

COMM370: Contemporary Political Communication

Dr. Knopf: Office hours – Tu 8-9 & 3:30-5:00, Th 3:30-5:00, M/W/F by apt (Morey 248)
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Course Description & Objectives: An examination of domestic (U.S.) politics in order to better understand how "political reality" is constructed through communication. To that end, the course will examine communication during particular political events, during acts of governance, and particular campaigns, and will discuss how that communication effects and is effected by the media. You will show your understanding of course concepts through answering text questions, leading class discussions, and creating your own political messages.

At the end of the course, you will be in a position to:

- better understand American political messages
- better consider and critique American political messages
- better compose and present political ideas in presentations

This course carries the General Education designator of "SI" – Speaking Intensive. This means you will participate in a semester-long series of oral communication assignments that strengthen understanding of effective oral communication. The assumption is that everyone has already taken an FS course and therefore knows how to create and deliver a speech and is ready to refine their speech skills.

Students who take this class are expected know how to: find, use, and cite evidence to support ideas; decide what ideas to include in a speech; arrange those ideas effectively, while using previews and transitions; relate the ideas directly to the audience; employ language to make ideas meaningful and interesting; construct clear and effective introductions and conclusions; and, use a delivery style that is vigorous, varied, and vivid.

As an SI course, you will engage in two major structured public speaking assignments and one minor presentation, in addition to regular contributions to class discussion, both mandated and voluntary.

There will be emphasis in this course about the place of satire and humor in politics. We will be looking at numerous examples of political humor. In these examples (things like The Daily Show, Colbert Report, The Simpsons, Futurama, The Onion, South Park...) many worldviews will be mocked. No one is safe; please do not take personal offense to any of the examples. If you are easily offended, this may not be the right class for you.

*This class will make extensive use of media presentations – TV shows, films, clips, Web sites. If you are not prepared to come to class regularly and to **actively** watch & listen to these presentations, this may not be the right class for you.*

Texts & Course Materials:

Hahn, D.F. (2003). *Political communication: Rhetoric, government, and citizens, 2nd edition*. State College, PA: Strata Publishing. ISBN 1-891136-08-9

Additional readings will be provided on the course Blackboard. To make sure you never miss an assignment because of technical difficulties, I recommend you download all readings ASAP to your hard drive, to a USB drive, or to a CD-ROM, &/or that you email them to yourself.

Assignments/Grading:

Reading questions =	30 points (2 each)
Satire Presentation=	25 points
Project Censored =	20 points
Weekly Censored update =	5 points (1/3 each)
NIF discussion =	15 points
Satire article lesson/discussion =	5 points

For each and every course assignment you will find a complete description, an outline of what you must do, details on how it will be graded, and an overview of the reasons you have been given the assignment.

The full syllabus and the complete instructions for all course assignments are available on Blackboard. Each is in a PDF file. You are expected to carefully read both documents in their entirety. I also strongly recommend that you save copies of each so if Blackboard is malfunctioning, you still have a copy to reference.

Course Calendar

Due dates will not change without prior discussion and ample notice. No additional work will ever be added to the schedule. [Note: Bb = Blackboard]

