The Electronic Pulpit: Media Activism for Social Justice

Draft Syllabus

Semester: Fall 2014
Dates & Times: Wednesdays 7:10-9:40
Venue: Fireside room
Instructor: Dennis J. Bernstein

Course Description

This course is designed to impart the fundamental journalistic and production skills of media activism as a tool to break corporate control of information, and to give voice to the voiceless, the disenfranchised and disinherited.

Students will learn skills in both technical production, the art and science of the interview journalism, the power of language & art to bear witness, as well as the history, philosophy, strategies, and power of alternative media.

Students will collaboratively create and produce in-depth/interview stories (of varying lengths) for a weekly radio news magazine, some of which may be broadcast on the Daily Newsmagazine Flashpoints on KPFA Radio.

Presentations & live interviews with key figures working in the field, as well as extensive case studies and historical context will be incorporated to give students an understanding of the depth and power of live media to transform and shape history.

Classes will generally have the format of:

- Lecture/presentation/discussion on a key aspect of journalism
- Each class will feature a presentation by or a live interview with prominent journalists working in the alternative radio/information media, who will share their insights, philosophy and experience, related to this key aspect.
- Brainstorming and collaborative dialogue in small groups
- Collaborative work on media projects.

Students will also study the work and contributions of other key journalistic figures, such as Robert Fisk, Normal Solomon, Amy Goodman, John Pilger, Robert Parry, Gary Webb, Seymor Hirsch, George Seldes, Edward R. Murrow, Studs Terkel, and others.

Students will also study a series of case examples on the power of radio to change or make history.

Students will be expected to conduct many class and field interviews, and work collaboratively to produce these as reports or extended interviews. Some of these may be broadcast on KPFA's weekly radio news magazine, in a dedicated segment.

In particular, the following areas will be covered:

1. The power of radio as a force for social change: How radio has been used to get the people’s message out in times of siege and revolution. Examples: El Salvador(positive) Rwanda (deadly).
2. An in-depth look at the vibrant micro transmitter and small transmitter movements using radio as a local organizing tool. Examples: Little Haiti in Brooklyn. In front of KPFA in the middle of an attempted corporate raid.
3. The Art of the Interview: How to get the whole story? How to ask a question? The intent of the interview. How to listen. Asking the same question repeatedly.
4. What's really important in a story: beyond the who, what, when, where and why.
5. Radio as an emotional and artistic medium on the front lines of social change.
6. New possibilities: radio and media on the Internet
7. Production in Practice: Studio visits to KPFA

**Expectations:**

The course will cover production techniques, interviewing skills, critical exploration of mainstream media, and the history, power and techniques of alternative media. Students will be expected to participate actively, critically, reflectively, in dialogue, collaboration and media production. Attendance and punctuality are crucial to the success of the class. Readings (Interviews and articles) will be assigned. In addition, students will be expected to listen to and watch a variety of media assignments. All participants will be expected to produce and present 12 recorded interviews of varying lengths. Each participant will be expected to produce 2 interviews into a format prepared for radio broadcast (introduction and written segway). Each participant will be expected to participate in field trips to KPFA to observe live production and radio processes both within and outside of class time.

**Grading:**

Participants will be graded Pass/Fail with a written evaluation unless a letter grade is requested on the basis of the following.

1. Attendance and participation:
2. Class presentation of 12 recorded interviews
3. 2 interviews of the above prepared for radio broadcast (introduction; written segways to connect sections)
4. Participation in on site visits to KPFA to observe live productions and radio processes.

**Expected Outcomes:**

At the end of the course, participants should:

- Will be competent on conducting one on one interview for radio
- Will learn how to ask a question and listen for the answer, to evaluate whether questions being asked are being answered
- Will be able to produce interviews, and basic news stories of various lengths
- Will know how to identify what makes a news story a story; and what makes a story political
- Will understand media production
- Will identify the difference between a real news story and junk news story
- Will understand the nature and level in current media
- Will understand the nature of corporate control and its impact on the open flow of information
- Will understand how censorship and self-censorship work
- Will understand the fallacies around so-called objective journalism
- Will understand the difference between business oriented reporting and worker-oriented reporting
The following outline is a tentative outline. The actual progression will evolve organically and dialogically from session to session, depending on the needs, situations and issues that are generated by the participants and current breaking events.

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW: INFORMATION AS POWER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
1. The job of the journalist: Monitor the centers of power and report to the people
2. Sources for the story: politicians, corporate flacks, law enforcement, government and corporate documents, people directly impacted and their various supporters.
3. Guest Speaker: Rosemary Bray McNatt (President of Starr King School, author and noted journalist)

WEEK 2: THE HEART OF LISTENING: THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW
1. Preparation for the interview: Really know who you are talking to (What is the interviewee's background, do they have axes to grind, what is their current state of mind (did they just lose a child or their house, are they dying from cancer because of corporate/government pollution), etc).
2. Interviewing: How to prepare questions; how to listen; what to listen for; how to create space; how to be spontaneous and follow the interviewee (be prepared to throw all your questions in the garbage, if your interview says something that is much more important or pressing that what you thought you came to talk about).
3. Interview exercise: students will interview each other and introduce their partners to the class
4. Guest: Miguel Gavilan Molina (Co-host of KPFA Flashpoints) on Advocacy Journalism

