J 395 Media, Culture and Civic Engagement
07945

Spring Semester 2013
Graduate Course
TIME Wed 3:00 – 6:00 pm
PLACE: CMA A6:106

Ann Beeson, J.D., M.A.
Senior Fellow & Lecturer
Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life
College of Communications, Department of Journalism
Office: CMA 7.144A
Office Phone: 512-232-5988
Cell phone: 917-637-0648
ann.beeson@austin.utexas.edu
Office hours: TBD

Course Description
This graduate seminar will explore the relationship between media, culture and civic engagement in the United States. What is the role of the media in developing an active and engaged citizenry, and how are changes in the media environment affecting the level and quality of engagement? The drastic decline in media coverage of public policy, particularly at the local and state level, has limited citizen access to reliable information. At the same time, online technology and social media have dramatically increased the ability of citizens to connect with one another and to engage directly on policy issues, both as producers and consumers of information. Patterns of media and civic engagement are also shaped by cultural norms and forces, from family and social environment to the influence of popular culture. How does culture limit or expand levels of engagement?

During the course of the seminar, students will progress from exploring concepts and frameworks, to understanding their own relationship to civic information and engagement, to working in teams to develop a media and civic engagement project. These team projects will provide students with opportunities to produce original media, and to work with community groups and citizens to obtain input, distribute media, and encourage citizen action.

Grassroots leaders, cultural organizers, and journalists will occasionally join class discussions as guest participants.
Learning Objectives

- Work in teams to develop media and civic engagement projects
- Learn how to work with community groups to gain citizen input on media development and to distribute media and encourage citizen action
- Discuss how the media fits within the larger realm of public and civic communications
- Deepen understanding about the relationship between media and civic engagement
- Learn about the information needs of communities and innovative models for addressing them
- Learn how culture shapes media consumption and levels of civic engagement
- Recognize alternative conceptions of the role of citizens and their relationship to civic media and engagement

Course requirements and grading

1. Developing a media and civic engagement project: Students will work in small teams to develop a media and civic engagement project that will require research, interviews, community engagement, and media production. Teams may choose to develop their own project, or partner with an existing community-based organization or effort. Students are also encouraged to connect their projects to other ongoing student media work they have in development. Each team will ultimately prepare a multimedia presentation about his or her project to present to the class. This project will constitute 50% of the grade. Acceptable projects could include:
   - Developing a print, video or audio piece about a civic issue, and using it to raise awareness or encourage action on the issue.
   - Partnering with a community-based organization to develop media that raises awareness or encourages action on a civic issue.
   - Designing a social media campaign to raise awareness or encourage action on a civic issue.
   - Researching, analyzing and reporting on an existing media and civic engagement project and its ability to raise awareness or encourage action on a civic issue.
   - Developing a print, video or audio piece that documents patterns of media and civic engagement in a particular cultural community.

2. Participating in media and civic engagement exercises: In preparation for developing their media and civic engagement project, students will explore different forms of media and civic engagement by completing three short assignments. These assignments will constitute 30% of the grade:
   1) writing a 2-page autobiographical essay on their own media and civic engagement habits;
2) researching information and engagement opportunities on a civic issue and drafting a 2-page summary of findings;
3) participating in online and social media forums on a civic issue and drafting a 2-page summary of the experience.

3. Class discussants: Each student will facilitate a class discussion once during the course of the seminar. This will count for 10% of the grade.

4. Seminar participation: All students are expected to do the required reading in advance, attend class and contribute to the discussion. Participation will count for 10% of the grade.

Class attendance is mandatory. Students who miss more than three classes can have their final grades affected up to 10%.

Course Timetable: THE COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS OUTLINED BELOW WILL BE UPDATED AND CHANGED PERIODICALLY. PLEASE CHECK BLACKBOARD REGULARLY FOR UPDATES.

