

2003 Year in Review

TV's Leading News Topics, Reporters, and Political Jokes

Major findings:

- **The Big Story** Almost 30% of all news in 2003 was about Iraq. *Page 1*
- **Arnold Is #1** The California recall got more coverage than the presidential campaign pre-season. *Page 5*
- **Crime Wave Crests** Crime news fell to its lowest level since 1992. *Page 2*
- **Old News** Coverage of Israel dropped over 60% from 2002. *Page 4*
- **The New Frontier** Only two foreign countries got more coverage than outer space. *Page 4*
- **Howls to the Chiefs** Bush, Clinton, "Arnold," and Saddam were the top targets of late night comedians. *Page 5*

During 2003 we monitored all 11,834 news stories broadcast on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news programs. We also logged 2,475 jokes about public affairs and public figures from the monologues of late night television comics Jay Leno, David Letterman and Conan O'Brien. This annual review issue of *Media Monitor* chronicles the leading news topics, most visible reporters and leading targets of political humor on TV during 2003.

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The war with Iraq and its aftermath was the dominant news story of 2003. Driven by the heavy coverage of Iraq, foreign coverage soared to a record setting 43 percent of all stories. If we excluded Iraq, foreign news would account for 19 percent of stories, a level more in line with the level of coverage we found in the late 1990s (see *Media Monitor* Nov/Dec. 2002). Other than Iraq, the leading countries in the news were Israel (337 stories), North Korea (152), Afghanistan (98), Liberia (88), Saudi Arabia (83) and Iran (78).

Top Ten Topics

#1 Iraq—There were 3,433 stories about the build-up to the Iraq war, the war itself and the post war period. That represents 29 percent of all stories during the year. Nothing approached this unprecedented level of

coverage since we began network news tracking in 1988. Although the first Gulf War dominated the news in 1990 and 1991, it never accounted for more than 18 percent of the news.

The build-up to war with Iraq (Jan 1st through March 18th) was covered in 810 stories. The war itself, from March 19th through May 1st, when President Bush declared an end to “major hostilities,” was the subject of 1,052 stories. There were 1,571 stories during the remainder of the year, as the U.S. hunted Saddam Hussein and other regime leaders, searched for weapons of mass destruction, battled guerilla attacks, and tried to build a transition to civilian Iraqi control.

#2 Crime – Crime was the number two topic for the second year in a row with 1,002 stories. While crime reporting

