

PSCI 4809-D

Special Topics: Op-Ed Writing & Social Media Engagement
Wednesdays 10:00-11:25 EST (by Zoom)

Department of Political Science
Carleton University
<https://carleton.ca/polisci/>
Prof. Mira Sucharov
mira.sucharov@carleton.ca

Office Hours: Thursdays 12:30-2:30 pm EST (by Zoom)

I will send a sign-up sheet to you all that morning. If those times don't work for you, let me know and we can make an appointment at a mutually-agreed-upon time.

With the rise of digital and social media, op-eds (which stand for “opposite the editorial page” and which are also known as opinion pieces) are becoming an increasingly important way for experts to communicate about a range of political and social issues. This seminar will help you hone your own op-ed writing skills around an array of research-based issues, while providing a forum through which to consider how social media dynamics shape debate. Since clarity, precision and the use of logic and evidence are key components of the op-ed form and of constructive social media use generally, the course will serve to sharpen your digital citizenship skills and improve your overall writing.

NOTE: The course will meet for 1.5 hours per week on zoom, with more time allotted to writing and receiving regular feedback and comments on your drafts.

Book: Mira Sucharov, *Public Influence: Op-Ed Writing and Social Media Engagement* (University of Toronto Press, 2019).

Requirements

Attendance and Participation: 25%

Pitch: (similar to the pre-read requirement, feedback will be given but a grade will not be assigned. It is, nevertheless, required.). (due class 4)

Op-Ed 1: 25% (due class 6)

Op-Ed 2: 25% (due class 9)

Op-Ed 3: 25% (due class 12)

All assignments are due by 11 pm, via cuLearn.

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 (appx. 250 words) needs to identify an issue you wish to write about, linking it to a current news “peg.” Explain why the topic is relevant, what broader issues it connects to, what your angle (and argument) will be, and how you will go about supporting your argument. If you wish, you may use the pitch (along with our 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), containing 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. Draw on at least *ten sources*, at least half of which should be scholarly sources. We will discuss this further in class.

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 *prescriptive arguments*. 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? *Who* needs to do *what* around *which* issue?

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 cuLearn six days before they are due. I will provide you with comments within four days, and sooner if possible, in time for you to revise it for the deadline. (Final submissions should also be submitted through cuLearn) Make sure all your major research is completed by (and evident in) the pre-submitted draft so that it won't be too onerous 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 readings (See note on “*when reading op-eds*” below). After discussing the assigned readings, we will try to workshop some student drafts together.

A Note on 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: The readings consist of a combination of academic articles, news pieces, and op-eds, as well as my book, which I wrote with this course in mind.

When reading op-eds, consider these questions:

What is the author's guiding question? What is their answer? What is the news peg? (Why was this op-ed published now?) How persuasive is the author? What would (or do) critics say? Which 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.

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: If one or more of the news outlets we are reading 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 duration of the semester.

Class Schedule

Class 1 (Jan. 13): Intro

Bret Stephens, "Tips for Aspiring Op-Ed Writers," *The New York Times* (25 August 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/opinion/tips-for-aspiring-op-ed-writers.html>

Class 2 (Jan. 20): The Role of Public Intellectuals in Society

Sucharov, Chapters 1 & 2

Busby, Joshua William. "Social Media and the Scholar in an Era of Hyper-Nationalism and Fake News." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50, no. 4 (2017): 1004–1007. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517001160>

Class 3 (Jan. 27): Did They Really Mean What They Wrote?

