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GU Politics Discussion Group Outline:
The New Normal - Covering Politics When the Old Rules Don't Apply

Discussion Groups: Mondays, 2:00 - 3:30PM in Healy G-18

Week 1 (2/3/20) — The Dossier: “You just published fake news.”
In January of 2017, BuzzFeed News published a 35-page document alleging salacious and unverified allegations regarding Trump’s ties to Russia. In the aftermath, many members of the media decried the decision. Trump called BuzzFeed a “failing pile of garbage.” Should BuzzFeed News have published the document? What were the ethical and journalistic considerations that went into BuzzFeed’s decision? How has that decision shaped the media’s coverage of the Russia investigation and the Trump presidency?

Week 2 (2/10/20) — #CancelNYT: What do readers want from their news outlets?
Several times this year the hashtag #cancelNYT has trended nationwide as readers reacted to missteps at the paper. What is the role of news outlets for the modern reader? How do they best serve their readers? What role does the opinion desk play in all this?

Week 3 (2/24/20) — The White House daily briefing is dead.
Long live the White House daily briefing. One of the biggest changes of the Trump era has been the steady erosion of daily briefings at the White House from the White House press secretary. Does this shift matter? Did we need on-camera briefings at all, especially when Trump regularly speaks with reporters and tweets so fervently and publicly? How do you cover a White House in this era?

Week 4 (3/2/20) — Impeachment and Investigations
Combine the frenzied breaking news environment, Trump’s inconsistencies and tendency to confirm details of stories through his Twitter feed (or yell Fake News!), and hyper-partisanship and you’ve got the formula for an impeachment process like none we’ve ever seen. Can journalists push back on falsehoods without seeming to root for a specific outcome in the course of these investigations and impeachment? In the rush to publish stories, journalists can and do make mistakes, which in turn is used by the president and his allies to attack the press. We’ll discuss sourcing, speed, and how covering the impeachment of Trump has no historical precedent.

Week 5 (3/16/20) — Covering #MeToo allegations
After Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey of the New York Times broke the stunning allegations of Harvey Weinstein’s rampant sexual assault and harassment, every journalist in America got to work uncovering the Weinstones on their beat. On Capitol Hill, reporters uncovered that a secret settlement system in place had covered up years’ worth of harassment and workplace abuse of Hill staffers. How much vetting should go into stories like this? When does a rumor become publishable? How do journalists tell the real from the fake and what kinds of sourcing work goes into telling these extremely sensitive stories?

Week 6 (3/23/20) — Information Warfare and actual fake news
When reporters make mistakes, as they do sometimes, and need to correct, that too can be derided as “fake news.” Bad actors too, will sometimes pitch fake information in an effort to trick journalists, who are increasingly becoming targets of opposition research. In this discussion group, we’ll talk about how information is weaponized against journalists. Is the media fair game? And how should the press engage back — when the president and his administration admonish the press as the “enemy of the people,” should reporters go grab coffee with a staffer to talk about say, energy policy?

Week 7 (3/30/20) — What the science says: Covering climate change
Where is the line between reporting and advocacy and when does that line get crossed? How can reporters covering the climate crisis convey the urgent information and science behind it? Additionally, there are science-skeptics in the Trump administration — do the new rules of covering climate change mean reporters should “never” quote administration officials?

Week 8 (4/6/20) — Are things worse or better than they were before?
It wasn’t that long ago that newspapers had strict deadlines, a story was filed, the paper came out, and everyone went home until the next day. The 24-hour-news cycle has fundamentally changed the rules of engagement for reporters and stories need to go up fast. Was it better when journalists were the only gatekeepers of information? Are there rules from an earlier era that were worth keeping around? We’ll try and speak with someone this week who has been through it all — and seen the changes up close and personal.