WEEK 3: EYEWITNESS TO CARNAGE: THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE JOURNALIST ON THE FRONT LINES
1. Eyewitness to the carnage: whether to enter the fray or to just stand back and take notes as the “Objective” reporter
2. Objectivity: What does it mean to be objective and balanced? Is there such a thing? Does “He said/She said” journalism undermine a true investigation/exposition of the facts?
3. What is the difference between “Poll Vaulting” vs. commentating and really reporting the news.
4. Guest Speaker: Norman Solomon (Columnist, founder of IPA)

WEEK 4: THE EVIDENCE OF OUR SENSES: FIRST PERSON JOURNALISM
1. Using your senses to report
2. “I saw, I heard, I smelled, I could taste….”
3. Whistle Blowers/Community Correspondents
4. Establishing trust
5. Interceding to Stop Violence

WEEK 5: WRITING TO BE HEARD/TO CHANGE PEOPLE’S MINDS: THE POET AS REPORTER; THE REPORTER AS POET
1. Using Imagery that tells a story but does not exaggerate
2. “Show me, don’t tell me”: Prose that paints a real picture and brings the Listener/Reader to the scenes of suffering/exaltation
3. Poems: Nazim Hikmet, Caroline Forche, Pablo Neruda, Kenneth Patchen, Muriel Rukeyser, Langston Hughes
4. Guest Lecturer San Francisco Poet Laureate Alejandro Murguía

WEEK 6: TO CARRY A NATION ON YOUR BACK: THE POWER OF RADIO
1. Radio vs. TV for getting the word out
2. How radio has been used as a tool to fight oppression
3. The use of Microtransmitter Radio to change history/support revolutionary Social Change
4. Guest Lecturer: Pedro Reyes, whose grandmother carried the FMLN’s radio station on her back through the jungles of El Salvador

WEEK 7: NUTS & BOLTS: HOW A COMMUNITY RADIO STATION WORKS: KPFA TOUR
1. Technical briefing with KPFA Technical Directors Mike Biggs/Dev Ross
2. An overview of KPFA Apprenticeship program as a way of getting started in radio

WEEK 8: STUDENT INTERVIEWS
1. Students will share the interviews that they have prepared: In depth discussions of Student interviews
2. Feedback from teacher and other students
3. Guest: Malihe Razazan ("Voices of the Middle East"/KPFA; producer of “Your Call Radio” KALW)

WEEK 9: STUDENT INTERVIEWS CONT’D
1. In depth discussions of Student interviews (continued)
2. Viewing and discussion of the Film: “Tell the Truth and Run” Documentary on the life and times of radical journalist, George Seldes.
3. A look at exemplary Journalists working today: Amira Hass, Bill Moyers, Glen Greenwald, Alan Nairn, Robert Fisk
4. Guest: Dar Jamail via Satellite/Skype/Fuze

WEEK 10: DISPATCHES FROM HELL: GRASS ROOTS REPORTING FROM THE WARZONE: CASE STUDIES
1. Haiti/ Palestine/Israel
2. Corporate reporting versus Grass Roots reporting
3. Guests: Kevin Pina, Nora Barrows Friedman

WEEK 11: TRUTH TO POWER: REPORTING ON US FOREIGN POLICY AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT
1. Stenography or real Reporting?
2. How Patriotism and Nationalism get in the way of real reporting
3. Students continue to share their interviews
4. Guest: To be Announced

WEEK 12: WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES OF OUR TIME?
1. A free-wheeling discussion of some of the key stories of our time and why
2. How to go about approaching these issues & stories in an original way.
3. Choose final Interview subject matter for possible airing on KPFA
4. Guest: to be Announced

WEEK 13: MEDIA ACTIVISM FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: REVIEW OF KEY ASPECTS OF MEDIA ACTIVISM THAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE
1. Review final interviews
2. Feed back and follow up for possible broadcast
ASSIGNED READINGS & ARTICLES

Articles and interviews by Dennis Bernstein
"Lethal Dose" the Progressive Magazine,
“The Downwinders” National Catholic Reporter
“Pentagon Planners Outline Key U.S. Military Role in Kuwait Recovery” San Francisco Chronicle.
The Fire This Time, Village Voice/Vibe Magazine,
“Death Row Inmate’s Last Words -- U.S. Leads World in Use of Death Penalty For Minors.”
Pacific News Service/New America Media…. "Netanyahu's Scheme for Palestine |
Consortiumnews Oct 11, 2013

Articles and interviews by other journalists:
"A Strange Kind of Freedom" Robert Fisk, The Independent
"Why We Need Media Critics Who Are Fiercely Independent" Common Dreams by Norman Solomon

NEWS WEBSITES TO FOLLOW:
CommonDreams: Commondreams.org
Counterpunch: Counterpunch.org
Consortium news:Consortiumnews.com
TRUTHOUT: Truthout.org
TRUTHDIG: Truthdig.org
Aljazeera: Aljazeera.com

READING LIST/BOOKS
Unafraid of the Dark, Rosemary Bray McNatt
Dark Alliance, Gary Web (film based on the book, Staring Jeremy Renner due out.)
Cable News Confidential, Jeff Cohen
Burning All Illusions: A Guide to Personal and Political Freedom, David Edwards
Newspeak in the 21st Century, David Edwards, David Cromwell

FILMS, RADIO AND TELEVISION REPORTS
“Tell the Truth and Run”: Documentary Film on the life and times of radical journalist, George Seldes
“Mississippi Burnings” a radio documentary by Dennis Bernstein, DemocracyNow