Journalism syllabus

Spring 2018

Instructor: Bob Woodward
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Assistant: Evelyn Duffy
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Teaching fellow: Chris Haugh
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Class meets: Tuesdays, 2:30-4:20 p.m. Location to be determined.

Office hours: Please contact Evelyn to arrange half-hour appointments in Woodward’s office (location TBD) on Tuesdays. In addition, she will coordinate occasional dinners and pre-class lunches for informal discussion.

Instructor’s Biography

Woodward graduated from Yale in 1965 and is currently an associate editor of The Washington Post where he has worked since 1971. He has shared in two Pulitzer Prizes, first for the Post’s coverage of the Watergate scandal with Carl Bernstein and second as the lead reporter for the Post’s coverage of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. He has authored or coauthored 18 books, all of which have been national non-fiction bestsellers. Twelve of those have been #1 national bestsellers, ranging from All the President’s Men (1974) to Obama’s Wars (2010).

In 2014, Robert Gates, former director of the CIA and Secretary of Defense, said that he wished he’d recruited Woodward into the CIA, saying of Woodward, “He has an extraordinary ability to get otherwise responsible adults to spill [their] guts to him...his ability to get people to talk about stuff they shouldn’t be talking about is just extraordinary and may be unique.” Gates is, of course, representing the government’s position about people telling the truth and talking about what he thinks they shouldn’t address. The class is going to be very much directed at this idea of finding out what the government and others don’t want reporters or the public to know.

(See www.bobwoodward.com under “Full Biography” for more details and background.)
Overview

English 467B is a seminar that examines the practices, methods, ethical dilemmas, and impact of journalism. The main attention will be on in-depth reporting and writing: How others have done it, what works, and what doesn’t. Students will be exposed to best practices in newspaper and magazine articles and books.

The course is designed not just for those considering journalism or writing as a career but for anyone hoping to enter a profession in which collecting, verifying, and conveying information is central to success. That may be almost everyone. Think of the seminar as a class to improve your methods for obtaining, skeptically evaluating and assessing information, and then writing it up for others to read — be it a newspaper article or an annual report for shareholders.

Students will read specific articles and books to discuss in class and analyze in occasional one-page papers.

I will meet or speak by phone with students individually during the term in order to provide evaluations, assistance on reporting, writing or the final project, and, if sought, career guidance. Teaching a formal course continues to be a learning experience for me, and I hope to get strong feedback from the students as the course proceeds on what is valuable to them — the readings, writing assignments, and class discussion. Some assignments may change based on student reactions and feedback, or in response to our volatile news environment.

Evelyn Duffy, my full-time assistant who has worked on my last four books, will help me with the class. Chris Haugh, a third-year Yale Law student and alumni of this course, is my teaching fellow this year. They are both available — Chris in New Haven, Evelyn by email or phone — to help with assignments or logistical issues. Don’t hesitate to contact Evelyn (EvelynMDuffy@gmail.com) or Chris (christopher.haugh@yale.edu) with any questions or ideas for improvement you may have.

Grading

Profile:

Fifteen percent of the final grade will be based on a
2,000-word profile of another person in the seminar (selected at random by me) that each student will be assigned to write.

These profiles should be based in large part on interviews with at least 10 people (parents, relatives, friends, colleagues, and most importantly the person who is the subject of the profile).

Each student will also be required to rewrite his or her profile. Editing is an essential aspect of the reporting process. I expect students to think about what they do well and where they can improve. Think of your first draft as a space to be creative. So be bold. You will have to rewrite anyway.

The profile is due on Tuesday, February 6, 2017, your critique of the profile written about you is due Tuesday, February 13, and your rewrite is due Sunday, February 25. The profile and rewrite will account for 15 percent of the final grade.

Short papers:
Fifteen percent of the final grade will be based on five one-page papers based on the readings. These papers are designed to focus thinking and will be used to stimulate class discussion. They should be kept to one printed page. Conciseness and directness is key.

Because the class meets only once a week, short papers will generally be due several days prior to class. Please consult the syllabus carefully for due dates and utilize the checklist on the final page.

Large reporting project:
Fifty percent of the final grade will be based on a large-scale reporting/writing project. An initial outline drawn from office-hours consultations and a draft of the first 200-250 words must be sent to me and shared with the class via email for constructive criticism and ideas on Friday, March 9. The final paper is due two months later on Wednesday, May 9.

