) and the Poynter Institute (www.poynter.org). The Jim Romanesko column on Poynter is particularly good. Also, www.journalism.org

6.) The key here is resourcefulness. There is plenty of information out there if you take the time to seek it out and read it.

Students are expected to arrive to class on time with reading assignments completed and ready to discuss. Guest speakers will visit from time to time. We also will take several field trips

Assignments

- 1.) In addition to assigned readings and class discussions, there will be three short quizzes based on readings, some written assignments, a midterm exam, a final exam and a final paper.
- 2.) The final paper will be based on issues involved in the media coverage of government and politics.
- 3.) Topics will be assigned.
- 4.) The weekly readings are important and should be read BEFORE class.

Weekly News Article Discussion

Every week , except for weeks of Career Development lectures or field trips, one student will be responsible for bringing into class one political or media-related news article printed in a newspaper, journal or posted on the Web no earlier five days before our Monday class, which means no earlier than the previous Wednesday. That student will be responsible for leading a 20-minute class discussion about the article he or she selected. We will rotate the assignment in alphabetical order.

Articles must come from a mainstream newspaper, news network, magazine, journal or news Website. When it is your turn to select the article, you must email it or its link to me no later than noon on Saturday before class so that I can forward to the rest of the class for reading before coming to class. Pre-discussion pop quizzes will be given from time to time to determine if you are doing the reading.

Attendance

Since this class meets just once a week, you are required to attend ALL classes unless you have an excused absence. Having to run personal errands or missing class because you are tired are not excused absences. If your internship requires you to work during class time, you must bring in a note from your supervisor saying so. If you are ill, you must bring a note from the medical advisor you consulted.

Grading

Grades will be determined by student attendance and participation in class, quizzes and written assignments, the midterm exam, the final exam, evaluation of the final paper, which will be assigned, and successful completion of the internship.

Grading Breakdown

Class quizzes, assignments and participation* - 35 percent

Midterm Exam – 20 percent

Final Paper – 25 percent

Final Exam – 20 percent

Total - 100 percent

* Students are expected to attend the below mentioned out-of-class events. Lily Pascucci or Professor Benedetto will be there to take attendance.

- State Department Briefing
- Pentagon Tour
- Newseum Visit
- Politico Visit
- USA TODAY Visit
- National Press Club Event

* Students are also required to participate in a service project at the DC Central Kitchen arranged by The Fund for American Studies. Lily will provide you with additional information about this.

Grading Standards

- A 95-100
- A- 90-94
- B+ 86-89
- B 83-85
- B- 80-82
- C+ 75-79
- C 72-74
- C- 70-71
- D 68-69
- F 67 or below

Additional Rules

Continued improvement as the course progresses will be taken into account in grading. Class participation can also boost your grade, especially in borderline cases between one letter grade and another.

Grammar and spelling will be taken into account in grading all written assignments.

Misspelled names - minus 3 points

Misspelled words - minus 2 points (SpellCheck is not foolproof)

Grammatical errors - minus 2 points

Errors of fact - minus 10 points, minimum

Late Assignments

Assignments turned in within 24 hours of the deadline will receive an automatic 10-point (one letter grade) deduction. Assignments turned in after that will not be accepted without an official medical excuse.

Plagiarism

It should go without saying that all work must be your own original effort. Plagiarism will be reported in the proper channels for appropriate action.

Plagiarism consists of such things as taking quotes or other material from another published source without attribution, using notes from another student without permission, having another person conduct your interviews or write your stories. Cases could arise in which you might share notes or documents with fellow students. In these instances, you must disclose in your source list the fact that you did not gather the material yourself. You will be responsible for any errors the shared material contains.

Fabrication

I never expected to have to tell students not to make up stories, quotes, sources and other material. However, based on recent events in the political and media worlds, I feel compelled to note that we deal in facts, not fiction. Fabrications will be dealt with severely.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1: Monday, Jan. 25

Introduction - Course Overview

To be read before First Class: Graber, Chapter 1; Benedetto, Chapter 1.

Getting to know one another; who are we?

Discussion: What is news? What is right and what is wrong with the way we report news of government and politics? How is the news business changing? What are the hottest problems confronting the media at this time? A brief tour of the history of journalism in the American tradition and how it is changing as we speak.

Student-led news article discussion – You all will receive emails on this before the first class.

Reading assignment for Feb. 1: To be assigned in class on Jan. 25

Week 2: Monday, Feb. 1

Guest Speaker

Ethical issues in journalism: Objectivity vs. Opinion, Unnamed sources, Fairness and Balance, Civility, Conflicts of Interest, Advocacy.

Student-led news article discussion

Reading assignment for Feb. 8 – To be assigned in class on Feb. 1

Week 3: Monday, Feb. 8

Career Development Lecture before class

Who Owns the Media?

Final Paper topics assigned

Reading assignment for Feb. 22 - To be assigned in class on Feb. 8

Week 4: Monday, Feb. 15

Washington's Birthday – No Class

Week 5: Monday, Feb. 22

Guest Speaker

Discussion: Polling and media effects on public knowledge, opinion, attitudes and behavior; media manipulation.

Student-led news article discussion

Reading assignment for March 1 - To be assigned in class on Feb. 22

Week 6: Monday, March 1

1:30 p.m.

**Visit to USA Today Washington Bureau, 1100 New York Avenue NW,
Washington Metro Stop: Metro Center.**

Student-led news article discussion (We will do it at USA Today)

Reading assignment for March 5 field trip will be given on March 1.

Week 6 (cont)

**Special Event – Friday, March 5 – National Press Club luncheon, 12:30 p.m.
Guest speaker: former Massachusetts governor and Republican presidential
candidate Mitt Romney.**

**Reading assignment for March 15 – Readings to review for midterm exam
will be assigned by March 5.**

Week 7: Monday, March 8

Spring Break – No Class

Week 8: Monday, March 15

Career Development Lecture

Midterm Exam

Reading assignment for March 22 - To be assigned in class on March 15

Week 9: Monday, March 22

Guest Speaker

Discussion: Media Coverage of The Presidency

Student-led news article discussion

Reading assignment for March 29 - To be assigned in class on March 22.

Week 10: Monday, March 29

Guest speaker

Media Coverage of Congress:

How does it differ from coverage of the White House?

How are the president and Congress getting along? Implications for 2010 elections

Student-led news article discussion

Reading assignment for April 5: To be assigned in class on March 29

Week 11: Monday, April 5

Career Development Lecture

Covering the Federal Bureaucracy

Student-led news article discussion

Reading assignment for April 1: To be assigned in class on April 5

Week 12: Monday, April 12

The Emerging Role of Niche Media

Field Trip: 1:30 p.m. Visit to Politico/Channel 7: 1100 Wilson Blvd. Arlington, Va.

Student-led news article discussion

Reading Assignment: Work on final papers

Week 13: Monday, April 19

FINAL PAPERS DUE IN CLASS

Guest Speaker

The Multiple Roles of the Press Secretary

Student-led news article discussion

Final Assignment – Take-home Final Exam due April 26.

Week 14: Monday, April 26

Field Trip- Visit to Newseum 1 p.m.

Final Exams collected on Field Trip