

FYS 125: CONTEMPORARY EVENTS
January 2010

Instructor: Brian Cooney

Hours : M, T, Th, F, 8:50-10:20 and 12:50-2:2

Room : C 405

Office Hours : C 468, W 10-12, or after class, or by appointment.

Course Objective : To learn how to read the news in depth and critically, with special emphasis on using the resources of the Internet.

Assignments: Over three weeks, each student will present orally in class several reports on topics (see list below) assigned by the instructor, related to the main story being covered in a particular session. (After a day or two, we will have a better idea how many reports there will be time for each student to do. I have in mind 20-minute presentations, but the actual time devoted to a presentation will depend on how controversial the content is.) Students not scheduled to present are expected to familiarize themselves in advance with the upcoming topics.

In addition, each student will submit a ten-page "state of the union" address on the last day of class.

Grades : Class participation (including both discussion and reports) will count for 60% of the course grade, and the state-of-the-union paper will count for 40%.

Attendance : Attendance at all class sessions is mandatory. Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of two points from the course grade.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Google : Very good search engine. The **Google Toolbar** can be downloaded at <http://toolbar.google.com/>. It then appears at the top of every web page, blocking pop-ups and displaying the keywords of your search on the bar as FIND commands.

Comprehensive news sites (a sampling) : (These sites usually have embedded search engines of their own.)

(CNN.COM) <http://www.cnn.com/> and (CNN.COM INTERNATIONAL) <http://edition.cnn.com/> The headings on each of these sites, e.g. □U.S.” and □World” are links to more detailed lists of stories in those categories.

[New York Times http://www.nytimes.com/pages/pageone/](http://www.nytimes.com/pages/pageone/) Free online subscription

[Washington Post](#)

[Fox News](#) (Right wing perspective)

[The Guardian](#) (Left wing perspective)

[Cato Institute](#) (Right wing/libertarian perspective with very incisive commentary)

[Common Dreams](#) (Left wing digest of news)

The [Heritage Foundation](#) (Right wing perspective)

The [Huffington Post](#) (Left wing digest of news)

[The Global Post](#) : for international news

[Economic terminology and info](#)

Info on any specific nation : [CIA World Fact Book](#) :

UPCOMING REPORTS

Iraq and Afghanistan :

- 9-11 and invasion of Afghanistan; proclamation of "War on Terror"
- [For a thorough time-table of both Iraq wars, click [here](#)] Invasion of Iraq and shift of resources from Afghanistan: (1) first Iraq War (1990-91) followed by sanctions, weapons inspections and no-fly zone; (2) rationale of G. W. Bush admin. for invading Iraq in 2003; (3) Sunni-Shiite split, Kurdish separatism, war between insurgents and coalition forces; (4) election of Shiite-dominated government in 2006; American troop surge in 2007
- Current situation in Iraq, including time-table for American withdrawal
- Current situation in Afghanistan, incl. resurgence of Taliban and problems with Karzai government
- Rationale for Obama's decision to escalate in Afghanistan
- Somalia and Yemen as new bases for Al Qaeda, and the attempted destruction of airliner near Detroit Christmas Day
- Just War Theory and war in Afghanistan
- Just War Theory and war in Iraq

Torture (and Rendition):

- Use of torture by Bush administration; Khalid Sheikh Mohammad; [Abu Ghraib](#)
- Did it "work"?
- International and American law on torture
- Moral justification of torture (cf. ticking bomb scenario)?
- Obama policy on torture and on prosecution of those who authorized or practiced it; cf. administration brief against the [Padilla lawsuit](#)

Israel and the Palestinians:

[There is much passionate disagreement over this topic, between Arabs and Israelis, within Israel between peace advocates and hardliners, between Jewish militants and secular Israelis, between conservative/right-wing Jewish organizations in America (e.g. AIPAC) and more moderate groups such as the J-Street Lobby. You should take notice of the orientation of any web sites dealing with this topic. Check the top or sidebar of a web page for a link titled something like 'about us'. Some of the strongest critics of Israeli policy toward Palestinians are Jews, e.g. Noam Chomsky.]

- 20 th C. events from Balfour Declaration of 1917 to 1948 formation of state of Israel; Arab-Israeli War of 1948-49
- 1967 war leading to occupation of west bank of Jordan, Gaza, and Sinai peninsula; Camp David Accords of 1978 (and peace treaty of 1979 between Israel and Egypt)
- Settlers' Movement, First Intifada, Oslo Accords of 1993, establishment of Palestinian Authority, Second Intifada, 2006 electoral victory of Hamas in Gaza, split between West Bank and Gaza governments
- Events leading to Gaza invasion by Israel 2008; continuing blockade by Israel; UN-sponsored Goldstone Report and its reception by Israel and U.S.; influence of Israeli lobby in U.S.
- America's role and responsibility in Israeli-Palestinian situation; power of Israeli lobby in U.S.; impact on America's relation to Moslem world

Health Insurance Reform:

- How health care systems work in other advanced nations [For a good starting point, including an excellent video, go to: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/>]
- The American system (Medicare, Medicaid, VA and private insurance) and its problems, incl. high cost per person compared to other nations (2)
- The debate in Congress: elimination of single-payer option, failed attempt at a □public option,” role of for-profit health insurance, Senate filibuster
- The final health insurance bill—strengths and weaknesses (2)
- American anti-government sentiment as evidenced in health care debate and in □Tea Party” movement

Global Warming:

- Facts and statistics; causes, predicted consequences
- Skeptics and controversies, including "climategate"
- Proposed solutions: Kyoto Protocol, Copenhagen treaty/accord; ways to reduce warming

The Global Financial Crisis 2007-present :

- sub-prime mortgages, easy money and the housing bubble
- financial derivatives: different kinds and functions of,
- de-regulation of financial institutions
- role played by the above in financial crisis

Abortion :