Each student will undertake and complete this reporting/writing project (3,500 to 4,500 words). It should examine and assess a Yale, city, or state government program, a department, local business, or event. Subjects should be cleared with me in advance. There are holes and weaknesses at Yale and in New Haven, or elsewhere in Connecticut. Identify one and dig
deeply into it. Find something in academic life, the administration, a program, or the university’s strategy and focus on it. The key is reporting on the real world – get out of the library and off the internet.

Reporting will include interviewing human sources who witnessed or participated in events, visiting the scene of the story if possible, and researching from original documents, newspapers, books, and the Internet. In the past few years, many students’ papers have later been published in Yale or New Haven publications. See:

Amelia Nierenberg’s *The Perimeter in The New Journal*;
Jake Leffew’s *Keep the Body, Take the Mind in the Yale Daily News*;
Madeleine Colbert’s *Prisons Outside of Prison series in The Politic*;
Eric Stern’s *The Need For Speed in The Yale Daily News*;
Tyler Foggatt’s *How Generous is Generous Enough? in The Yale Daily News*;
Fiona Lowenstein’s *The Edge of Sisterhood in The New Journal*.

**Participation:**

Twenty percent of the final grade will be based on attendance and active seminar participation – vital elements in a discussion course. Each student should read *The Washington Post* online (anyone with an email address ending in .edu may and should create a free online account) and other newspapers, outlets, Facebook, Twitter, or blogs of your choice for at least 30 minutes a day. We will discuss the central news of the day or week – not just the substance of coverage but what you like or don’t like in the various accounts – during each seminar session. I want to learn where you get your news and what you find useful (and what you find less useful).

**Application**

The seminar is open to all sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students (with department approval). The application will consist of two parts. The first should be a personal statement explaining your interest in the course, your Yale class year, any previous writing courses, your main extra-
curricular activities, and any journalism or work experience.

The second part should be a writing sample – an article that has been published anywhere or a paper you have submitted for a class. The application, which is available on the English Department website, should be submitted by noon on December 13. I encourage people who are writers or editors of campus publications to apply, but I also want students who have little or no experience with campus publications to apply as well.

**Course Schedule**

**Note:** This schedule is not written in stone. There may be events that occur during the semester that are important news and lend themselves to short papers, analysis, and discussion during the seminar.

**First class: Tuesday, January 16**

**Class theme: The State of Journalism**

In our first class we will delve into your questions about the state of journalism in 2018. I will attempt to summarize some principles and lessons from 47 years as a reporter and book author. We will also discuss your expectations for the seminar. Please be prepared to contribute to a lively discussion. I suggest we consider some of the following: Where do you get your news, and why? What makes an in-depth reporter? What is it like to report on the current Trump administration? What is “fake news”? Consider the motto of the Washington Post: “Democracy Dies in Darkness.” What does that mean to you?

**Assignment:** Class profile subjects will be assigned by me. They are due **Tuesday, February 6.** You must interview at least 10 people, including the subject.

**Tuesday, January 23**

**Class theme: Watergate**

**To read for today:** All the President’s Men (1974), Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. I will provide a copy to each student in the class. Evelyn will be in touch once the book is available for pickup in the English Department prior to the start of class.

**To watch for today:** Film, All the President’s Men (1976) and film, Spotlight (2015), about the Boston Globe’s expose of sexual abuse by Catholic priests.
To write by Sunday, January 21 (2 days before class): A one page paper on how the Watergate scandal might have been covered if it had occurred today in the internet/online era. Include a frank critique of the reporting methods described in the Watergate book. Email Chris, Evelyn, and myself your Watergate paper by 11:00 p.m., Sunday, January 21.

To discuss in today’s class: We will discuss the Watergate reporting and your papers. We will also address the role of journalism, its strengths, weaknesses, and the impact of the internet in this new era.

Tuesday, January 30 Class theme: The profile

To read for today: How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?, Lillian Ross, New Yorker (course packet given to each student) and Michael Finkel, “The Strange & Curious Tale of the Last True Hermit,” GQ (course packet).

Assignment for today: Find another profile that you think highly of and share it with the rest of the class via email.