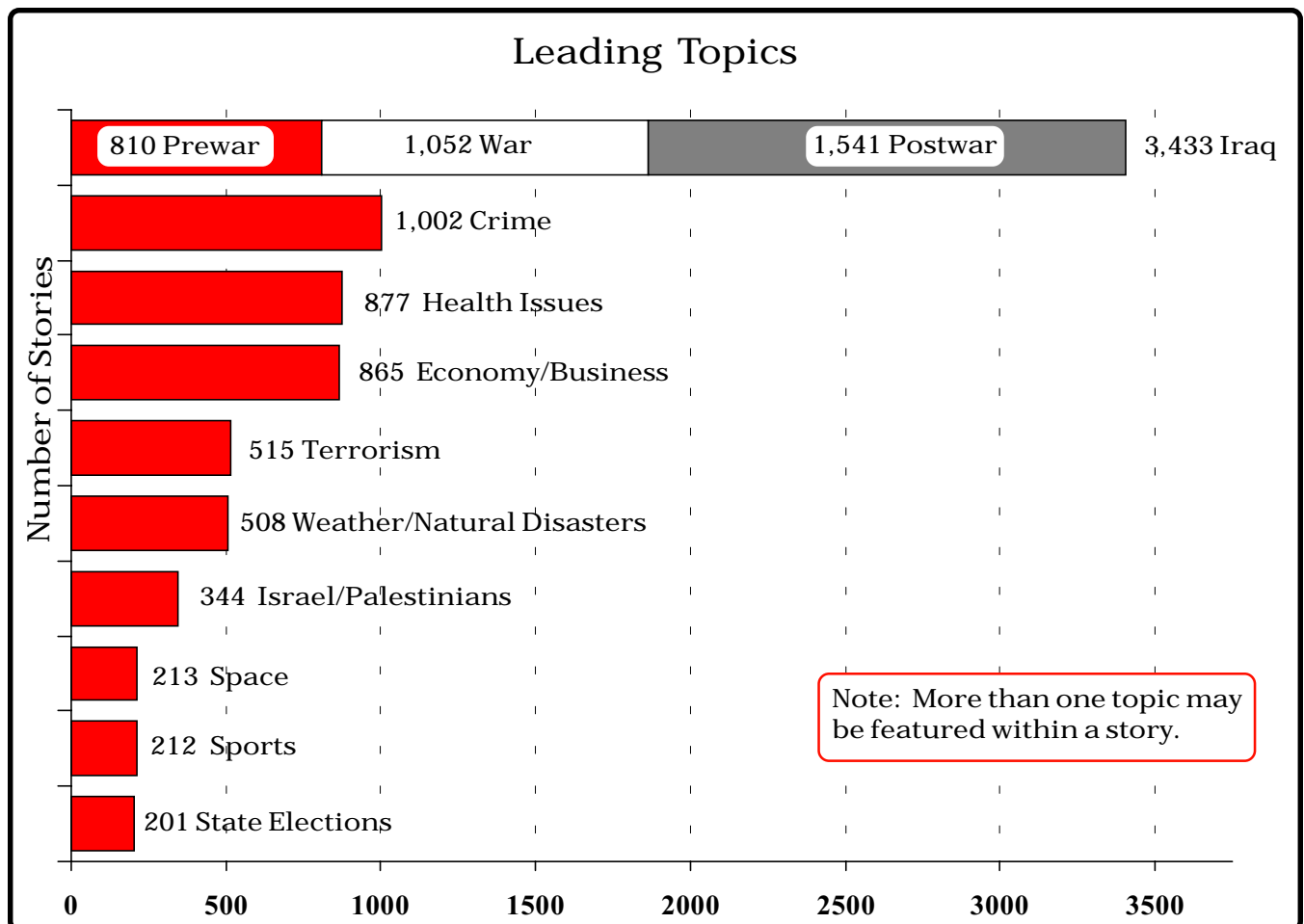
held second place, coverage fell 24 percent from 2002, the lowest level in over a decade (830 in 1992).

As in previous years, homicides dominated crime stories (212). The trial of the DC sniper suspects (47), the Laci Peterson murder (16), the death of college basketball player Patrick Dennehy (15) and the murder of college student Dru Sjodin (12) were among the major stories.

The investigation and prosecution of terrorism suspects in the U.S. placed second (121 stories). This included continuing disclosures of new information on the attack on the World Trade Center (64), the capture of Eric Rudolph for the 1996 Olympic park bombing (23) and the prosecution of Zaccharius Moussaoui (11).

Allegations of fraud were the next most common crime in the news, with 90 stories. This reflects the ongoing trials and investigations of corporate accounting scandals at Enron, WorldCom and other companies (31), as well the Martha Stewart case (19). Rape was covered in 65 stories. Over half were about the Kobe Bryant case (36). Allegations of rape at the Air Force Academy added another eight stories. Stories about child abuse (60) were almost evenly split between scandals in the Catholic Church (32) and new allegations against Michael Jackson (28), which broke in November. Coverage of illegal drugs remained at a very low level (31 stories).

#3 Health Issues – There were 877 stories about health in 2003, a 14



percent increase over 2002. The dominant focus in was new information on diseases (334 stories). The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) across Asia and Canada drove disease coverage with 161 stories. Mad Cow Disease in Canada also grabbed attention (27 stories.) Concerns over more common diseases such as cancer (64), the flu (48), and heart disease (20) fell from previous years.

Health care policy issues grabbed headlines because of plans for Medicare expansion (52 stories) and discussions of high prescription drug prices (38). This subject fueled the debate over the prescription drug benefit plan passed by Congress in the fall. Discussions of health care costs (25) and health insurance (24) rounded out the discussions of health care policy issues.