Date	Reading Due	Homework Due	Tentative In-Class Activity
Tu, 8/31			<i>Man of the Year</i>
Th, 9/2		Project Censored update (briefly share a news item you found interesting through one of the provided websites; this is done weekly & is strictly oral)	<i>Man of the Year</i>
Tu, 9/7	Ch. 1	Q. 1 or 2 or 3 on p. 11 (post answer to appropriate Bb space in 140 characters)	
Th, 9/9		Project Censored update	<i>TV Land</i> political special
Tu, 9/14	Begin reading satire article	Post a satire link on Bb to share with the class	NO CLASS MEETING (Dr. K @ conference)
Th, 9/16	Begin reading satire article	Project Censored update (post blurb to Bb this week)	NO CLASS MEETING (Dr. K @ conference)
Tu, 9/21	Ch. 2	Q. 1 or 2 on p. 28	<i>Bulworth</i>
Th, 9/23	Ch. 3	Q. 1 or 2 or 3 on p. 50 Project Censored update	<i>Bulworth</i>
Tu, 9/28	Ch. 4	Q. 1 or 2 or 3 on p. 70	
Th, 9/30	Ch. 5	Q. 1 or 2 on p. 90 Project Censored update	
Tu, 10/5	Ch. 6	Q. 1 or 2 on p. 114	<i>Mr. Kang Goes to DC</i>
Th, 10/7		Project Censored update	<i>3-Eyed Fish</i>
Tu, 10/12			FALL RECESS
Th, 10/14	Ch. 7	Q. 1 or 2 on p. 133 Project Censored update	<i>Animal Farm</i>
Tu, 10/19	Ch. 8	Q. 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 on p. 158	Clinton/Palin SNL
Th, 10/21	Ch. 9	Q. 1 or 2 on p. 183 Project Censored update	
Tu, 10/26	Ch. 10	Q. 1 or 2 on p. 211	<i>Wag the Dog</i>
Th, 10/28		Project Censored update	<i>Wag the Dog</i>
Tu, 11/2	Ch. 11	Q. 1 or 2 on p. 230	
Th, 11/4		Project Censored update	
Tu, 11/9	Ch. 12	Q. 1 or 2 on p. 252	
Th, 11/11	NIF book on Bb	Be prepared for NIF discussion Project Censored update	NIF media forum
Tu, 11/16			NO CLASS MEETING (Dr. K @ conference)
Th, 11/18	Stewart trial articles on Bb	Project Censored update	
Tu, 11/23	Ch. 13	Q. 1 or 2 on pp. 260-261	
Th, 11/25			US THANKSGIVING
Tu, 11/30	Ch. 14	Q. 1 or 2 or 3 on p. 284	
Th, 12/2		Project Censored update	
Tu, 12/7	Appendix A	Satire presentation	presentations
Th, 12/9		Satire presentation Project Censored update	presentations
FINALS WEEK	<i>Date & time TBA</i>	Project Censored <u>report</u>	<i>Colbert Christmas</i>

Full assignment descriptions are found in the Assignment Packet.
Additional support materials may be available on Blackboard

Grading

Your final course grade is determined out of 100 possible points:

- Reading questions = 30 points (2 each)
- Satire Presentation = 25 points
- Project Censored = 20 points
- Weekly Censored update = 5 points ($\frac{1}{3}$ each)
- NIF discussion = 15 points
- Satire article lesson/discussion = 5 points

Full assignment descriptions, instructions, explanations, and grading procedures are found in the accompanying "Assignments Packet" available on Blackboard under the Syllabus menu option.

Final Grades are broken down **in this class** as follows:

4.0 = 95-100 points	3.7 = 90-94 points
3.3 = 86-89 points	3.0 = 82-85 points
2.7 = 78-81 points	2.3 = 72-77 points
2.0 = 67-71 points	1.7 = 61-66 points
1.3 = 56-60 points	1.0 = 51-55 points
0.0 = 0-50 points	

Work that meets the minimum requirements of an assignment, is completed on time and displays average involvement with the course content is deserving of a 2.0. A 2.0 is a "satisfactory" grade that indicates the *minimum* has been achieved.

Higher grades are awarded to work that goes above and beyond the minimum standards to produce papers and presentations that reflect superior intellectual effort, excellence in critical analysis and overall creativity in the approach towards any given assignment. A 4.0 is attainable but will require much more than minimal effort.

Challenging a Grade

If you identify an error in grading, I am always willing to admit to a mistake and correct it.

If you want me to *reconsider* a grade, follow these steps:

- Wait at least 24 hours before deciding to seek reconsideration, but no longer than one week.
- Write a 1-2 page explanation of why the grade should be reconsidered identifying what type of change you seek and providing a reasoned argument and evidence in support of that change. The burden of proof in any disagreement over evaluation of student performance rests with the student.
- Resubmit the original work (complete with grade & comments) along with the rationale.
- Allow two weeks for reconsideration. *Be aware that in reconsidering a grade, I may find that it earned a lower grade than it originally received.*
- Accept the final decision. *I will reconsider each assignment only once.*

Due Dates/Late Work

LATE ASSIGNMENTS ARE NOT ACCEPTED. *If you know in advance you will not be in class when an assignment is due, turn it in early. If you wake up sick when something is due, please email it by class time.* All due dates are on the course calendar.

Extra Credit

Extra credit will not be available as an end-of-semester option to make-up-for or replace work that you did not do throughout the semester. There are some chances at bonus points built in to the course. Also you can earn 2 extra points, added to your overall course grade by printing, truthfully filling out the statement at the end of this document, and giving it to Dr. K.

