

*Dr. Camille Kraeplin*  
*HUMN 6311: Objectivity & Bias in the News*  
*Summer Session I*

Lecture: XX to XX, Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday, Room XX in XXXX.

Office hours: Office is Room 209 in Umhrey Lee

Contact: Office phone, 214-768-3431; [Kraeplin@smu.edu](mailto:Kraeplin@smu.edu); cell phone, 469-955-2511.

**Communicating with your professor:**

The best way to reach me is via e-mail. If you have a question or a concern, ask. I will try to respond within 24 hours. I also encourage you to visit me during office hours. If my office hours are not convenient, we can set up an alternate time.

**Required materials:**

This is a Journalism Critical Studies course designed to introduce you to a body of critical, conceptual and/or theoretical knowledge related to the field of journalism and the media. The first step in this process, of course, is introducing you to these ideas, which means the reading load for the course will be fairly demanding. Books (in order of publication date):

**\*\**Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York: Pantheon Books, 2002/ISBN 0-375-71449-9), by Noam Chomsky & Edward S. Herman**

**\*\**Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2002/ISBN 0-89526-190-1), by Bernard Goldberg**

**\*\**What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias & the News* (New York: Basic Books, 2003/ISBN 0-465-00176-9), by Eric Alterman**

**\*\**It's Not News, It's Fark: How Mass Media Tries to Pass Crap Off as News* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008 paperback/ISBN 978-1-592-40366-0), by Andrew Curtis**

**\*\**Media Bias? A Comparative Study of Time, Newsweek, the National Review, the The Progressive Coverage of Domestic Social Issues, 1975-2000* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009/paperback ISBN 978-0-7391-2190-0), by Tawnya J. Adkins Covert & Philo C. Wasburn**

**\*\**The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009/paperback ISBN 978-0-691-13868-8), by Matthew Hindman**

**\*\*A packet of additional readings is available at Lone Star Shipping Company (6611 Hillcrest Ave.; 214-987-2282) under [Kraeplin/Objectivity & Bias](#) (these include journal readings & several book chapters).**

**Course Description:**

Many of you know that early in this country's history, the media worked much differently than they have in the recent past. Most newspapers (print was, of course, the only medium in existence) were affiliated with a political party and openly, in fact, fervently, espoused a partisan point of view. It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the advent of the "penny press," that the concept of "objective" journalism came into vogue. And even then, the change was due to commercial more than editorial pressures: Publishers realized they could sell more copies of their inexpensive newspapers to the growing numbers of literate Americans if they refrained from expressing a political point of view, if they instead concentrated on telling readers the tantalizing details of crimes and scandals and, when possible, battles. This new focus led, critics allege, to the birth of "yellow journalism." The term originated during the circulation battles between Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, which peaked from 1895 to about 1898. Both papers were accused of sensationalizing the news to drive up circulation, although the newspapers did serious reporting as well. The *New York Press* coined the term "yellow kid journalism" in early 1897 after a popular comic strip to

describe the down-market papers of Pulitzer and Hearst, which both published versions of the comic during the circulation war. This was soon shortened to *yellow journalism* with the *New York Press* insisting, "We called them Yellow because they are Yellow."

Over time, the concept of objectivity became part of professional journalism's norms. The idea was that good reporters could keep themselves out of the story – could remain neutral, as it were. As a result, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional reporting was expected to meet certain standards that kept it at odds with much of the writing that appeared in other sections of the newspaper, such as the editorial and opinion pages. Both journalists and media critics have questioned the concept of objectivity in recent years, however. Every reporter comes to a story with his or her own unique background, personal history and ingrained biases, critics argue. Try as they might, reporters cannot avoid making decisions – from which sources to interview to how to frame a story to which information to include or exclude from the final version of a print or online piece or newscast – that will influence the message an audience receives. Instead of objectivity, some critics suggest, journalists should strive to be fair. Other critics likewise argue that journalism is hopelessly biased. However, these critics see the biases in contemporary journalism as largely partisan/ideological, either as a result of the inherent leftist leanings of individual journalists, or, on the other hand, as a result of conservative corporate influences on market-driven media industries.