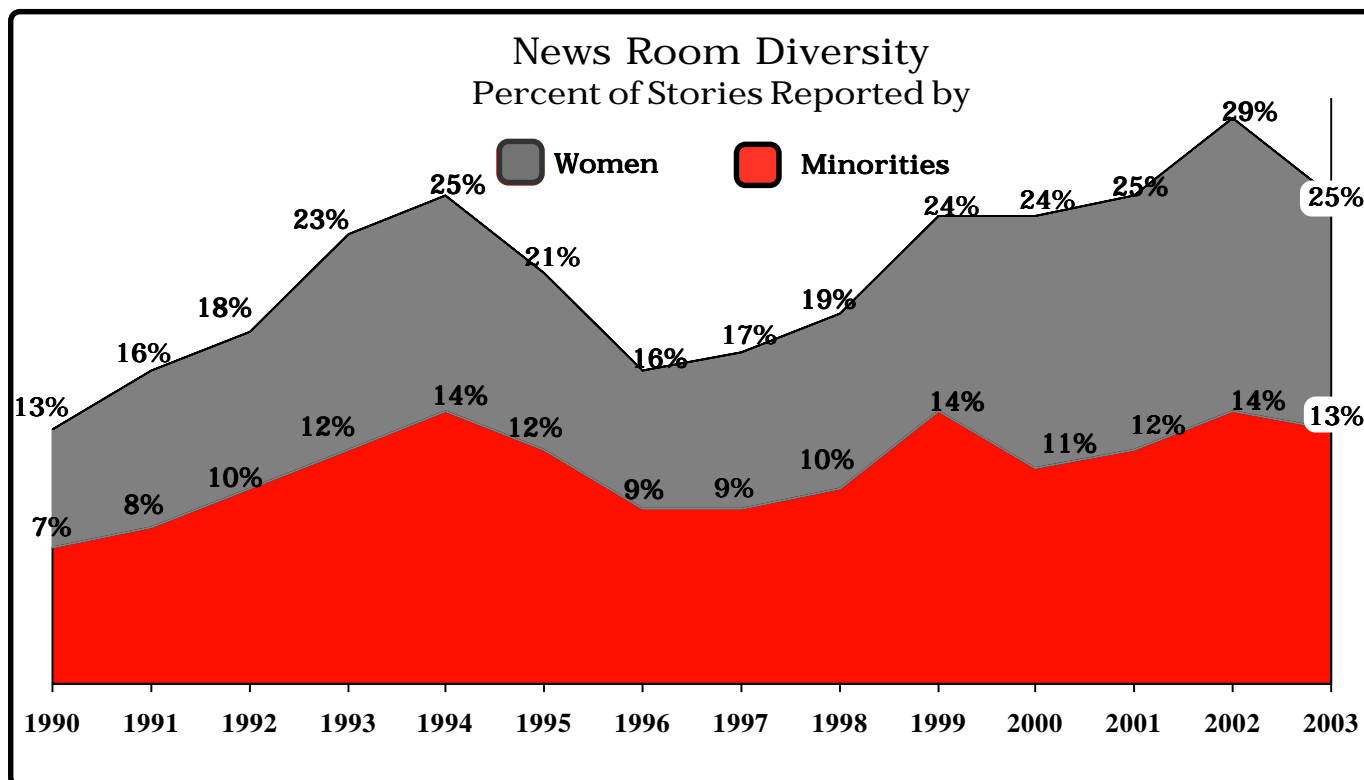
#4 Economy/Business – News about the state of the American economy and business took fourth place with 865 stories, down 29 percent from the year before. Coverage was almost evenly divided between news about the general economy (438) and news about specific industries or business in general (427). The overall decrease reflects a drop in the coverage of corporate scandals. News about the general state of the economy rose by 20 percent (from 364 stories to 438.)