To write by January 28: A one page paper on what you took from these profiles. Consider what worked and what didn’t, and how they will influence your approach to writing your profile. Email Chris, Evelyn, and myself your paper by 11:00 p.m., January 28.

To discuss in today’s class: We will discuss these examples and how to win the trust of your subject and other sources as well as how to report and structure a profile.

Tuesday, February 6 Class theme: Emotional truth (guest instructor Elsa Walsh)

Elsa Walsh, my wife and most recently a staff writer for the New Yorker and previously for The Washington Post, will be in New Haven to teach the class.


To write by February 4: Write a one page paper commenting on what you think emotional truth is, and what emotional truth was uncovered in each reading. Please email to me, Chris, Evelyn, and Elsa Walsh (elsa.walsh@gmail.com) by 11:00 p.m. on February
4.

To discuss in today’s class: Please read the assigned readings thoroughly and be prepared for a robust discussion. How does reporting on emotional truth differ from reporting on government, business, culture or politics?

Profiles are due by 11:00 p.m., Tuesday February 6. Please send them via email to me, Chris, Evelyn, and the person you profiled (who will write a critique in response) by 11:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 6.

Tuesday, February 13 Class theme: Covering the administration

Assignment for today: Find two articles reporting on the current Trump administration, one that you consider excellent and one that you consider inadequate or biased. Share links to both with the class, me, Chris and Evelyn via email by 11:00 p.m., on February 11.

To discuss in today’s class: We will discuss your examples and examine what worked well in the excellent stories and what could have been improved in the inadequate and/or biased stories.

To write for today: By 11:00 p.m. on February 13th, send a written critique to the person who wrote your profile, bearing in mind that they will use your constructive criticism when rewriting their profile. Please also copy Chris, Evelyn, and me by 11:00 p.m. on February 13th.

Tuesday, February 20 Class theme: War and Seymour Hersh

To read for today: The My Lai articles, Seymour Hersh, St. Louis Post-Dispatch (relevant pages reprinted in Reporting Vietnam are in the course packet); pp. 50-55 and 206-208 in The Last of the President’s Men, Bob Woodward (in course packet); The Killing of Osama bin Laden, Seymour Hersh, London Review of Books (in course packet); The many problems with Seymour Hersh’s Osama bin Laden conspiracy theory, Max Fisher, Vox (in course packet); Death of Osama bin Laden: Phone call pointed U.S. to compound – and to the ‘pacer’, Bob Woodward, The Washington Post (in course packet).

Optional reading: Lessons in Disaster, Gordon M. Goldstein (Times Books, 2008). This is an important book about the Vietnam failure and a riveting and compelling description of how the
government can get some of its most important business – in this case, war – wrong.

To write for February 18: Write a one page paper addressing the following questions: How did Hersh do? What does it mean to describe journalism as “the best obtainable version of the truth?” What could be true but not obtainable or provable? What is the duty of a journalist to be empirical? Should a journalist be willing to challenge conventional wisdom with assertions that cannot yet be proven? Please email to Chris, Evelyn, and me by 11:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 18.

Profile rewrites are due by 11:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 25. Please email to me, Chris and Evelyn.

Tuesday, February 27 Class theme: Profile rewrites

To discuss in today’s class: We will focus on discussing the profiles and your process of writing and rewriting them.

Tuesday, March 6 Class theme: In-depth reporting


To discuss in today’s class: Why did these in-depth stories work? What were their weaknesses?

Assignment: No later than Friday, March 9 (beginning of spring break), turn in via email an initial outline and a draft of the first 200-250 words of your final project, a report on your progress to date and your plan for finishing. This should incorporate information from the interviews you have conducted and research you have done up to this point as well as indicate what interviews and reporting you have left to do, and what your strategy is for completing the project. It should be based on your consultations with me in my office hours or by phone.
Please also send to the class via email for constructive criticism and ideas. You must turn these in at this point to receive full credit for the final project at the end of the course. Email to me, Chris, and Evelyn by 11:00 p.m. on March 9.

**No class: Tuesday, March 13 and Tuesday, March 20 (spring break)**

**Tuesday, March 27 Class theme: Covering The Supreme Court**

**To read for today:** The Brethren, Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong, (the Nixon Tapes case), p. 1-5 and p. 343-421 (in course packet); Money Unlimited, Jeffrey Toobin, New Yorker (in course packet).

