Welcome to Northwestern University! You are beginning a great adventure and a significant life transition. College not only provides an opportunity to have fun, to mature socially, but it also provides an opportunity for an intellectual community. You have four years in which to discuss any and all intellectual topics that you have ever been concerned about. You are surrounded by people who care about these ideas, including faculty, staff, graduate students, and other undergraduates. So, party (responsibly), but also use this time to learn about those things that matter to you. You will never have another four years like these.

College life will be for most of you a new and strange experience. Some of you will fit into campus life smoothly, and your freshman year will be a joyous highpoint of your life. Others will have difficulty: socially, emotionally, or intellectually. If so, there are people here to help you. People at Northwestern care about you. I am one of those people. I have included my home telephone number, and will offer advice when you need it. While I do not encourage you to call in the wee hours of the morning, if you are in trouble, if you need help, call at any time. Each year some first year students find themselves severely depressed, gripped by anxiety attacks, panicked, afraid of failure, or engaged in destructive or compulsive behaviors. If you fall in one of these categories, you will not be the first, you will not be alone, and there are people here who can help through difficult times. I cannot emphasize too strongly how helpful it will be for you to have someone with whom to talk. While you might feel embarrassed sharing your problems, it will help brighten dark nights. I am not only your professor, but your advisor for fall quarter, and will be happy to talk with you throughout your freshman year and beyond. While I may not know the answer to every question that you ask, you and I will
together find out those answers. (In winter quarter you are assigned a college advisor, but we can continue our discussions.)

Remember you were admitted to Northwestern because we felt that you were wonderful, not because we felt that you were perfect. Our goal is to help insure that every student who is admitted graduates and that each student looks back on these four years with satisfaction.

This relates directly to this course. The Freshman Seminar is designed for first-year students. We will work hard, but we will also work slowly. This is a college course, but it is a college course that recognizes that your previous experience is with high school classes. In the course we will be reading some articles and books that professors write for each other. I selected them because they are not hyper-technical, but they will be a challenge if you have not been exposed to this level or style of writing previously. However, there will be a lot of sharing and a lot of support, particularly in the first weeks.

Although the topic of the course is “Scandals and Reputations,” the real topic of the course is “thinking, reading, researching, and writing on the collegiate level.” We will spend time discussing each of these things, and, because I serve as your advisor for the fall quarter, we may also discuss other issues of your transition to college. As we are a community, there will be a lot of group discussion and you will receive a lot of feedback on your writing. Note that there has been considerable discussion about what are now called “trigger warnings,” announcements about potentially sensitive topics. Given that you selected a seminar that examines scandals, I assume that you do not need such warnings (we will be discussing scandalous behavior), but if you are concerned about the content of the course, please talk with me.

Over the course of the quarter, you will be asked to write approximately twenty pages: ranging from short essays to a lengthier research paper. Some of you find writing satisfying; others find writing painful. For those of you in this second category, I do not suggest that you concentrate on math, but I will work with you to give you the skills to write, even if you never fall in love with putting words on paper.

I assign on average 100 pages of reading per week (some weeks more, some less), so you should expect to read 1000 pages this quarter, not including the reading for your research papers.

Grading is based on the papers and projects with class participation used for borderline grades. Attendance is expected (try to miss no more than two classes this quarter) and class
participation is essential.

Each time I teach this class, it changes. I may alter the syllabus throughout the quarter, hopefully to insure that it meets your needs. But, as I will be providing you with feedback, I hope that you will provide me with feedback on those things that have worked and those things that have failed to inspire you. Make those suggestions during the quarter, not afterwards. And rely on your peer advisor, who can provide indirect feedback to me. Courtney Skula was an excellent student in this seminar last year, she has a sense of what I expect, and she is very good about keeping information confidential. Trust her with your comments.

The university provides $100 in support for the class attending a play or other event, or inviting a speaker, and also provides an additional $100 for a social event. We should think how to use this support during the fall quarter. If any of you like to arrange social events, let me know.

READINGS

Joel Best, Damn Lies and Statistics
Patricia Bonomi, The Lord Cornbury Scandal
John Caughey, Imaginary Social Worlds (unavailable at Norris, but a selection will be on electronic reserve)
Gary Alan Fine, Difficult Reputations
Jill Lepore, The Whites of their Eyes
Sanford Levinson, Written in Stone
Donileen Loseke, Thinking About Social Problems, Second Edition
Michael Schudson, Watergate in American Memory (unavailable at Norris, but a selection will be on electronic reserve)
Barry Schwartz, Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory
Daniel Solove, The Future of Reputation

The material in Best, Bonomi, Fine, Lepore, Levinson, Schwartz, and Solove may not be available on electronic reserve (the rules keep changing). If not, all books should be available at library reserve. Even though there are a lot of books listed, you will typically be reading a chapter or two. I recommend that you purchase Bonomi and Levinson because of the amount of reading in
those books, but if you love books (or love scandal), you might consider purchasing all.

SCHEDULE

September 20    INTRODUCTION: SCANDALS IN POLITICS AND THE ARTS


September 22    DISCUSSION OF SCANDALS: HOW DO WE "KNOW" CELEBRITIES?