**** Academic Integrity & Dishonesty ****

As stated in the Undergraduate Catalog, the following pledge is made on all academic work done by students at SUNY Potsdam. This pledge is regarded as an indication that you understand and have complied with the requirements and assignments as set forth by the course instructor and as stated in this Academic Honor Code.

"On my honor: I will not give nor receive any inappropriate assistance on any academic work in accordance with the SUNY Potsdam Academic Honor Code and the directions given to me by each course instructor"

To plagiarize is to pass off *ideas or words of someone else* as your own or to use created productions without crediting the source. Any time you incorporate the words and/or ideas of another person into your work, whether from a book, a film, T.V., the Internet, or any other source, without giving their creator the credit, you have plagiarized. It is literary and intellectual theft when you present work that someone else did as being new and original. This includes user-generated content on sites like Wikipedia.

I have a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism. In the event of plagiarism on a an assignment in this course you will A.) Definitely fail the assignment. B.) Possibly fail the course.

Therefore, you will be responsible for authenticating any assignment submitted in this course. I recommend that you keep copies of all drafts of your work, make photocopies and/or careful notes of research materials, save drafts or versions of assignments under individual file names on computer disks, etc. (This is a good practice for any and all classes. Not only will it protect you should you ever be accused of academic dishonesty, but it also protects you in instances of computer malfunctions, stolen bags, spilled coffee, and bad filing systems.)

Other forms of dishonesty or cheating are also not tolerated and will result in a failure of the assignment and/or class. If you think you are engaging in questionable behavior, you probably are, so either don't do it or seek clarification.

Incompletes

Incompletes, or other arrangements for course completion, can be planned only in advance to the semester's end in extreme circumstances with documentation. To receive an incomplete, there must be a serious *emergency* so late in the semester that there isn't time to make up what you miss. Incompletes are not granted because you partied the first 12 weeks of the semester and realized during the last 3 weeks that doing so wasn't such a good idea.

Attendance

There is no set number of “allowable” absences, but regular, timely, attendance is expected. *In-class work and assignments that are missed during an absence cannot be made up*, except in extreme circumstances with documentation.* Reasonable effort at providing advance notice of such instances is expected.

Arriving late and leaving early on a regular basis will be counter-productive because you are likely to miss a lot of information and numerous important announcements.

Consecutive absences of one week or more, **without notice** from you, can result in a failure. In the case of prolonged absences from class of one week or more, you must notify me immediately in order to make arrangements.

Attendance is expected during Finals Week, so make your travel arrangements accordingly.

Classroom Behavior

Technology/Electronic Devices

Technology is permissible, and even welcome, in the classroom given the following:

- Your usage is polite. You are taught from kindergarten on that it is not acceptable to carry on personal conversations with others or to pass notes to people during class time. The same is true for the electronic versions of these (i.e., taking/making cell calls and texting).
- Your usage does not interfere with your performance in class. Multitasking is a fact of modern life, but if you're not good at Facebooking and listening at the same time, don't do it.
- Your usage does not bother your neighbors. Gaming, video viewing, downloading porn, etcetera may not be a distraction to you but may be a distraction to the people sitting near you. Phones and pagers should always be set to silent and should only be answered outside of the classroom.
- You are willing to apply your technology use to course materials in productive ways. Technology can enhance your learning, so if asked to look something up on the Web during class, please do so. A *refusal to use technology in the classroom as part of the class can result in revocation of technology use privileges.*
- You do not secretly record any portion of a class without seeking permission from all involved parties.

Consider your technology use outside of class, too. If contacting me via email, be professional: use an appropriate and informative subject, address me politely, and use good Standard English.

Etiquette

The success of this course is directly related to the sense of community that we develop in the classroom. Participation is essential to this process. I encourage you to share your views and listen to those of others. Debate and discussion are an important part of the learning process. While there will no doubt be disagreements, I expect the members of this community (including myself) to challenge ideas in a manner that reflects respect and recognition of opposing viewpoints without attacking individuals.

* Extreme circumstances are things like college sanctioned events, hospitalization, serious illness, religious observances, or death in the immediate family. They do not include optional events like hangovers, vacations, weddings, births of children other than your own, and various appointments; manageable events like roommate disputes and romantic troubles; or events that can be planned for like funerals, exams and papers in other classes, and work conflicts. Documentation must come from official sources like coaches, doctors, lawyers, or clergy - not notes from your parents or roommates.



