Course Description
This is a precarious time for covering politics. An unprecedented president who dubs the press “the enemy of the people” occupies the White House. America has arguably not been this polarized since the Civil War. Political reporting is under siege from economic forces—local politics is covered far less than it used to be as more and more people get their news from social media, where misinformation can flourish.

Students will learn the craft of political reporting, how to interview elected officials and people in government, how to make sense of and cover events, and how to distill complex information for the public. In addition to spot news and “straight reporting,” students will learn how to write deep dive features and profiles where they can inject their voices into the pieces.

This is a class that will seek to reinforce why coverage of politics matters and how we can reconnect with readers. Trust in the press is historically low, and was abysmal before Donald Trump even ran for president. Why? What is politics, exactly, and how do we make it matter to the public? How can we best hold power to account? How can we inform the public with facts that actually matter?

We will explore the macro trends that are affecting how politics is covered today. Students will analyze and debate competing approaches to political reporting, from traditional nonpartisan coverage to its most cutting critiques, including takedowns of the “View from Nowhere.” The media is often accused of being biased, either toward liberals or corporate interests. Is this accurate? How do journalists regain trust?

We will also spend time focusing on New York City, where coverage has noticeably shrunk. Over the course of the semester, students will attend local political events, profile a member of the City Council, State Assembly, or State Senate, and learn how to navigate government bureaucracies to get at the truth and hold our government accountable. Students will understand the importance of mastering policy as well as personalities—and how what is conceived as politics impacts everyday life.

Writing assignments will include 750-word profiles of local political figures, 1,000-word stories that capture the intersection of politics and a chosen policy of particular importance to the student, and a 1,500-word final project. Students will also complete mini-assignments as well as classroom exercises that strengthen writing and critical thinking.
Learning Objectives

In this course, students will:

- Demonstrate an awareness of the debates animating political journalism and media criticism today
- Demonstrate core competency in short-form and long-form political journalism
- Write clearly, accurately, and intelligently about politics and policy
- Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information
- Understand current events on a much deeper and more nuanced level
- Demonstrate greater understanding of awareness of local politics and government

Assignments:

- Profile of a political figure (750 words)
- Story on Intersection of Politics and Policy (1,000 words)
- How Government Works—Explain an Agency (500 words)
- Coverage of a political event/legislative hearing (500 words)
- Final Project (1,500 words)

Readings

Students will be required to read the “New York” and “Politics” sections of the New York Times every day. Students will also read daily coverage of government and politics in the New York Post and Daily News, as well as subscribe to the emailed “first reads” of City and State and Politico’s New York Playbook.

The following articles and essays will be read and discussed throughout the semester:

My background

I am suited to teach this class because I have spent my career covering politics and government. I have also run for office myself. At the New York Observer, I covered the 2013 mayor’s race and was a City Hall reporter in 2014 and 2015. After that, I covered the 2016 presidential race for the Observer. I was a Village Voice columnist and reporter, where I wrote investigative pieces and commentary on New York and national politics. I have also been a columnist at the Guardian, focusing chiefly on national politics. In addition to those publications, I have contributed to the New York Times, Daily News, Columbia Journalism Review, New York Magazine, Esquire, and
the New Yorker. Currently, I am a columnist with Gothamist and the Guardian. In 2018, I was a candidate for office, running for State Senate in the Brooklyn District where I grew up. While I did not win, the race gave me an even deeper understanding of the political process.