#5 Homeland Security/Terrorism – With a new war in Iraq and the Department of Homeland Security settling down to business, coverage of terrorism declined to fifth place with 515 stories. Slightly more than half (52%) dealt with homeland security. The 271 stories on this subject dealt with domestic efforts to prevent or prepare for a terrorist attack. Among these were Tom Ridge's confirmation as secretary of the new department, reorganization problems as the new department began work, and continued budget questions. Throughout the year there were reports on efforts to tighten

Most Visible Reporters in 2003

	# Stories	Race	Gender	Network
1. Peter Jennings*	166	W	M	ABC
2. Tom Brokaw*	145	W	M	NBC
3. Martha Raddatz	144	W	F	ABC
4. Andrea Mitchell	141	W	F	NBC
5. Terry Moran*	140	W	M	ABC
6. John Roberts*	134	W	M	CBS
7. David Martin	131	W	M	CBS
8. Jim Miklaszewski	128	W	M	NBC
9. Robert Hager	122	W	M	NBC
10. Pete Williams	121	W	M	NBC
11. Jim Avila	114	H	M	NBC
12. Dan Rather*	109	W	M	CBS
13. David Gregory	107	W	M	NBC
14. Dan Harris	101	W	M	ABC
15. Anne Thompson	96	W	F	NBC
16. Robert Bazell	92	W	M	NBC
17. Lisa Myers	86	W	F	NBC
18. Jim Axelrod	83	W	M	CBS
19. Brian Williams*	80	W	M	NBC
20. John McWethy	79	W	M	ABC
21. Bob Orr	74	W	M	CBS
22. Lee Cowan	73	W	M	CBS
23. Ned Potter	70	W	M	CBS
Brian Ross	70	W	M	ABC
25. Anthony Mason*	69	W	M	CBS
26. Dean Reynolds*	68	W	M	ABC
27. Jim Stewart	67	W	M	CBS
28. John Cochran	66	W	M	ABC
John McKenzie	66	W	M	ABC
Betsy Stark	66	W	F	ABC
Elizabeth Kaledin	66	W	F	CBS
32. Lisa Stark	65	W	F	ABC
Pierre Thomas	65	B	M	ABC
Byron Pitts	65	B	M	CBS
35. Mark Phillips	64	W	M	CBS
36. Linda Douglas	62	W	F	ABC
37. Cynthia Bowers	61	W	F	CBS
Sandra Hughes	61	W	F	CBS
Jim Acosta	61	W	M	CBS
40. Sharyl Attkisson	59	W	F	CBS
Bob McNamara	59	W	M	CBS
42. Bob Jamieson	58	W	M	NBC
David Hawkins	58	W	M	CBS
44. Jim Meceda	57	W	M	NBC
45. Campbell Brown*	56	W	F	NBC
46. Jim Sciutto	55	W	M	ABC
David Wright	55	W	M	ABC
Ron Allen	55	B	M	NBC
Rosiland Jordan	55	B	F	NBC
50. Elizabeth Palmer	54	W	F	NBC
Roger O'Neil	54	W	M	NBC

*Note: Excludes "headline" anchor-read stories.



airline and airport security, concerns about possible biological or chemical attacks and the security risks of illegal immigration. Increases in the Homeland Security Threat Advisory also increased media attention.

The other big story in this area was the ongoing pursuit of Osama bin Laden and other members of al Qaeda. There were 132 stories on this subject including the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and members of a suspected al Qaeda cell in Spain. President Bush and Pakistani President Musharref met and rededicated their joint war on terrorism. The year ended with a confirmed audio tape from bin Laden, the closing of three U.S. diplomatic missions in Saudi Arabia due to terrorist threats, and al Qaeda-sponsored attacks on synagogues in Turkey.

#6 Weather/Natural Disasters – Severe weather and natural disasters have made the top ten topic list for each of the past eight years. In 2003, such

events placed sixth with 508 stories. That represents a seven percent drop from 2002 levels, in keeping with the wide fluctuations in coverage we have seen over the years.

As in the past three years, wildfires were the biggest story (137). With the hurricane season starting earlier than usual and more storms making landfall in the U.S., coverage rose to 130 stories. That is almost double the level we found in 2002 (78 vs. 130).

Rounding out coverage of severe weather were reports on heavy snowstorms (65), tornadoes (58) and severe rainstorms (45).

#7 Israel – Coverage of Israel and the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians fell to 344 stories. That is a 62 percent drop from 2002, a time when suicide bombings and other violence were running rampant. While news about Israel declined from last year, it continued to be dominated by violence. Terrorism and government

actions to stop the violence were the subject of 254 stories or three quarters of all reports on Israel.

The peace process and efforts to find a long term solution were covered in 49 stories. That is consistent with previous years, when the peace process lagged far behind coverage of violence.