I, _____, have read the entire syllabus for COMM370 with Dr. Knopf, have understood it, and agree to observe it for the duration of my enrollment in the course.

[printed name]

If there was any part of the syllabus that I found troubling in any way, I have already spoken to Dr. Knopf about my concerns.

Signature

Date

Assignment Packet

COMM370

Dr. Knopf

This document contains complete descriptions and requirements for each and every assignment in this class, including grading.

Though we will discuss most assignments in class, you are responsible for being familiar with the information contained in these pages. If you do not pay attention to the details provided here, and as a result do not complete an assignment accordingly, your grade will be negatively affected, with only yourself to blame.

That said, I am always more than happy to answer questions, clarify things, or to help in any way I can with your work on these assignments – as long as you take the time to review the information I've provided here first.

Thanks!

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Th, 12/9		Satire presentation Project Censored update	presentations
FINALS WEEK	<i>Date & time TBA</i>	Project Censored <u>report</u>	<i>Colbert Christmas</i>

Full assignment descriptions are found on the following pages.
Additional support materials may be available on Blackboard

Reading Questions

Worth 30 points (2 points each chapter)

Due as indicated on calendar

At the end of each chapter in the Hahn book are a few "For Further Consideration" questions. On each day a chapter is due, you will submit the answer to *any one* of the questions. You can choose the question, but you must do one of them.

Purposes of this Assignment:

- Encourage you to keep up with the assigned reading
- Allow you to apply text content in ways that are more personal &/or more current than general class discussions.
- Explore how social media may limit or enhance political discourse

PLEASE NOTE: This is, in my opinion, one of the liveliest and most provoking political communication textbooks available. The concepts presented are timely, even though the book is, unfortunately, now 2 presidential elections out of date. Therefore, for any of the questions asking about the 2000 election you may choose to update your answer to discuss the 2004 or 2008 elections; if a question asks about the Bushes & Gores you may opt to talk about the Obamas & McCains, or Bushes & Kerrys, etc. (Note: this won't work for all questions, such as #3 in chapter 1.)

Because a lot of our discussions in this class will consider the media's influence on both politics and society, we will use this homework assignment to test and explore how forums like Twitter can shape discourse. Write your answers as if you are Tweeting them. (Check out the format of Tweets on Twitter; you do not need an account.)

- Keep your answer to 140 characters (word processors can do character counts for you).
- You may use up to 2 "Tweets" for an answer if one is insufficient space.
- Use the pound sign (#) to highlight keywords.
- Feel free to include web links.
- Begin your answer by noting the question number to which you are responding (ex. @2). You may choose to respond to classmates' "Tweets" (extra credit is possible)

Grading is as follows:

- Answer submitted by the appropriate class time = 1 pt
- Answer is complete with evidence of thought/reading = 1 pt

These questions are not "hard" but they do require careful attention and thought; occasionally, you might even have to do a little additional reading outside of the text (like of news stories). Therefore,

these chapter questions will replace exams in this class.

Please treat them seriously.

Electronic submission is being used in order to reduce costs for you and for the school, to ensure against lost or forgotten work, to allow you to submit homework on time no matter where you are. Technical difficulties are never an excuse for not completing your homework on time!

Troubleshooting:

- Though not required, it is recommended that you type your answer into a word document, then copy & paste it into the Blackboard form. That way, if Blackboard glitches, you won't lose your work.
- If Blackboard is down or is not working for you when you try to submit your homework, you should email your answer(s) to me directly at knopfcm@potdams.edu
- If you are having Internet or computer problems, you should hand in your homework to me on paper.

Satire Article Lessons

Worth 5 points

Due on "sign-up" basis

Each person will be responsible for "teaching" the rest of the class about some aspect of political satire. Every student will be assigned a unique academic article that examines some element of political satire (its arguments, its effect, etc.) You will sign-up for a particular day on which you will give a brief explanation of what you learned from the article.

