# "Teaching the 2016 U.S. Election" Editors' Notes and Introduction

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## Teaching the 2016 Election

### Editors' Notes and Introduction

**Heidi Zimmerman, Lauren Weinzimmer, Rebecca Jurisz & Joy Hamilton**

We're celebrating our fourth anniversary by revisiting the theme of our inaugural issue: Teaching the U.S. Election. As the school year begins, we know instructors and students alike are captivated by the current election and looking for ways to make sense of the role of media in political life. As in past election cycles, voters and politicians alike claim news media are central to shaping the political conversation. How can we give students tools to unpack these claims? Our contributors in this issue offer engaging activities that invite students to map the ways in which media shape politics in the U.S.

Federica Fornaciari and Laine Goldman's "Framing the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: One Story, Many Crosscultural Tales," is a media literacy lesson. It asks students to bring cultural values and frame theory to bear on coverage of electoral politics in order to think about gender bias. The authors include two assignments and an in-class activity, which can be used in tandem or as stand-alone units. In Assignment 1, students work in groups to select a news event, follow coverage of that event across a number of global outlets, and then present their comparative analysis to the class. In Assignment 2, students work independently to analyze gender bias in US news outlets, presenting their findings in a journal entry or a blog post. In the final in-class activity, students watch an episode of the fictional television series *House of Cards Season 2* and brainstorm in groups what an episode would look like were the female lead to become president.

In "The News Flip Exercise: Finding Patriarchy, Racism and Other Forms of Bias in Language," Mary Bock offers an in-class exercise in which students analyze bias in election coverage by looking at, first, the language used in coverage, and second, the facts that were selected to include in the coverage. The activity aims to help students see how white, hetero-patriarchal norms often structure coverage. Students type up real news stories about political candidates, twice, each time changing the candidate's name. The first time, students keep the gender of the candidate the same, but substitute a fictional name. The second time, they "flip" the gender, by likewise inserting a fictional name. The instructor displays the accounts on the screen and the class votes on whether they believe story is original or flipped, and discuss the clues they noticed.

Caroline Claiborn Way's group activity "Make Your Own Daily Show Report" first appeared in our 2012 election issue, but we share it again here as a lively and relevant activity for students of U.S. political coverage. Working in groups over the course of the semester students select a narrow topic within election coverage, and closely follow coverage of that specific issue. After a period of guided research and reflection, students develop arguments related to the coverage and think through ways to use humor and satire as rhetorical strategies to present these arguments. Finally, students assemble clips and compose content to contextualize the clip that may feature a Daily Show style monologue, correspondents, or an interview.

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The 2016 election has thrown questions of identity, economics and globalization into the foreground in unprecedented ways, while still operating within a context structured by specific political histories. These lesson plans bring current events into the classroom, providing a framework for students to investigate and contextualize the ways in which candidates, policies, and the election are represented as mediated discourses.

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