Our job in this class will be to explore these issues and questions, interest in which has intensified since the 2002 publication of CBS reporter Bernard Goldberg's best-selling book *Bias*. We will start by explicating the terms "bias" and "objectivity," as well as examining different forms of bias – from the frequently cited ideological bias to the "structural" bias that occurs as a result of the way newswork is done. An example would be deadlines: Often reporters are unable to get information they need – say a comment from an important source -- by deadline. This may affect the tone or slant of the story. However, this "bias" would not be due to any journalist's ideological prejudices – it would be introduced into the story as a result of a structural restriction of the news business. We will read books by authors who blame ideological forces, structural forces and a combination of the two for the bias they see in media today. We will analyze these books, through class discussion, short papers and presentations. You should also pay close attention to the news media during this course, and I will ask you to keep a "media journal," where you keep track of what you read, watch and listen to, as well as your reactions to it. You should do your best to make daily entries while class is in session; if you must miss a day, be sure to resume your journaling the following day. Many of you may enter this course with a confirmed idea of not only whether media, or at least certain media, are biased, but in which direction. We as human beings tend to seek out information that supports our own viewpoints, so the news media you rely most likely reinforces these assumptions. Therefore, I would urge you to utilize a wide variety of media while taking this course – not just your favorite sources. In addition, we must try to approach ALL the course readings with an open mind; more importantly, we must be ready to listen to the opinions of others' whose views differ from our own in a civil, courteous way. My goal as your instructor is to introduce you to a variety of views on media bias, as well as information that will help you understand the way media organizations operate. In our rapidly changing media environment, both should help make you more aware, more informed consumers of news.

### **Course objectives & learning outcomes:**

- understand how "objectivity" came to be a standard of the journalism profession.
- define and explicate the terms "media bias" and "objectivity."
- distinguish among various types of media & media content and the standards of fairness, or "neutrality," appropriate to each.
- identify the various forces that critics contend bias the news media, both "structural" and ideological/partisan.

- examine the structure of news media as business, and often corporate, entities, and how this may affect content or lead to biased coverage.
- assess the ways language can be identified with biased reporting.
- examine how the media can be manipulated by powerful agents who wish to use news organizations to convey their own messages, thus often leading to charges of bias.
- analyze the problems journalists encounter when trying to report in an unbiased way on complex, culturally sensitive issues.
- look for evidence of bias in a range of news media products.
- consider the perception among many media users that news professionals contribute to bias, and how that belief affects reader/audience attitudes toward journalists and their news organizations.

### **Course Requirements:**

To succeed in this course, you must meet the requirements listed below. Each of these required tasks will be addressed in detail in class handouts and discussion.

