PSCI 4809  
Special Topics: Political Opinion Writing  
Tuesdays, 11:35-12:55  
LA A602

Department of Political Science  
Carleton University  
Prof. Mira Sucharov  
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:05-2:45 or by appointment. (Please do not use my voice mail. Email is the best way to reach me. mira.sucharov@carleton.ca) Office: C678 Loeb.

Course Description: With the rise of social media, op-eds (which stand for “opposite the editorial page,” dating from the days of broadsheet newspapers — and sometimes known as blogs, columns or opinion pieces) are becoming an increasingly important way of communicating about a range of political and social issues. This seminar will provide you with an opportunity to hone your own op-ed writing skills, while providing a forum through which to consider the role of public intellectuals, and analyze contemporary political issues through reading and discussing published op-eds. The course will serve to tighten and improve your overall writing, as clarity, precision and the use of logic and evidence are key components of this writing form.

NOTE: The course will meet for 1.5 hours per week, with more time allotted to drafting assignments and receiving regular feedback and comments.

Requirements:

Pitch (due class 4, by 11 pm, by email)  
(10%)
Op-Ed 1: 25% (due class 6, 7 — by 11 pm, by email)
Op-Ed 2: 25% (due class 8 or 9 — by 11 pm, by email)
Op-Ed 3: 25% (due class 10, 11 or 12 — by 11 pm, by email)
Attendance: 15%

Note: Pre-submissions are required for two out of three of the op-eds. (You may pre-submit a third if you wish.) See instructions below.

Pitch: The pitch (roughly one paragraph) needs to identify an issue you wish to write about, linking it to a current news “hook.” Explain why the topic is relevant, what broader issues it connects to, what your angle (and argument) will be, and briefly how you will go about supporting your argument. If you wish, you may use the pitch (and our subsequent feedback) as the basis for a subsequent op-ed.

Op-Eds: The op-eds you are required to write for this course are a hybrid assignment, which is to say a mixture of traditional op-ed and academic essay. This means that the arguments in your op-ed should stand on their own (and the op-ed itself should only be roughly 750 words), but in this assignment you will also provide extensive footnotes (or endnotes), including scholarly and news-style references, additional data, background to the issues, and conceptual and theoretical context. Footnotes (or endnotes) should contain, in some cases, a full paragraph of additional context or information for the reader. A note about your argument: While op-eds can be structured around descriptive, explanatory (occasionally predictive) or prescriptive arguments, in this course I encourage you to focus on the latter. This will enable you to develop a
punchier writing voice, something that will help you excel in the op-ed writing world. A prescriptive argument is one which focuses on the “ought” rather than the “is.” How should things be? Hopefully, though, your “ought” argument is informed by current reality, even if you advocate changing an aspect of the current state of affairs. In a prescriptive op-ed, you are making a case for creating (or changing or challenging) certain policies or practices or attitudes on a given issue. Draw on at least ten sources, at least half of which should be scholarly sources. We will discuss this further in class.

Length: 700-800 words, plus footnotes (or endnotes), including references and extended discussion, and additional data and background within the footnotes or endnotes. See point about pre-submissions below.

Pre-Submissions: You are required to pre-submit at least TWO of your op-eds for comments and feedback. Submit them via CU Learn six days before they are due. So, if you plan to submit an op-ed on the day of class 6 (Tuesday), provide me with the pre-submitted version the previous Wednesday. We will provide you with comments by Sunday at 6 pm (and hopefully earlier), in time for you to revise it for Tuesday’s deadline. (Final submissions should also be submitted to CU Learn.) Make sure all your major research is completed by (and evident in) the pre-submitted draft so that it won’t be too time-consuming for you to fill in any gaps that we identify.

If you are so inspired, I encourage you to send a pitch and/or a full op-ed to an actual outlet (student papers are a good first bet, particularly if you can tie your topic to some area of student or campus interest.) Please feel free to discuss this with me if you’d like additional coaching on a particular submission.

Attendance: Come to class prepared with op-ed draft ideas, and come prepared to discuss the assigned op-eds (See note on “when reading op-eds,” below). After discussing the op-eds assigned for the week, we may workshop some student drafts together.

Wellness: If you are experiencing any sort of distress that interferes with your ability to complete the course work or to generally cope adequately with work/life/school, please feel free to come talk to me. I will try to provide some mentoring from my own varied experiences, and can also point you in the direction of additional professional support services on and off campus. I operate under the assumption that you want to succeed in this course, and I am here to help support you in that.