John Caughey, Imaginary Social Worlds, Prologue

September 27    PERSONAL REPUTATION

ACADEMIC FOCUS: HOW TO READ ACADEMIC ARTICLES


September 29    REPUTATION ON THE INTERNET

ACADEMIC FOCUS: HOW TO WRITE BRIEF PAPERS

Daniel Solove, The Future of Reputation, Chapters Three and Four


For those who are willing, we will display and discuss your social media pages (Facebook, etc.) and my blog. Be prepared.

October 4    POLITICAL SCANDAL

Michael Schudson, Watergate in American Memory, Chapters Introduction, Chapter 1

PAPER # 1: ANALYSIS OF THE REPUTATION OF A FRIEND OR ACQUAINTANCE (1-2 pages)

October 6 CONSTRUCTING A SCANDAL

ACADEMIC FOCUS: HOW TO WRITE A FIRST PARAGRAPH

Gary Alan Fine, Difficult Reputations, Chapter Two (Warren Harding)

Joshua Gamson, “Old Stories, New Rules: Scandal in the Age of Sexting.” Forthcoming in Gina Chen and Hinda Mandell, eds. Scandal in an Age of (Self) Surveillance. This essay will be provided to you

October 11 THE IMAGE OF SCANDAL

ACADEMIC FOCUS: HOW TO LEARN FROM CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

No Reading

SCREENING OF “WAG THE DOG” (class will run until about 5:30 p.m.)

October 13 INVESTIGATING HISTORICAL SCANDAL

ACADEMIC FOCUS: HOW TO SKIM A BOOK

Patricia Bonomi, The Lord Cornbury Scandal: The Politics of Reputation in British America, all, skim (limit reading time to one hour)

ACADEMIC FOCUS: HOW TO CHOOSE A TOPIC FOR A PAPER

October 18 THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

ACADEMIC FOCUS: HOW TO USE THE LIBRARY

Donileen Loseke, Thinking About Social Problems, Chapter 1

PAPER: Address one of the scandals of the campaign: Hillary’s emails, Donald’s taxes, Hillary’s role in Bengazi, Donald’s hiring foreign workers, Hillary’s ties to the Clinton foundation when Secretary of State, Donald’s not renting to African Americans, or any other scandals of these two worthies or their lovable spouses. Your goal is not to suggest whether these claims are true, but rather what their publicity says about the nature of scandal in the media and how it might affect the election. (3-5 pages, no references required, but cite anything you use).

October 20 NO CLASS
October 25 UNDERSTANDING STATISTICS
Joel Best, Damn Lies and Statistics, Introduction, Chapters 1-3, 6

PROJECT: DISCOVER THE ORIGIN OF A STATISTIC

October 27 SOCIAL PROBLEMS: BIG AND SMALL

ACADEMIC FOCUS: HOW TO REWRITE A PAPER


November 1 CASE STUDIES OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

ACADEMIC FOCUS: PLANNING A RESEARCH PAPER

No Reading

Discussion of papers

PAPER: ANALYSIS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SOCIAL PROBLEM (3-5 pages; 3-5 sources)

November 3 HISTORY WARS

Jill Lepore, Prologue, Chapter 5, Epilogue

November 8 ELECTION DAY

George Saunders, “Who Are All These Trump Supporters?” New Yorker (July 11 and 18, 2016).


Read four other articles two about the reputation of Hillary (one pro, one con) and Donald (one pro, one con)

November 10 THE AFTERMATH
Your own discussion of the election outcome, scandals, and reputations

SELECT TOPIC FOR PAPER #4: CHOICE AMONG FOLLOWING PRESIDENTS: John Adams, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Martin Van Buren, John Tyler, James Polk, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, Chester Arthur, Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, William Howard Taft, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, Gerald Ford

November 15  COMMENORATIONS
Sanford Levinson, Written in Stone, pp. 3-74

ACADEMIC FOCUS: TAKING NOTES FOR A RESEARCH PAPER

PROJECT: Design a memorial that deals in some way with immigration to the United States.

November 17  COLLECTIVE MEMORY

ACADEMIC FOCUS: ORGANIZING TO WRITE A RESEARCH PAPER

Barry Schwartz, Chapters Introduction, 1, 3-6

The class will be divided into groups of three. Each group will be assigned to present one of the following chapters to the class, which you should read carefully, and skim the others, understanding the major concepts.

November 22  UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR PROBLEMS

Max Clarke and Gary Alan Fine. “‘A’ is for Apology: Slavery and the Discourse of Remonstrance in American Universities.” History & Memory 22, 2010, 81-112.

Gary Alan Fine, Adam Mendel, Heather Menefee, and Forrest Bruce, “Sand Creek Massacre a Moral Stain on NU’s Past.” Daily Northwestern (January 24, 2013): 4. (To be provided)

HAND OUT “Take Home Final”

November 24  NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 29  GENERATIONAL MEMORY

ACADEMIC FOCUS: READING A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

December 3       ORAL PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PAPER (Class lasts until about 7:30 p.m. Pizza Dinner)

December 8       FINAL PAPER and TAKE HOME FINAL DUE

PAPER #4: ANALYSIS OF THE REPUTATION OF A PAST PRESIDENT (8-10 pages; based on significant research)

Due Thursday December 8th by 10:00 p.m. To be sent as an email attachment.