Sucharov, Chapter 3 & 4

David Brooks, "How We Are Ruining America," *The New York Times* (11 July 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/11/opinion/how-we-are-ruining-america.html>

Caitlin Dewey, "The real problem with David Brooks's sandwich column," *The Washington Post* (11 July 2017) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/07/11/the-real-problem-with-david-brooks-sandwich-column/?utm_term=.47cb7730adc5

Mayim Bialik: "Being a Feminist in Harvey Weinstein's World," *New York Times* (13 October 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/13/opinion/mayim-bialik-feminist-harvey-weinstein.html>

Mayim Bialik, "Beauty and Sexual Assault," *The New York Times* (19 October 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/opinion/mayim-bialik-harvey-weinstein.html>

...and see her apology: <https://www.themarysue.com/mayim-bialik-2nd-apology/>

Benjamin Shinewald, "The Jets are Out, but Winnipeg is Definitely 'In,'" *The Globe and Mail* (22 May 2018). <https://tgam.ca/37hnl8o>

Also: see the news piece about the fallout: *He should be more careful': Indigenous community takes issue with Winnipeg mayor's retweet CBC News* (25 May 2018) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/indigenous-brian-bowman-twitter-globe-mail-1.4677410>

Class 4 (Feb. 3): Using Personal Experience to Advance an Argument

Page, Tiffany. "Vulnerable Writing as a Feminist Methodological Practice." *Feminist Review* 115, no. 1 (2017): 13–29

Jarrar, Raed. "Why Won't Israel Let Me Mourn My Father?" *New York Times* (23 November 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/23/opinion/why-wont-israel-let-me-mourn-my-father.html>

Jaclyn Corin, "Would Congress Care More if Parkland Had Been a Plane Crash?" *The New York Times* (13 February 2019) <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/13/opinion/parkland-anniversary-guns-reform.amp.html>

Aya Hijazi, "Egypt Imprisoned me for Advancing Human Rights. But I Haven't Lost Hope." *The Washington Post* (21 August 2017) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/08/21/egypt-imprisoned-me-for-defending-human-rights-but-i-havent-lost-hope/?utm_term=.424c2b18c064

Charles Blow, "Library Visit, Then Held at Gunpoint," *The New York Times* (24 November 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/26/opinion/charles-blow-at-yale-the-police-detained-my-son.html>

Samantha Ettus, "What it's Like to Win the Lottery as a Woman," *The Washington Post* (24 November 2017) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/what-its-like-to-win-the-lottery-as-a-woman/2017/11/24/c90f67ea-cd69-11e7-9d3a-bcbe2af58c3a_story.html?utm_term=.6a7b5b8b2odb (**content warning: sexual assault**)

Class 5 (Feb. 10): Op-Eds After Tragedies

Mira Sucharov, "Antisemitism isn't Back. It Never Went Away." *The Globe and Mail* (29 October 2018) <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-anti-semitism-isnt-back-it-never-went-away/>

Bret Stephens, "Yes, the President Bears Blame for the Terror From the Right," *The New York Times* (1 November 2018) <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/01/opinion/trump-sayoc-bowers-attacks.html>

Melissa Batchelor Warnke, "We can learn from the Orlando attack, but only if we're willing to be brave," *LA Times* (17 June 2016) <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-ol-orlando-lgbt-nightclub-fear-grief-hate-racism-homophobia-20160616-snap-story.html>

Gary Younge, "Charleston church shooting: Without gun control, racism will keep killing black people," *The Guardian* (18 June 2015) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/18/charleston-church-shooting-gun-control-racism-killing-black-people-us>

Anthea Butler, "Shooters of color are called 'terrorists' and 'thugs.' Why are white shooters called 'mentally ill'?" *Washington Post* https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/06/18/call-the-charleston-church-shooting-what-it-is-terrorism/?utm_term=.d6bc06e62831 (18 June 2015)

Feb. 17 — No Class (Reading Week)

Class 6 (Feb. 24): The Pandemic (AKA How to find your voice on a topic that EVERYONE seems to ALWAYS be talking about)

Sucharov, chapter 6

David Quammen, "The Pandemic, from the Virus's Point of View," *The New York Times* (19 September 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/19/opinion/sunday/coronavirus-covid-evolution.html>

