

W&M in Washington

Spring 2015

Politics in the Era of Social Media

Taught by Professor Jaime Settle

Social media technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube appear increasingly integrated into the modern political landscape. Proponents of these technologies argue that the political sphere is more accessible and governments are more responsive due to the ease and speed with which political actors and the public can communicate. Opponents argue that these changes have adverse effects on the quality of representation because sensitivity to public opinion has reduced elected officials' incentives for deliberation and compromise. Our goal will be to evaluate these and other arguments 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 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, American Prospect, NBC, NPR, PBS NewsHour, 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 Department of State or Homeland Security** – 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 **Center for American Progress**, or a public relations firm like **Fleishman Hillard** or **APCO**; these critical actors in our political system seek to shape how their issues of interest are portrayed and interpreted by social media, and thus ultimately shape public preferences.

Political Communication in an Evolving Information Environment

- *4 credit hours: GOVT 491*

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. How have Facebook and Twitter altered the way that Members of Congress communicate with their constituents and run for reelection? How has the proliferation of news availability affected the public's information consumption and political knowledge? While the course will emphasize the effects and the implications of changes due to the Internet and social media technologies, 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. We will cover topics related to the development of mass media and trends in the news media; how and why political actors use media strategically; the effect of news and campaign communications on the public's perceptions of the political world; and how the public uses the media to communicate their preferences.

Changing Media, Changing Politics

- *3 credit hours: GOVT 391*

In this course, students will have the opportunity to interact with people who make, frame, interpret, and respond to the changing information environment. We will speak with: communications officers who manage the social media strategies of relevant government actors and agencies; reporters who cover the news using both traditional and new approaches, and who can comment on the evolution of their field over time; political activists who use social media to advance their causes; and experts who monitor how Americans process the news.