

SELF PROGRAM 2023/2024

Controlling the Narrative in the Age of "Alternative Facts"

Professor : C. Jon DELOGU

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Course information

Number of credits: 6 credits

Contact hours: 30 contact hours + additional hours for mid-term and paper preparation
outside of class... and of course reading time!

Hours taught per week: 2,5

Teaching period: Fall semester 2023

Course description:

This course aims to examine the recent evolution of storytelling (narratives); i.e., the stories we are told (in school or by media outlets) as well as the stories we tell others and ourselves to understand the past, cope with the present, and plan for and move into the future. In the Internet Age, with the intensification of social media, “fake news,” “alternative facts,” and “trolling,” we are subjected to ever more sophisticated ways of controlling narratives for various reasons—political, economic, humanitarian, etc. This course will first examine what’s at stake with a look back at pre-Internet uses of history, narrative, and social media (in the age of Voltaire, the French Revolution, Napoleon, Napoleon III, the Dreyfus Affair, Vichy, and the Algerian War), and then allow students to work individually and in teams to examine more cases—some highlighted by the professor (e.g., populism, nationalism, fascism,

advertising, profiling), others chosen by the students themselves based on their background and areas of interest.

Program breakdown:

(dates below are last year's, they will be adjusted when I know the final schedule)

PART I: Controlling the Narrative pre-Internet // Key Topics in Modern French History

Week 1 Introduction + Voltaire, "L'affaire Calas," French Revolution

Week 2 The French Revolution + Napoleon

Week 3 Napoleon + Napoleon III + French Colonialism

Week 4 Dreyfus Affair, Loi de 1905, Grande Guerre

Week 5 Lyon sous Vichy + The Algerian War

Week of Fall (Toussaint) Vacation

Week 6 **In-class mid-term exam: factual questions + role playing**

PART II: CTN in the Internet Age of polarization, trolling, alternative facts, etc.

Week 7 Group topic / Student Presentations

Week 8 Group topic / Student Presentations,

Week 9 Group topic / Student Presentations, **1st draft of paper due**

Week 10 Group topic / Student Presentations,

Week 11 Group topic / Student Presentations,

Week 12 **FINAL EXAM IN CLASS – final draft of paper due**

Prerequisites:

An interest and some background in literature, history, political science, or social media.

Course objectives:

To understand French history and contemporary media better; to empower students to think more clearly and freely about the narratives they build, send, and receive.

Assignments / Assessment:

Mid-term exam (600-800 words 24-hour take home), **Oral Presentation** (5-10 minutes, solo two-person team), **Final Exam** (in class, 3 hours), **Final Paper** (1200-1600 words); grades weighted equally). The **Mid-term** will be a choice between essay and textual commentary; the **Oral** will present your paper or other related topic; the **Final exam** will be like the mid-term but in class.

The Paper: guidelines

You can work on a pre-Internet or Internet Age topic – your choice. You can confine yourself to summarizing and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the argument of ONE **scholarly** journal article, book, or chapter of book... OR you can craft your own mini-research paper about a controversial topic of your choice. Please AVOID using basic

journalism as your target text. You are permitted to use high-quality **investigative journalism** such as the work of Evan Osnos, Jane Mayer, Ronan Farrow, etc. **Please respect word limits.**

Please include your name and email address at the top of your mid-term exam and paper

Attendance:

In order to participate, students must be present. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed otherwise no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.

Bibliography:

E. Burke (selections from *Reflections on the Revolution in France*), R. Emerson (selections from *Essays*), A de Tocqueville (selections from *The Old Regime and the Revolution*), A Dreyfus (selections from his *Diary*), A. Horne (selections from *Algeria: A Tragic War of Peace*), R. Paxton (selections from *Vichy: Old Guard and New Order*), and G. Pontecorvo (film, *The Battle of Algiers*), among others.

On labeling and sending and receiving papers (.docx files or similar, not pdf), Example:

2019 CTN paper CHEN	(CHEN sends to Mary Daniels)
2019 CTN paper CHEN md	(Mary Daniels sends paper with feedback to CHEN)
2019 CTN paper CHEN v2	(CHEN sends definitive version of paper to Delogu)

Inspiring Words to get you thinking:

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live...We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.”

Joan Didion, *The White Album*

‘A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality – “The king died and then the queen died” is a story.’ But “the king died and then the queen died of grief” is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.’

E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*

Google <controlling the narrative>, and see what you find... here are some “hits”:

<https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/09/controlling-the-narrative/>

Tim Kreider, 9 June 2014 *New York Times*

Marketing your idea and yourself

<http://songbirdmarketing.ca/controlling-the-narrative/>

Control the narrative, control the world

<http://www.thelogicalcontrarian.com/control-the-narrative-control-the-world/>

<https://firebrandtalent.com/blog/2016/09/ways-control-narrative-during-crisis/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2018/09/18/controlling-the-narrative-dealing-with-breaking-news-and-embargo-challenges/#3677f64831a9>