André Picard, "With COVID-19, Canada is paying the price for being complacent," *the Globe and Mail* (2 November 2020)

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-with-covid-19-were-paying-the-price-for-being-complacent/>

Helaine Olen, "How Covid-19 is ripping us apart," *Washington Post* (14 November 2020) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/11/14/how-covid-19-is-ripping-us-apart/>

Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett, "Wartime Christmases can teach us how to 'muddle through' in the time of Covid," *The Guardian* (6 December 2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/06/wartime-christmases-covid>

Class 7 (March 3): Social Media & Democracy

Sucharov, Chapters 7 & 8

Helen Margetts, Rethinking Democracy with Social Media," *The Political Quarterly* (December 2018) <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12574>

Chandan Kumar Jha and Oasis Kodila-Tedika, "Does social media promote democracy? Some empirical evidence," *Journal of Policy Modeling* (25 September 2019)

Ann Friedman, "Social media isn't a social safety net," *LA Times* (23 August 2018) <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-friedman-social-media-safety-set-20180823-story.html>

Thomas L. Friedman, "How Mark Zuckerberg Can Save Facebook — and Us," *The New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/27/opinion/zuckerberg-facebook-digital-bullies.html> (27 March 2018)

Mark Zuckerberg, "Protecting democracy is an arms race. Here's how Facebook can help," *The Washington Post* (4 September 2018) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/mark-zuckerberg-protecting-democracy-is-an-arms-race-heres-how-facebook-can-help-win-it/2018/09/04/53b3c8ee-b083-11e8-9a6a-565d92a3585d_story.html?utm_term=.c725dfb5f3c0

Class 8 (March 10): Race, Gender, Privilege and Representation

"Pick your perspective: Racial group membership and judgments of intent, harm, and discrimination," Stefanie Simon, Aaron J. Moss, Laurie T. O'Brien, *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* (November 2017) <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1368430217735576>

“No, We Won’t ‘Calm Down’: Tone Policing Is Just Another Way to Protect Privilege.” Robot Hugs (Webcomic), accessed on August 6, 2018. <https://www.robot-hugs.com/comic/tone-policing/>

Jamie Utt, “Intent vs. Impact: Why Your Intentions Don’t Really Matter,” *Everyday Feminism* (30 July 2013) <https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/07/intentions-dont-really-matter/>

Melanie Tannenbaum, “‘But I didn’t mean it!’ Why it’s so hard to prioritize impacts over intents,” *Scientific American* (14 October 2013) <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/psysociety/e2809cbut-i-didne28099t-mean-ite2809d-why-ite28099s-so-hard-to-prioritize-impacts-over-intents/>

Dustin Harp, Ingrid Bachmann, Jaime Loke, “Where Are the Women? The Presence of Female Columnists in U.S. Opinion Pages,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* Volume: 91 issue: 2 (2014): 289-307

Taylor Marvin and Barbara F. Walter, “Where Are All the Female Bloggers?” *Political Violence at a Glance* (28 June 2013) <http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2013/06/28/where-are-all-the-female-bloggers/>

Class 9 (March 17): Social Media & Outrage Culture

Sucharov, Chapter 9

Eoin O’Carroll, “How Digital Media Fuels Moral Outrage – And What To Do about It.” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 22, 2017. <https://www.scribd.com/article/359631544/How-Digital-Media-Fuels-Moral-Outrage-And-What-To-Do-About-It>

Aaron Rugar, “Bret Stephens’s ‘Bedbug’ Meltdown, Explained,” *Vox* (27 August 2019) <https://www.vox.com/2019/8/27/20834957/bret-stephens-bedbug-meltdown-dave-karpf-new-york-times-explained>

Kelly Oliver, “Education in the Age of Outrage.” *New York Times*, October 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/16/opinion/education-outrage-morality-shaming.html>

Nadia Khomami, “#MeToo: How a Hashtag Became a Rally Cry against Sexual Harassment,” *The Guardian* (20 October 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/20/women-worldwide-use-hashtag-metoo-against-sexual-harassment>