- **Participate!** Attend class, complete homework and reading assignments on time (by the day they are listed as due on the course schedule), and participate in class discussion in a civil, responsible way by showing respect for others, including views you do not agree with. This also means no cell phones or computers – unless they are being used for class purposes – or other electronic devices are allowed during class time: **10 percent of course grade.**
- **Complete a team presentation** that focuses on/analyzes a topic we are discussing in class. I will pass out a list of presentation topics/dates toward the start of class. Presentations should be 10 to 15 minutes long and should include a 1-page handout that summarizes your findings. Bring enough handouts to distribute to your classmates and your professor. If you must reschedule a presentation for some reason, I MUST KNOW A WEEK AHEAD OF TIME. If a presentation is missed without notification, you will receive an “F” for the presentation: **10 percent of course grade.**
- **Response papers over readings:** Each week, you will be asked to turn in a three- to five-page response paper over the week’s readings. I will hand out a rubric for each response paper the previous week, or will send it to you as an email. The papers should be typed (12-point, double-spaced) and stapled and submitted as a hard copy. No emails, please, except with instructor’s OK: **25 percent of course grade.**
- **Take part in “debate” over outside reading:** I will give you all a short list of books that have climbed the bestseller lists in recent years, all dealing with media and partisan bias. You may select one book from the list to read. The class will be divided into teams, based on reading selections, and the teams will debate. I will provide a rubric for the debate. The winners will be the team that scores higher based on the rubric – and will earn a higher grade. The debate will take place toward the end of the course session: **10 percent of course grade.**
- **Media journal:** As noted above, you will be asked to keep a journal of all the news media you consume while taking this course. You may use any notebook for this task, but you should use the same notebook, and use it exclusively for this purpose, as I will ask you to hand it in from time to time. Each journal entry should include: Date, time, full name of medium, format (is it Fox News TV or online?), time spent with medium, description of items read/watched/listened to, and reaction to those items. Again, as noted above, try to journal every day while class is in session. Look specifically for any news items that rub you the wrong way – that strike you as “biased.” And if so, why? Alternately, also note any items that you find particularly well done – and why: **20 percent of course grade.**
- **Final essay:** Due the last day of class. You will be asked to write an 8- to 10-page essay that addresses the following question – Is objectivity still relevant in today’s media environment? The essay should address appropriate philosophical, professional and financial issues that are discussed in class and that you discover through additional research. The essay should have a point-of-view – you should take a

stand one way or the other on this issue. However, your viewpoints should be supported with solid facts, and the sources for those facts should be cited. We will discuss the style for this essay in detail in class and a rubric will be provided: **25 percent of course grade.**

### **Grading Criteria:**

Grades in this course will be assigned following the guidelines below, which are set forth in the SMU student manual.

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	0-59

**A note on attendance:** SMU has a mandatory attendance policy that requires instructors to keep track of who comes to class and who does not. Roll will be taken every day. Any student who misses the first day of class may be dropped. In addition, you may be dropped from the course or receive an “F” for excessive unexcused absences (three or more). Absences due to illness or emergencies will be excused. However, this determination is up to your instructor; providing documentation for any reasonable absence will work to your advantage. You should notify your instructor of absences in advance whenever possible, or within 24 hours after the fact. **You are also expected to arrive in class on time.** If you are late, it is up to you to make sure your instructor noted your arrival and counted you present.

Please note the SMU Health Center’s policy on giving forms for excused absences. The Health Center’s policy is found at <http://smu.edu/healthcenter/policy/absenceclass.asp>. There is a PDF file that you can download and submit for consideration of an excused absence. This form must be filled out fully for your instructor to consider your absence(s) as excused.

### **Grading Policies for Written Assignments:**

This course is a journalism critical studies course. The primary purpose of every written assignment should be to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the concepts conveyed in class. Of course, as most of you know by now, there is a connection between good writing and clear thinking. Therefore, I will deduct points on written assignments if your presentation is not clear and effective. Likewise, I will also deduct points if your grammar is poor or if you misspell words, especially proper nouns.

All written assignments in this course should abide by the Journalism Division’s general guidelines for written work. First, all written assignments will be graded based on their content: Is there a clear thesis statement, or explanation of the issue/problem you will address? Does the paper provide sufficient background about the issue? If you are taking a position -- which you should do in the analytical Capstone papers, reviews and blogs you will write for this course -- is that position clearly stated? Is the argument you are forwarding well-reasoned and supported (through statistics, interview material, outside sources, etc.)? Do you address any possible objections to or problems with your position, and how well do you respond to/counter these

objections? Written assignments will also be graded for mechanics (grammar, punctuation, flow, use of transitions, general organization, etc.).

**How to earn an "F" on a written project:** Miss a deadline. Misquote or misrepresent someone. Rewrite or submit a paper that was produced for another class.

**Plagiarism and Fabrication:**

Plagiarism is stealing someone's words or ideas and passing them off as your own. Fabrication is making stuff up. We will deal with plagiarism and fabrication in the harshest manner possible, including referral to the Honors Council.