**To discuss in today’s class:** What was the reporting method used by Woodward and Armstrong? Was it appropriate and necessary? How does Toobin’s piece, on the 2010 Citizens United v. FEC Supreme Court decision dealing with campaign expenditures by organizations, differ? Was the court’s decision in Citizens United principled or political? Who covers the Supreme Court well?

**Tuesday, April 3: Interviewing the president**

**To read for today:** The transcript of the April 2, 2016 interview Robert Costa and I did with Donald Trump; “In a Revealing Interview, Trump Predicts a ‘Massive Recession’ but Intends to Eliminate the National Debt in 8 Years,” Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, The Washington Post; the transcript of my July 10, 2010 interview with President Barack Obama and the memo with questions that I sent him in advance of the interview (all in course packet).

**To write for April 1:** Write a one page paper with your observations after reading the interviews. Include a critique of questions asked or not asked. What did you learn about Donald Trump and Barack Obama? Were they telling the truth? Please send your papers to me, Chris, and Evelyn via email by 11:00 p.m. on Sunday, April 1.

**To discuss in today’s class:** We will pick apart the interviews and discuss the conclusions you reached in your papers.

**Tuesday, April 10: Class theme: A Critique of Journalism**

To discuss in today’s class: What are your thoughts on Janet Malcolm? Was she right or wrong? Does this piece change how you view journalism? Should it?

Tuesday, April 17 Class theme: Mistakes

To read for today: Jimmy’s World, Janet Cooke, The Washington Post (in course packet) and the Washington Post Ombudsman’s Report by Bill Green (in course packet); A Rape on Campus, Sabrina Rubin Erdely, Rolling Stone (in course packet) and ’A Rape on Campus’: What went wrong, The Columbia Journalism School report (in course packet).

To discuss in today’s class: We will look at the reporting methods and mistakes in both Rolling Stone’s piece and Jimmy’s World, with an emphasis on both the practical and moral dimensions of mistakes and what you as a journalism student might do to avoid those kinds of mistakes in your own reporting.

Note: If any student prefers not to do the Rolling Stone and CJS portion of the reading assignment, he or she may elect not to. We will be discussing the Rolling Stone piece for the first half hour of the class; any student who likes may arrive 30 minutes after the start of class and join us for the second portion of discussion without impact on their participation grade.

Final class, Tuesday, April 24 Class theme: Interrogate Woodward


To watch for today (available on BobWoodward.com): Video excerpts of Alex Butterfield and Bob Woodward interview; Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein’s 2017 White House Correspondents’ Dinner speeches.

To discuss in today’s class: Please use this class to raise any topic you would like about the course, the criticisms raised about me in the assigned articles or on Wikipedia, your final
projects, The Washington Post, or journalism in general. What are the main challenges for journalists today? Please come prepared to discuss with constructive criticism to improve the class in the future.

**Assignment:** Complete your final projects by **11:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9.**

**Reading Period, April 27-May 3:** I will be available by email or phone throughout this period for questions or consultations about your final project. (As will Chris and Evelyn.)

**Final projects are due Wednesday, May 9.** This is the last day I can accept any written work. Please email Chris, Evelyn, and me your final projects **no later than 11:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9.**
Checklist for the written assignments:

Send all written assignments to me (timeout1014@gmail.com), Chris (christopher.haugh@yale.edu), and Evelyn (EvelynMDuffy@gmail.com) via email by 11:00 p.m. on the date they are due unless otherwise noted.


_____February 4: 1-page paper on emotional truth. Email to Elsa Walsh (elsa.walsh@gmail.com) in addition to me, Chris, and Evelyn.

_____February 6: Profiles are due.

_____February 13: Critiques of the profile done on you are due.

_____February 18: 1-page paper on Seymour Hersh.

_____February 25: Profile rewrites are due.

_____March 9 (beginning of spring break): Initial outline and draft of your final project are due. Email to the rest of the class as well as me, Chris, and Evelyn. You must turn in an outline/initial draft to receive full credit for the final project.

_____April 1: 1-page paper on interviewing the president.

_____May 9: Final projects are due.