Joshua Keating, “The Less You Know.” *Slate*, May 20, 2014. http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_world/2014/05/20/the_depressing_reason_why_hashtag_campaigns_like_stopkony_and_bringbackourgirls.html

The Gillette ad controversy:

<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/17/685976624/backlash-erupts-after-gillette-launches-a-new-metoo-inspired-ad-campaign>

Class 10 (March 24): Social Media and Interpersonal Dynamics

Sucharov, Chapters 10 & 11

Jon Ronson, “How One Stupid Tweet Blew Up Justine Sacco’s Life,” *The New York Times* (14 February 2015)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/magazine/how-one-stupid-tweet-ruined-justine-saccos-life.html>

Gwendolyn Seidman, “Self-Presentation and Belonging on Facebook: How Personality Influences Social Media Use and Motivations.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 54, no. 3 (2013): 402–407

Frances Lee, “Why I’ve Started to Fear My Fellow Social Justice Activists.” *YES! Magazine*, October 13, 2017. <https://www.yesmagazine.org/democracy/2017/10/13/why-ive-started-to-fear-my-fellow-social-justice-activists/>

Jane Coaston, “Virtue Signalling Isn’t the Problem. Not Believing One Another Is.” *The New York Times* (8 August 2017) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/08/magazine/virtue-signaling-isnt-the-problem-not-believing-one-another-is.html>

Chou, Hui-Tzu Grace, and Nicholas Edge. “‘They Are Happier and Having Better Lives than I Am’: The Impact of Using Facebook on Perceptions of Others’ Lives.” *CyberPsychology, Behavior and Social Networking* 15, no. 2 (2012): 117–121

Daniella Greenbaum, “The Social Media Mob is a Danger to Society,” *Washington Post* (12 July 2018) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-social-media-mob-is-a-danger-to-society/2018/07/12/eef13834-860b-11e8-9e80-403a221946a7_story.html?utm_term=.4c63868c5636

Class 11 (March 31): Wild Card

I will check to see which topics are animating the op-ed pages this week, and I will email you the op-ed readings five days in advance.

Class 12 (April 7): Social Media & False News (and how strong op-ed writing and constructive social media use can help!)

Robb, Amanda. "Anatomy of a Fake News Scandal." *Rolling Stone*, November 16, 2017. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/pizzagate-anatomy-of-a-fake-news-scandal-w511904>

Thompson, Nicholas. "Exclusive: Facebook Opens Up about False News." *Wired*, May 23, 2018. <https://www.wired.com/story/exclusive-facebook-opens-up-about-false-news/>

Andrew Guess, Jonathan Nagler and Joshua Tucker, "Less than you Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook," *Science Advances* (9 January 2019)

Abeshouse, Bob. "Troll Factories, Bots and Fake News: Inside the Wild West of Social Media." *Al Jazeera*, February 8, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/2/8/troll-factories-bots-and-fake-news-inside-the-wild-west-of-social-media>

Carey, Benedict. "How Fiction Becomes Fact on Social Media." *New York Times*, October 20, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/health/social-media-fake-news.html>

Mike Isaac, "Dissent Erupts at Facebook Over Hands-Off Stance on Political Ads," *The New York Times* (28 October 2019) <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/28/technology/facebook-mark-zuckerberg-political-ads.amp.html>

Accommodations during COVID

Due to COVID, instructors will not request or require a doctor's note when students seek accommodation for missed term work or exams due to illness. Instead, students will be asked to complete the self-declaration form available here: https://carleton.ca/registrar/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19_Self-declaration.pdf

Academic Accommodations

Pregnancy

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

Religious obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC 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 your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and is survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support

Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: students.carleton.ca/course-outline

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.

More information on the University's Academic Integrity Policy can be found at:
<https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

Intellectual property

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).