

Religion in the Media Workshop

Part I: Weekly tracking of religion in the news

Meet in your media groups to discuss your findings of your week two assignment to track religion in the news. Have one person take notes of the discussion.

Specifically, discuss:

1. Your four specific news sources, representing U.S. mainstream, U.S. alternative, international and specialty religious
2. Which religions, issues, people or events were covered?
3. Which issues about religion did you not find that might have been interesting?
4. What patterns did you notice?
5. Where did the stories fall in terms of Abdallah's classification of informative, appreciative, accusative, provocative and offensive (*Quoting God*, p. 127)?

As a group, synthesize your findings into three key highlights. Report back to the whole group.

Part II: Think Tank Workshop

You see their experts on talk shows and cable news. Non-governmental research institutes, or think tanks, are increasingly wielding a disproportionate amount of power in shaping public policy and public debate within government circles. They wield influence over issues of national and international concerns, including how we think about religion. Who are these experts? Who funds the think tanks? What are their philosophies? What are their agendas?

For this assignment, you will be working in your media groups in order to understand how think tanks operate. It will include Internet research, creation of a poster reflecting your group's findings and a 5-minute presentation of your findings to the class.

Each group is assigned to look at **one** of the following think tanks:

1. American Enterprise Institute
2. Brookings Institute
3. Center for American Progress
4. Discovery Institute
5. Pew Research Center for People and the Press
6. Cato Institute

Each group meets. What do you know, if anything, about this tank from the start? What, if anything, does the name tell you? Discuss briefly and list what you know.

Next, using your laptop or the Computer Center, find the Web site of your assigned think tank and read over it to get a general sense of the think tank. Then **using the think tank's search engine**, search "religion" to get a sense of what types of religion issues the group has addressed. Discuss your findings as a group.

Next, divide up the following question among your group so that everyone has 1-2 questions to research and present on to the whole group:

1. What do you think is the general philosophy or political orientation of the think tank? What evidence can you cite?
2. What types of articles or studies on religion do they have? What types of stories might journalists use them for (you might want to refer to your notes and our discussion on religion in the news from week I. Suzanne's lecture is on the program wiki)? Do any of the stories fit into news categories not generally covered? If so, what new categories can you suggest?
3. How "good" is their research (define "good")? How well documented are their papers? How sound is their methodology for doing public opinion surveys (define "sound")?
4. What trends do you notice about the think tank's religion articles?
5. Who is on the board of directors or trustees? What kinds of organizations, businesses, interests, do they represent?
6. Identify one person associated with your think tank, and do a search on him/her to identify what types of opinions he/she has on issues of religion or related areas, such as ethics.
7. Would you use this site for research? Why or why not?

After researching your think tank, groups come back to class, create a poster, and plan a 5-minute presentation (stay on time!) on your think tank.