

Fall 2020 DC Semester Program

Politics in the Era of Social Media

Taught by Professor Jaime Settle

This program is designed to explore the causes and consequences of changes in the political information environment, specifically the growth of social media and data analytics in many facets of politics. We will cover topics related to the development of mass media and trends in the news media; how and why political actors use media and data strategically; the effect of news and campaign communications on the public's perceptions of the political world; the creation and use of politically-relevant data in the electoral context; and how the public uses the media to communicate their preferences. Our goal will be to evaluate these and other ideas through the unique first-hand experiences available in Washington, D.C.

Washington Program Internship

- *6 credit hours: INTR 499*

Students will have the opportunity to interact with social media, data, and politics from a number of angles. Some will work with media that reports on the actions of elected officials and government, such as **Politico, the Hill, NBC, NPR, Fox News, MSNBC** and others. Students may choose the other side of that equation and work with the **communications office of a Member of Congress, the Heritage Foundation, or the Center for American Progress**—i.e., an organization whose goal is to control and shape the information that the media report. Others may work with a think tank or an advocacy group, such as the **American Enterprise Institute** or the **Brookings Institution**. Students with the requisite background may apply their analytics skills to work at data-driven consulting firms, such as **Clarity Campaigns** or **AlphaVu**.

Political Communication in an Evolving Information Environment

- *3 credit hours: GOVT 391, DATA 202*

This course will examine how changes in the structure and forms of political communication affect the relationships between government actors, the media, and the public, with added consideration of the ethical implications of these changes. While the course will emphasize the effects of the Internet and social media, it will do so in the context of understanding the similarities and differences of these effects compared to earlier historical transformations of the media and information environment. The study of political communication presents many intriguing questions. What has been the historical impact of “democratizing” news sources? How have Facebook and Twitter altered the way that congressional representatives communicate with, and campaign to, their constituents? How has the proliferation of news availability affected the public's information consumption and political knowledge? Who uses the data that people create through their mobile devices and online behavior, and what are they doing with it? What kinds of data do candidates have about potential voters, and why does that matter?

Changing Media, Changing Politics

- *3 credit hours: GOVT 391*

In this course, students will engage with people who make, frame, interpret, and respond to the changing political information environment. This course will be a highly interactive experience, incorporating both exposure to a wide range of speakers as well as the opportunity to apply what we've learned in the program to real world experiences. We will speak and work with: communications officers who manage the social media strategies of relevant government actors and agencies; reporters who cover the news using both traditional and data-driven approaches, and who can comment on the evolution of their field over time; political activists who use social media to advance their causes; experts who monitor how Americans process the news; and consultants who use data generated by the American public to inform political strategies.

The Politics of Data and the Data of Politics

- *1 credit hour: GOVT 390*

This course is a supplemental experience designed to complement what we will learn from the three-credit courses. We will take a deep dive into several book-length assessments of the ethical, legal, political, and social implications of the creation, collection, and use of big data and algorithms.