Purposes of this Assignment:

- Improve your presentation skills
- Enhance your learning by teaching others
- (Re-)Introduce you to the research behind the course content

If you are considering graduate school, these articles are the kinds of things you will likely read. They are written by professors all over the world (I write stuff like this, too, but not about satire.) They may be very different from what you're used to reading in college. If you haven't read a scholarly article before, here are some tips:

1. If there is an abstract, a short summary at the beginning, read that first. It will give you an idea what the main point is.
2. The first 1-2 sections of every article introduce the topic and provide an overview of other studies that will help us to understand the importance of this particular study.
3. The next section typically explains what the question or problem being studied is and then explains the research methodology used to try to answer it. (It's just like the scientific method you learned in bio, chem, or physics.) If you have an article that uses statistical analysis, don't worry if you don't understand every word. Just skim through it and get the best sense of what's going on that you can.
4. The following section explains the findings of the research – what the researcher discovered. Again, if your article is statistical, this might not make a lot of sense; look for the things that do – like graphs.
5. The final section puts everything into context and provides the "so what" or the point of the article.
6. Do your best. You're graded entirely on presenting on time and making a stab at it. If you need to ask me questions about your article in advance, that's fine.

Your lesson/discussion should be about 10 minutes. Extra credit will be awarded if you can use a Web site, a TV or film clip, a comic, or some other visual aid in your presentation. Your lesson should contain (in no particular order & do not need to be labeled):

- An overview of the campaign or person or media being studied.
- A quick review of some of the most relevant highlights from the article's literature review.
- A short summary or a mention of how the research was conducted, IF you think it is interesting or helpful to the lesson.
- The point, the "so what;" whatever we now know about how political satire works.

As you put together your lesson, think about how lessons in your class's sound and what they contain. Try to incorporate questions, discussions, or even an activity so the rest of the class can get involved. If you can, relate your lesson to other things discussed in class.

Grading is as follows:

Presented on the correct day =	1 pt
Amply prepared =	2 pts
Approximately 10 minutes =	1 pt
Clear & competent delivery =	1 pt
A/V presentation aid =	2 bonus pts

NIF Discussion

Worth 15 points

Due 11/11

"For over 10 years, thousands of Americans have met each year through the National Issues Forums (NIF). These Forums have looked at important public issues. They have encouraged Americans to think about the hard choices we face on major questions like AIDS, racial inequality, and health care" (Patrick Scully, NIF Project Director).

In this class, we will use NIF publications and discussion questions to consider and reconsider the political system. "More and more people feel our politics does not work. They feel no one cares what they think. Many Americans feel that our system needs to be changed, But they do not know how to fix it" (Scully). We will talk about different actions we can take. "These are called 'choices.' Some of these choices have been suggested before. More than once choice could be right. All are presented fairly" (Scully). You will be asked to think through which choices are good or bad and to consider alternatives.

Purposes of this Assignment:

- Provide the opportunity to engage in actual political discourse
- Improve public speaking skills in a discipline-specific and "real-world" format
- Consider not only political concerns but also political remedies
- Demonstrate the potential of citizen involvement in the Political Process

The NIF discussion will coincide with our examination and consideration of the role of the media in American politics. Therefore, we are going use the NIF on "News Media and Society: How to Restore the Public Trust." This reading is available on Blackboard.

To prepare for discussions, read pages 2-29 in the NIF Discussion Guide on "News Media and Society," available on Blackboard.

Consider the three approaches presented. What do you like/dislike, agree/disagree with? Can you think of alternatives that are not presented here? What solution(s) would you propose or support? Be prepared to state a position or pose a question during the "Town Hall" discussion in class. Be familiar enough with the information that you can even question, challenge, or defend the comments other people might make.

Grading is as follows

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| -Remaining attentive, tuned in, and focused during the discussion = | 3 pts |
| -Making at least one contribution to the discussion = | 6 pts |
| (come to class with some notes, thoughts, or opinions about the materials you read jotted down on a piece of paper or an index card.) <i>If you're really active in the discussion, you'll have a chance to earn extra points.</i> | |
| -Showing your fellow citizens (classmates) courtesy; paying attention to what they have to say, and respecting their opinions even if you disagree = | 2 pts |
| -Thoughtful completion of NIF questionnaires administered after discussion = | 4 pts |

Satirical Presentation

Worth 25 points

Presentations begin 12/7

In order to criticize something, we must know a lot about it. The quality of a piece of satire is in its details. I therefore encourage you to satirize something close to you, about which you feel strongly. For example, if you play sports or are in a fraternity/sorority you might want to satirize the school's perception of student athletes or Greek life. If you've lived in suburbia, you might channel that experience to satirize the suburban lifestyle. **Look around for something that really ticks you off and then form a serious, rational argument about you can turn on its head.** If you are having difficulty thinking of a topic, have a look through our readings and your notes, talk to a friend, talk to me, or just turn on *South Park*. Do not copy other satire, but there is no harm in learning from examples. For example, you might find that you can apply Stephen Colbert's methods to a different subject.