Readings: Each week, we will read one or two academic articles about opinion writing, argumentation, democracy and the role of public intellectuals, in addition to three or four op-eds. I have assigned the readings on this syllabus up to and including class 4. Thereafter, so that we can discuss op-eds on timely topics, I will email you the readings for discussion 5 days prior to the next class session.

When reading op-eds, consider these questions: What is the author’s guiding question? What is their answer? What is the time/news hook? (Why was this op-ed published now?) How convincing is the author’s argument? What would (or do) critics say? What techniques does the author use to convey the argument in an engaging manner? In the event that there are hyperlinks embedded in the piece, follow them to see if they provide sufficient evidence to support the author’s point. (Pro-tip: if you are writing for a hard-copy outlet you won’t be able to include hyperlinks, of course.)
**Late Penalties:** One percent per day on final drafts and on pre-submissions (taken off of the final draft mark.) Note that pre-submissions — including receiving feedback and revising accordingly — are a very important part of the course. This process will give you a good sense of what it feels like to work with an editor on an op-ed up to and including publishing stage.

**Subscriptions:** Since we have no assigned books in this course, if one or more of the outlets prompts you to buy a temporary subscription (in the event that you’ve maxed out on the free allotted articles), please consider doing so for the semester.

**Class Schedule/Readings**

**Class 1: Intro**

**Class 2: Readings**


**Class 3: Readings** [Note: *trigger warning* for this week’s topic on sex robots and mention of sexual assault.]:


Margaret Somerville, “Brave New Ethicists,” in Wiseman, ed. (see citation above; e-book available through library website).

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-sex-robots-are-coming-do-not-fear-them/article35698109/

(Note: this piece is almost twice the length of our target length for op-eds; I’m including it because it provides a useful counterpoint to the Debra Son piece.)

Class 4: Readings:

Christopher Lasch, “The Lost Art of Political Argument,” Harper’s (1990) — via the library website


Robert Kagan, “This is How Fascism Comes to America,” The Washington Post (18 May 2016),
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/this-is-how-fascism-comes-to-america/2016/05/17/c4e32c58-1c47-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html?utm_term=.d5de1d3f5f35

Thereafter (Classes 5 - 12), I will email you the readings for discussion 5 days prior to our class meeting.

Academic Accommodations
The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

For Religious Observance: Students requesting accommodation for religious observances should apply in writing to their instructor for alternate dates and/or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist, but no later than two weeks before the compulsory academic event. Accommodation is to be worked out directly and on an individual basis between the student and the instructor(s) involved. Instructors will make accommodations in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student. Instructors and students may contact an Equity Services Advisor for assistance (www.carleton.ca/equity).

For Pregnancy: Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity Services to complete a letter of accommodation. Then, make an appointment to discuss your needs with the instructor at least two weeks prior to the first academic event in which it is anticipated the accommodation will be required.

Plagiarism: The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They may include a mark of zero for the plagiarized work or a final grade of “F” for the course.

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).
**Submission and Return of Term Work:** Papers must be submitted directly to the instructor according to the instructions in the course outline and will not be date-stamped in the departmental office. Late assignments may be submitted to the drop box in the corridor outside B640 Loeb. Assignments will be retrieved every business day at 4 p.m., stamped with that day's date, and then distributed to the instructor. For essays not returned in class please attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you wish to have your assignment returned by mail. Final exams are intended solely for the purpose of evaluation and will not be returned.

**Grading:** Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Final standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points is:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>12-point scale</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>12-point scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67-69</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>63-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
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<td>77-79</td>
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<td>73-76</td>
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<td>70-72</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50-52</td>
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**Approval of final grades:** Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

**Carleton E-mail Accounts:** All email communication to students from the Department of Political Science will be via official Carleton university e-mail accounts and/or cuLearn. As important course and University information is distributed this way, it is the student’s responsibility to monitor their Carleton and cuLearn accounts.

**Carleton Political Science Society:** The Carleton Political Science Society (CPSS) has made its mission to provide a social environment for politically inclined students and faculty. Holding social events, debates, and panel discussions, CPSS aims to involve all political science students at Carleton University. Our mandate is to arrange social and academic activities in order to instill a sense of belonging within the Department and the larger University community. Members can benefit through numerous opportunities which will complement both academic and social life at Carleton University. To find out more, visit [https://www.facebook.com/groups/politicalsciencesociety/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/politicalsciencesociety/) or come to our office in Loeb D688.

**Official Course Outline:** The course outline posted to the Political Science website is the official course outline.