Week 1, 1/16/13: Course introduction
Required readings:

  - Shirky, Clay, Here Comes Everybody: the power of organizing without organizations, Chapter 1, “It Takes a Village To Find a Phone.”
  - Gillmor, Dan, We the Media: Grassroots Journalism By the People, For the People, Intro and Chapter 1, “From Tom Paine to Blogs and Beyond,” pp. xix-22.

Week 2, 1/23/13: Definitions and concepts
Required readings:

  - Dahlgren, Peter, Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy, Chaps. Intro – Chapter 3 (pp. 1-76).
  - Shirky, Clay, Here Comes Everybody: the power of organizing without organizations, Chapter 2, “Everyone Is a Media Outlet”.

Week 3, 1/30/13: The information needs of communities
Assignments due:
- 2-page autobiographical media and civic engagement essay

Required readings:

Week 4, 2/6/13: Developing a media and civic engagement project
Required readings:

Week 5, 2/13/13: Cultural roots of democracy, media and citizen engagement
Assignments due:
- 2-page civic information and engagement research summary

Required readings:

Week 6, 2/20/13: Engaging citizens
Required readings:
- Ganz, Marshall, Module on Organizing.
- others TBD

Week 7, 2/27/13: Workshopping class media and civic engagement project projects
Assignments due:
- Teams present their project outlines for discussion and support

Week 8, 3/6/13: Workshopping class media and civic engagement project projects
Assignments due:
- Teams present their project outlines for discussion and support

Week 9, 3/13/13: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

Week 10, 3/13/13: Relationship between citizens and professional media in the digital age
Assignments due:
- 2-page summary of participation in online and social media forums

Required readings:

Week 11, 3/20/13: *Civic and media literacy and the limitations of information*
Required readings: TBD

Week 12, 3/27/13: *The perils of citizen journalism*
Guest speaker – journalist
Required readings: TBD

Week 13, 4/3/13: *Media and civic engagement in historically underserved communities*
Guest speaker – grassroots leader
Required readings: TBD

Week 14, 4/10/13: *The value and limitations of social connectivity*
Required readings: TBD

Week 15, 4/17/13: *Presenting class media and civic engagement project projects*
Assignments due:
- Teams present their final projects

Week 16, 4/24/13: *Presenting class media and civic engagement project projects*
Assignments due:
- Teams present their final projects

Week 17, 5/1/13: *Wrap up – what we’ve learned*

**Course Readings**
Required book:
Required readings: All other required readings will be posted by the instructor on Blackboard.

Instructor Bio
Ann Beeson is a constitutional lawyer, creative organizer, and advocate for the transformative power of culture. She is currently seeding, supporting, researching and writing about new ways to inspire lifelong civic engagement and advance social change through culture. Ann is a senior fellow at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas, where she is spearheading a year-long news and public dialogue series with KUT and KLRU called Why Bother? Engaging Texans in Democracy Today.

Ann is also developing a new Culture and Change Fellowship Program that would support partnerships between artists and leaders in the non-profit, government, and business sectors. By supporting fellowships in three cities around the country, the program intends to demonstrate the value of culture and creativity to social change efforts, and to expand understanding and creative practice across social change sectors.

As a Board Member of Welcoming America, Ann is supporting initiatives in Texas and nationally to build more welcoming communities for immigrants. She helped to create and launch the You’re Welcome campaign at the SXSW Music Festival in 2012, which uses comedy, music and dance to inspire young people to build more welcoming communities.

Ann was the Executive Director of U.S. Programs at the Open Society Foundations from 2007-11, where she oversaw the distribution of $150 million annually to promote human rights, justice, and accountability. She was the national Associate Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union from 1995-2007, where she litigated numerous constitutional cases around the country and argued twice before the U.S. Supreme Court. Ann holds a law degree from Emory University and a master’s degree in ethnomusicology from the University of Texas. She has been recognized as one of the 50 most influential women lawyers in America by the National Law Journal.

University Policies
Scholastic Dishonesty: The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student’s learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the
course and/or dismissal from the University.
http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

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Religious Holy Days: A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

Students with Disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).
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