Purposes of this Assignment:

- Enhance your understanding of how satire works
- Learn more about an issue that interests you.
- Improve your public speaking and presentation skills in a discipline-specific format

Possible projects, depending on your own style and skills: News story (ala Stewart & Colbert), children's book, comic book, song, web site, speech, film (documentary or fiction), skit... Classes with a similar assignment came up with:

- An irreverent video, "The Wit and Wisdom of Bill O'Reilly."
- A video purportedly from Canada mocking Michael Moore's pledge to leave the US if Bush won re-election in 2004.
- A report from the future on a wacky religion based on the discovery of sacred texts that turn out to be Dr. Seuss books.
- Fake campaign commercials showing candidates who went to elitist colleges presenting an idealized version of the American Dream
- A parody of "Leave it to Beaver" where a distant relative from the future visits the Cleaver family and explores issues such as race, war, gender and global warming
- A children's book about "No Child Left Behind"

Along with the satire itself, you will turn in a short paper that addresses the following:

- a) the target of your satire (What problem will you address?)
- b) the earnest argument you wanted to make (What is your real opinion on this issue?)
- c) the satirical argument you made (What satirical or humorous "mask" did you use?)
- d) the reason you chose a particular medium and how that shaped your arguments (website, cartoon, fiction, prose [e.g. newspaper editorial, magazine column, etc.], photography, film, audio recording [music and/or vocal]), etc. How will your choice of medium dictate your rhetorical strategies?)
- e) the authorial persona you used in your satire (For example, if you wrote a story, what was the narrator like? Or, if you wrote a newspaper editorial, what personality did the author have - a right-wing pundit like Colbert, or an absurd leftist perspective?)
- f) the intended audience of your satire (who would "get it" and who wouldn't?)
- g) the research you needed to do about the subject

(The purpose of this paper is to help guide you through all the necessary steps of creating satire. Also, it makes the workload of the project more equitable because regardless of what medium each person chooses, everyone must think through the same number of issues in creating the final product.)

Grading will be as follows:

Satire	Clarity/Unity	5 pts
	Ingenuity/Creativity	5 pts
	Presentation/Performance	5 pts
Explanatory Paper	Grammatically correct	5 pts
	Justified with course content/lessons learned	5 pts

Clarity/Unity: Your satire must target a specific problem/vice/corruption/etc. and address an identifiable audience.

Ingenuity/Creativity: How well you integrated your satirical critique.

Presentation: You should rehearse your presentation to the class and demonstrate all the characteristics of a good public address.

Project Censored

Worth 20 points (plus 5 more for weekly updates)

Report due during Finals Week

Founded by Carl Jensen in 1976, Project Censored is a media research program that conducts research on important national news stories that are underreported, ignored, misrepresented, or censored by the US corporate media. Each year, Project Censored publishes a ranking of the top 25 most censored nationally important news stories in the yearbook, *Censored: Media Democracy in Action*, which is released in September. Recent Censored books have been published in Spanish, Italian and Arabic. As we will discuss throughout the semester, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping what Americans know about, pay attention, and deem important or worthy. For that reason, we will participate in Project Censored.

Students in class will search independent and foreign news sources for important news stories not covered in the US corporate media. Stories are reviewed in class and prioritized for importance to the American people. Students research the prioritized news stories for coverage in the US corporate media using the following databases (if available) Lexis-Nexis, Proquest, Google, and Factiva. News stories not covered by US corporate media are then vetted by campus faculty or community experts for accuracy and credibility. Nominations will be posted by the faculty affiliates on the Project Censored interactive website for comment and review prior to the final vote. **The names of all students and faculty participating would be listed in the acknowledgments of the annual yearbook. Personal attributions for those individuals whose stories make the final list will be listed with the story in the text.** The top 10-20 most important news stories identified by the affiliate class each semester will be permanently posted on the Project Censored interactive website and will be available for open comment and discussion through the worldwide web.