#8 Space – Overall, space exploration was the topic of 213 stories. In fact, outer space drew more attention than every nation on earth except Iraq and Israel. The loss of the space shuttle Columbia in February and the subsequent investigations were the subject of 165 stories. Questions of culpability and debate about the future of the shuttle dominated news throughout the year.

#9 Sports – Sports placed ninth with 212 stories. Coverage focused on the major sports that usually dominate coverage. Baseball received the most coverage (41 stories), much of it

focused on the pennant races, the playoffs and the controversy over Sammy Sosa's use of a corked bat. Golf (27) placed higher than usual due to coverage of the first woman, Annika Sorenstam, to compete in a PGA tournament in almost six decades. Football was the topic of 21 stories, horse racing 15, and Lance Armstrong's Tour de France cycling victory garnered 13 stories.

#10 State Elections (CA) – There were 201 stories about state elections, most of them focused on the California gubernatorial recall (182 stories). The campaign which featured actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, attracted more attention than the presidential campaign pre-season. More information about how the networks covered the campaign pre-season may be found on our website at www.cmpa.com/pressrel/EW200401.htm.

Newsroom Diversity

Newsroom diversity declined slightly in 2003, but the shifts were well within the variations seen over the past few years. Female reporters filed 25 percent

of stories, down from 29 percent the year before but about the same as 1999, 2000 and 2001. Minority reporters were seen in 13 percent of reports, down one percent from 2002. As with women, this level was roughly equivalent to levels since 1999.

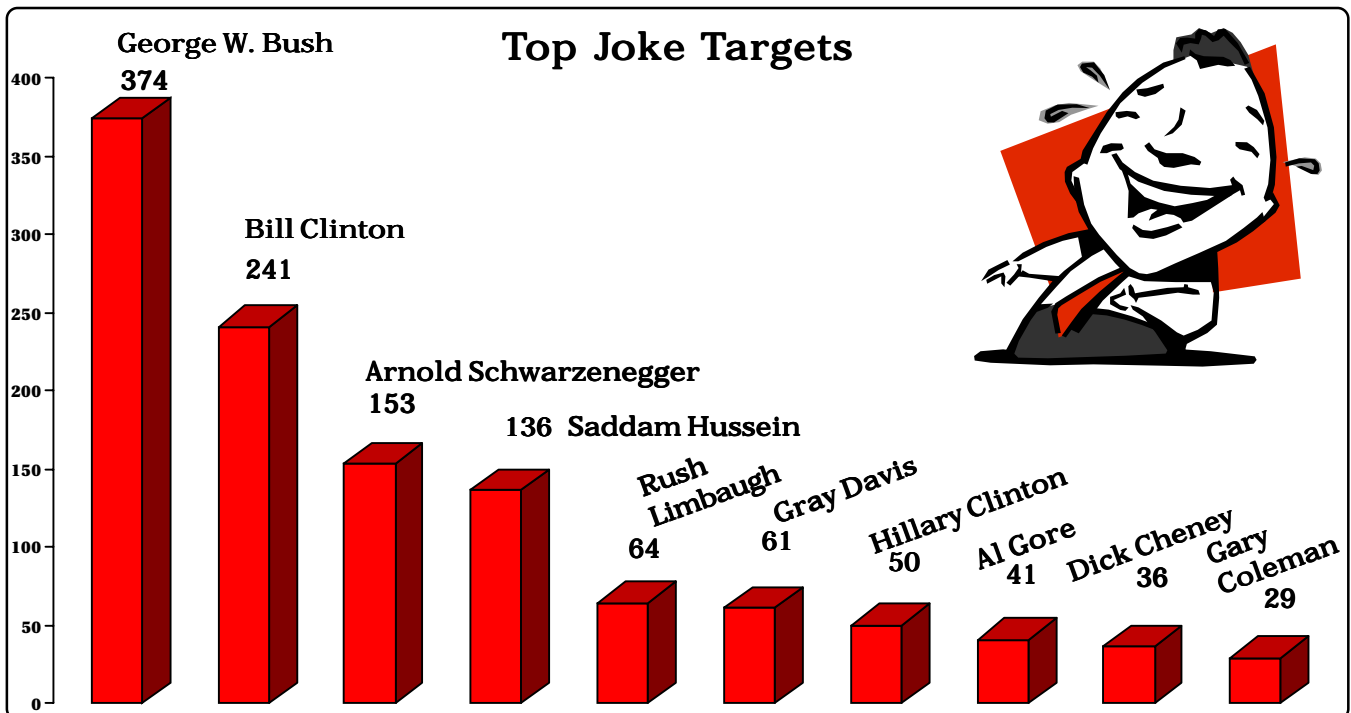
The three networks were equally likely to air stories by female reporters. One quarter (25%) of reports on ABC and NBC were filed by women while women accounted for 24 percent of reports on CBS. For ABC and NBC this represents a clear decline from 2002. On NBC women's representation fell six percent, while on ABC it dropped five percent. The networks also differed in the exposure they gave to minority reporters. NBC "Nightly News" was the most diverse, with minority reporters filing one in seven reports (15%). This matches 2002 levels. At CBS "Evening News" minority reporters accounted for 12 percent of stories (a drop of one percent from 2002). On ABC "World News Tonight," minorities were found in 10 percent of stories, which translates into a four percent drop from 2002.