**SMU Honor Code:**

It is your responsibility to read and understand the SMU Honor Code. Please note that the code calls upon students who are aware of academic dishonesty to report such matters to the instructor. Violations will be dealt with in the prescribed manner.

**Excused absences for extracurricular activities:**

Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled university extracurricular activity will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed assignment.

**Religious accommodations:**

Religiously observant students who will be absent on holidays must notify the teacher in writing at the beginning of the semester.

**Disability accommodations:**

If you need academic accommodations for a disability, you must contact Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies, 214-768-1470/[www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp](http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp), to verify the disability and establish eligibility for accommodations. You should also notify your instructor in time to make any necessary arrangements. A verification letter is required.

# **Bias & Objectivity in the News**

## **Course Schedule**

### **Dr. Camille Kraeplin**

(This schedule is subject to change, as I add guest speakers, for example. I will notify you in class and via Blackboard of any changes. Each class will include a 10- to 15-minute break.)

#### **Week 1**

#### **Topic**

Introduction to class/  
Defining Objectivity  
& Bias

**5/31**

\*\*Lecture: Media in a democracy

#### **Reading/Assignments**

Read following items from Lone Star packet for class:

1) “Rethinking Objectivity,”  
from *American Journalism Review*

2) “Challenges to Objectivity,”  
from *Contemporary Media Issues*

3) TBA

**Please bring completed bios &  
course contracts  
(at end of this syllabus)**

**6/1**

**Field trip to WFAA &  
The Dallas Morning News**  
(tentative date)

#### **Reading/Assignments**

Read following items from Lone Star packet for class:

1) “Partisan & Structural Balance  
in Newspaper Coverage of U.S.  
Senate Races in 2004 with  
Female Nominees”

2) “Framing Bias: Media in  
the Distribution of Power”

\*\*Lecture/discussion: Structural bias – what is structural bias, how does it influence media products?

## Week 2

6/6

Topic

Sources of  
Structural Bias

Reading

*Manufacturing Consent: The  
Political Economy of Mass Media*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Turn in first response paper.

\*\*Watch film version of “Manufacturing  
Consent”

\*\*Team presentation: Defining Structural Bias

6/7

Topic

Sources of  
Structural Bias

Reading

*Manufacturing Consent: The  
Political Economy of Mass Media*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Team presentation: “Political Economy” & the Mass Media

\*\*Watch film: “Journeys with George” (documentary on  
Bush presidential campaign’s press contingent – overview  
of pack journalism, competition, deadline pressure, etc.)

\*\*Guest speaker: Charles Bittner with *The Nation*  
(tentative date)

6/8

Topic

Sources of  
Structural Bias

Reading

*Manufacturing Consent: The  
Political Economy of Mass Media*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Team presentation: The role of “Alternative” or “Opinion”  
Media

\*\*Watch film of Bernard Goldberg speech

\*\*Review media journals

### Week 3

**6/13**    **Topic**  
Introduction to  
Partisan Bias

#### **Reading**

*Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How  
the Media Distort the News*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Turn in 2<sup>nd</sup> response paper

\*\*Lecture/discussion: Partisan bias – How can we define  
“ideological” or “partisan” bias? How does it differ from  
structural bias? Which is more common in media today?  
Which do media consumers believe is more common?

\*\*Film: “Outfoxed” (documentary on Fox News Network)

**6/14**    **Topic**  
Introduction to  
Partisan Bias

#### **Reading**

1) *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How  
the Media Distort the News*  
(reading assignment to come)  
2) *What Liberal Media? The Truth About  
Bias and the News*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\* Colleen McCain Nelson, Pulitzer Prize-winning  
editorial writer, The Dallas Morning News  
(tentative date)

\*\*Team presentation: Fair & Balanced? Fox vs.  
MSNBC

**6/15**   **Topic**  
Introduction to  
Partisan Bias

**Reading**

1) *What Liberal Media? The Truth  
About Bias and the News*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Team presentation: News versus opinion –  
objectivity and the op/ed page

\*\*Debate: News Coverage – Liberal vs. Conservative.

