

Recitation Guide, Recitation Following Lecture #2

Recitation #2:

The Battle Over Information

PURPOSE: Today you look at controls over the flow of information. The CPJ paper, reflections on what they learn about CPJ's work, does a good job of sparking outrage, but it also puts the work of journalism in the larger context of the battle for information. You do want them to develop an attitude about their beliefs about it. And then they are ready for a more nuanced discussion about their decision as CEO of Google.

Google's controversial operation in China is rich with material for discussion about the battle for information and they will have written their papers about what they'd do if they were the CEO of Google. Be prepared to provoke a little bit of ethics/morals debate about Google's obligation to stockholders and its obligation to the public interest. The discussion can move on to other examples of censorship mentioned in the lecture, among them North Korea, Iran, Russia, and Mexico. It's always fun to ask if developing countries can afford to relax controls on information.

Lest the debate lapse into xenophobic China bashing, raise questions about efforts by the United States government to censor information and spread propaganda among its own citizens or abroad.

I. ORGANIZATION:

Take attendance

Check whether students have any questions or concerns about the syllabus, the use of Blackboard or SafeAssign.

Remind students they should follow the news closely in preparation for discussions and quizzes

II. NEWS QUIZ #1:

NOTE: Check with your lecturer on whether your group is beginning weekly news quizzes this week or next. If you are giving a quiz today, it's best to review the answers as soon as students complete the quiz.

III. REVIEW CPJ ASSIGNMENT:

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- Ask why journalists like Kim Dozier take such chances. They watched the video about her. Do they think she was in the wrong place, or that bombers meant to harm her along with U.S. troops.
- Ask students for their reactions to the CPJ's work. Which specific cases are they reacting to. Are they surprised by the statistics? Why?
- Revisit the story of Lasantha Wickrematunge, the Sri Lankan editor whose final editorial portended his own assassination.
- Let students make an argument for taking such risks or not.
- Would you do it? Why or why not?
- What is gained when reporters go to these places?
- What is lost when they don't?
- Are citizens worse off in places like North Korea, where the government has rendered the masses deaf and mute? (Don't be afraid to play the Devil's advocate)

Read aloud the quote from the late Razia Bhatti, a female Pakistani journalist and champion of press freedoms: *"I see the journalist's role as both reporter and crusader. In a civilization that seems to be regressing into new holocausts, we must seek and speak the truth, for we are the voice of voiceless millions. Having chosen this profession, we cannot be afraid to speak the truth no matter what the cost. And by speaking, I personally believe we can change the world."* Does her approach raise questions of independence? If you declare yourself the voice of the voiceless, are you an advocate? How is this different from a journalist declaring herself the voice of students at Stony Brook or the voice of any sub-group of students? (gender, race, religion, politics, major, etc)

IV. CHINA GOOGLE:

This is where the discussion zooms in on China as an example of government censorship. Stress that China is just an example. Refer to lecture info on how widespread censorship is.

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Start by asking students to summarize the situation, based on the readings. How did Google come to operate in China? What compromises did it have to make to get a share of that market?

Prompt them to debate the ethics and efficacy of those compromises. Review the written assignment:

What would you have done as a Google executive?

As a foreign journo, Would you pursue news stories that might violate China's policies on foreign media?

Or would you comply with Chinese restrictions?

Why or why not?

Discuss info from readings on how Chinese netizens cope, in part by evading the censors, and how others take risks to publicly protest censorship.

What are the competing forces at work here?

Reference Kristof's columns on how the internet is changing China and how more info is getting through.

Can wrap up with reflections on the U.S. State Department's internet freedom program and diplomatic attempts to pressure repressive governments to loosen their holds on info. Note that Secretary of State Clinton has made this push about economic prosperity as well as human rights. Why could the economic arguments be more effective?

V. ASSIGNMENTS:

Check your course schedule and brief students on upcoming readings, viewings and written work assignments.