As in 2002, virtually all of the most prominent reporters were white. For the third straight year NBC's Jim Avila was the only minority reporter to make the top 25. With 114 stories, Mr. Avila placed 11th this year. As a result, not a single minority reporter made the top ten in 2003. For the second year in a row, the next most visible minority reporter was ABC's Pierre Thomas (32nd place and 65 stories.) As in 2002, five minority reporters made it to the top 50.

Female reporters enjoyed a greater prominence, with two women making the top ten. The two most prominent women were ABC's Martha Raddatz (144 stories) and NBC's Andrea Mitchell (141). A total of four women made it to the top 25, down from six in 2002. Fourteen women placed in the top 50, down from the 17 in 2002.

Political Punchlines

Once again, the President was tops in the late night joke tallies. George W. Bush was in first place with 374 jokes, a 17 percent rise from 2002. A plurality



of jokes concerned his intellect and his fitness to be President. This joke topic was driven by a series of Bush gaffes, including choking on a pretzel, falling off a scooter, and dropping his dog. The war with Iraq and the search for weapons of mass destruction, were no laughing matter, accounting for only 12 percent of the President's total.

Former President Bill Clinton came in second place, with 241 jokes, up from 190 in 2002. Almost 30 percent of jokes about the former President and 60 percent of the former first lady's jokes came in June, when Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton's book was released. Ms. Clinton placed seventh, with 50 jokes.

The California recall election was another staple of this year's

punchlines. Overall, 257 jokes were made about the recall. Actor turned governor Arnold Schwarzenegger dominated the humor, garnering 153 jokes, high enough for third place for the year. Arnold was not the only entertainer campaigning to lead the nation's most populous state, and the comics made sure viewers knew it. Eighties sitcom star Gary Coleman came in tenth for the year with 29 jokes. The man at the center of the recall, governor Gray Davis, came in sixth (61 jokes), as the comics mined endless material from a crumbling political career.

Saddam Hussein came in fourth, with 136 jokes this year. Our opponent in two wars, Saddam received similar levels of attention in both periods. In 1991, he was the target of 160 jokes.

The Iraq war was joked about 495 times in 2003, compared to 256 jokes about the Gulf War in 1991.

Rush Limbaugh, who didn't have the best year after being fired by ESPN for racial comments and subsequently checked into drug rehab, finished in fifth place (64 jokes). Al Gore placed eighth with 41 punchlines, and Vice President Dick Cheney accounted for 36 jokes and ninth place.

Finally, none of the 2004 Democratic presidential candidates cracked the top 10. Howard Dean came the closest, in eleventh place with 27 jokes.

Center for Media and Public Affairs

2100 L Street, N.W. Suite 300 * Washington, D.C. 20037 * Phone (202) 223-2942 * Fax (202) 872-4014

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Editors: *Dr. S. Robert Lichter, Dr. Linda S. Lichter*
Research Director: *Daniel Amundson*
Political Studies Director: *Mary Carroll Willi*
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