\*\*Review media journals.

## Week 4

### 6/20 Topic

Searching for Bias

### Reading

*It's Not News, It's Fark:*

*How Mass Media*

*Tries to Pass Crap Off as News*

(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Turn in 3<sup>rd</sup> response paper.

\*\*Guest speaker: Tom Maurstad,  
pop culture critic with *The Dallas  
Morning News*

\*\*Outside reading debate

### 6/21 Topic

Searching for Bias

### Reading

1) *It's Not News, It's Fark:*

*How Mass Media*

*Tries to Pass Crap Off as News*

(reading assignment to come)

2) *Media Bias? A Comparative Study*

*of Time, Newsweek, the National Review,*

*the The Progressive Coverage*

*of Domestic Social Issues, 1975-2000*

(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Lecture/discussion over where and how,  
according to research, bias appears most  
frequently in media products.

\*\*Team presentation: Pundits – Journalism or  
propaganda?

\*\*Review drafts of final essays

**6/22 Topic**

Searching for Bias

**Reading**

*Media Bias? A Comparative Study of Time, Newsweek, the National Review, the The Progressive Coverage of Domestic Social Issues, 1975-2000*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Team presentation: Monitoring the Media  
-- AIM, the Media Research Center, FAIR, etc.

\*\*Review drafts of final essays

\*\*Review media journals.

## **Week 5**

### **6/27   Topic**

Other Sources of Bias:  
Digital Divides

### **Reading**

*The Myth of Digital Democracy*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Turn in 4<sup>th</sup> response paper.

\*\*Lecture/discussion over the effect of search engines on the open “marketplace of ideas” on the Internet.

\*\*Guest speaker: TBA

### **6/28   Topic**

Other Sources of Bias:  
Digital Divides

### **Reading**

*The Myth of Digital Democracy*  
(reading assignment to come)

\*\*Team presentation: Political blogs -- News, opinion, both?

\*\*Review media journals

### **6/29   Topic**

Course overview

\*\*Team presentation: The marketplace of ideas in the digital age

\*\*Turn in final essays.

\*\*Turn in media journals.

\*\*Final quiz.

**Student Bio - Objectivity & Bias in the News**

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer to be called: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Best Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Residence: \_\_\_\_\_

Professional/educational background \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is your goal from this program? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why did you take this class? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What do you hope to get out of this class? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything I should know about you that might affect your performance in class (i.e. family situation, health, work, etc)? You need only include information you are comfortable sharing with your instructor (anything you tell me will remain confidential):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Course Contract: An Agreement of Expectations**

YOU (the student)

- Agree to treat other students and their ideas with the respect and intellectual curiosity you yourself would like to receive and to help make this classroom a safe place to exchange and explore ideas.
- Agree to attend every class, check email and Blackboard regularly, and complete all assignments as outlined in the syllabus and supplementary notes.
- Agree not to plagiarize, collaborate where it is forbidden or otherwise steal the work of others and understand that not late work will be permitted.
- Acknowledge that previous academic preparation (for example, writing ability) will affect performance in this course.
- Agree to be responsible for understanding the grading rules and deadlines outlined in the syllabus, as well as additional assignment criteria detailed in supplementary materials, and acknowledge that your perception of effort, by itself, is not enough to justify a distinguished grade.

I (your instructor)

- Agree to treat you and your ideas with the same respect I expect myself and promise not to discriminate against you on the basis of your identity or views.
- Agree to treat you as an individual.
- Agree to prepare carefully for every class and manage all business in a professional manner.
- Agree to respond quickly to your e-mails, questions or assignments.
- Promise to pursue the maximum punishment for plagiarism, cheating and other violations of academic integrity.
- Agree to make myself available for advising, promise confidentiality concerning your performance, and agree to write recommendations for you when appropriate.
- Agree to be honest with you that your grade will reflect the quality of your work and nothing else.

By continuing in this class, you agree to these standards and conditions:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_