Purposes of this Assignment:

- Demonstrate the agenda-setting power of the media
- Improve your research and writing skills
- Encourage exploration of current events

Project Censored's goal is to identify important news stories of which the American people should be knowledgeable of that have not been covered by the US corporate mainstream news. This includes instances where:

- corporate mainstream media will cover the news topic but leave out very important facts and information that is only available from independent sources.
- the Associated Press releases a story, but few corporate mainstream organizations pick it up
- the story receives one-shot "back page" coverage

Instructions

Be sure the news story has been published, either electronically or in print, in a newspaper, journal, magazine, newsletter, or similar publication or is it a transcript from a radio or TV broadcast. Make sure it is important to the people in the United States in some way, and ask yourself if the story has clearly defined concepts backed up with solid, verifiable documentation? (During the search you may find news stories related to your original story from other independent news sources. It is acceptable to combine two or more stories into a single nomination if the stories complement each other or contain much of the same information. The author who published the story first becomes the lead for combined nominations.) Several hundred independent news sources both foreign and domestic are listed at: <http://www.projectcensored.org/censorship/news-sources/>

1) In order to do a thorough job of researching an article, you need to understand what it is saying. Be sure to read the article thoroughly, highlighting the actual pieces of information as you go. Clarify and record the main point or points. Focus more on what the author says has happened in the past and less on what should or could happen in the future. (In other words, avoid personal conjecture or commentary.)

2) Write down key words and phrases that are important and unique to this story. These nouns (people, places and things) that words that the story could not be written without. Some examples might include: the name of a legislator, a proposed piece of legislation, the name of a group or organization involved, a specific amount or statistic, the name of a country or a type of currency.

3) Use your key words to search the LexisNexis database (available through the SUNY Potsdam libraries) to ensure that the story was **not** covered in the U.S. corporate media (see criteria at top). Select the coverage range for the prior two years whenever possible. Enter in your keywords and conduct the search. You should also conduct a Google search using your keywords. Using several databases (like LexisNexis & ProQuest & Google News & Yahoo! News), and varying your search terms is a good idea. **Note: A normal full search of a particular story can take hours to accurately complete.**

4) Get the story evaluated by a person with expertise in the subject area of the story (like a professor, community leader, doctor, lawyer, politician, etc). The evaluator should advise on the accuracy and credibility of the story. Are the facts of the story scientifically accurate? Is the story free of major gaps in logic and information? Are the sources of the story determinable and trustworthy? Is the story timely and important for people in the US to know?

5) Write an article synopsis – a **150-200 word** summary of the information found in an article. Be sure to reflect the main points of what the authors are trying to say in the least amount of space. Your job is to present the most important information contained in the article by listing the facts, data, trends or examples that the authors relate in a clear and organized format. This summary will contain:

- i) A title – either the original story title or a unique title that fits the overall idea
- ii) A strong first sentence, in bold type, that summarizes the entire thrust of the article.
- iii) A 150-200-word body that supports with the key facts the main ideas of the story.
- iv) Actual original source, Title, Author, magazine or news source, date, and on-line URL connection for each of the sources used.
- v) Names of student researcher(s), instructor's name, expert evaluator's name, and university.

Because this can be a time consuming process, I do not want you waiting until the end of the semester to start work on it. Doing so will cause you a lot of unnecessary stress and may result in lower quality work. Therefore, to encourage you to look for "censored" stories on a regular basis, each Thursday you will tell the class about one particularly interesting, under-reported, news item you found. (If you are absent from class you can email me a short write-up, by class time, for credit.) If you find a story to use early in the semester, GREAT! Good for you. You will continue to participate in the weekly updates, but will be able to surf through the headlines more casually.

Grading is as follows:

The story is not prominently featured in U.S., mainstream, corporate media =	4 pts
Title =	1 pt
Strong, bold faced, first sentence =	1 pt
Original source completely cited =	2 pts
Name of credible evaluator =	3 pts
Proper length of summary (150-200 words) =	4 pts
Clearly & correctly written (understandable & free of writing errors) =	5 pts

**If you would like to earn extra credit towards your final course grade, you can submit a second story and accompanying report. It must be complete to receive credit and will earn you up to 7 points to add to your course grade (1 point for each item listed in the above rubric that you accomplished). Please indicate if you have a preference for which story you want graded and which is to be extra credit.