

00:00:07:02 – 00:00:39:06

Sarah Dove

Hello and welcome to the inaugural podcast installment of the Office of Distance Education's Instructor Spotlight, a multimedia approach to highlighting instructors actively invested in cutting edge online learning, development and delivery from around the College of Arts and Sciences at the Ohio State University as a part of ODE's mission to support dynamic research driven and forward thinking solutions proven to ensure understanding engagement access and equity in online learning communities.

00:00:39:15 – 00:01:06:22

Sarah Dove

We know that some of the most important work being done toward this purpose is happening in real time in the classroom. My name is Sarah Dove, and I'm an instructional designer for ASC ODE. Joining us for a conversation today is instructor Jeffrey Trimble from the School of Communication and the Department of Political Science. Jeffrey Trimble has been an international journalist, editor and media manager for more than 35 years.

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Sarah Dove

He came to Ohio State in 2018 as a lecturer in the School of Communication and the Department of Political Science. Trimble served most recently as deputy director of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the U.S. government agency that oversees all U.S. funded nonmilitary international broadcasts including Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty as deputy director. Trimble represented the BBG and U.S. Government Inter-Agency, strategic planning and coordination efforts, including with the State Department and National Security Council from 1997 to 2007.

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Sarah Dove

Trimble worked at RFE/RL, where his positions included acting president and Director of Broadcasting in charge of all editorial content in more than two dozen languages of the former Soviet space, Central and Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. Previously, Trimble worked at U.S. News and World Report magazine for 15 years in positions including assistant managing editor, foreign editor and Moscow bureau chief. During the final five years before the collapse of the USSR, Welcome, Jeff, and thank you for being here.

00:02:27:27 – 00:02:45:15

Sarah Dove

The question I'm going to launch into you first your course. International Perspectives on Communication includes opportunities for students to engage with and reflect on issues like media literacy and press freedom. Why are these issues so important to you and to your

students future success?

00:02:46:00 – 00:03:19:13

Jeffrey Trimble

Sarah, thanks. So, you know, it's a cliché, but I'll go ahead and roll it out because it makes the point. Information is the oxygen of democracy, and it's something that young people coming into the role of stakeholders in a democracy, frankly, that's undergoing a stress test at the moment need to be aware of. They have to have access to an understanding of how to process information so they can make informed decisions as stakeholders in a democratic society.

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Jeffrey Trimble

And of course, in the digital era, we're over oxygenated and we're drowning in information. And it's therefore even more important that they have the tools to sort through that information and get greater perspective and understanding of what makes sense, what doesn't make sense, what do they trust, what might be disinformation and while that that I've just been talking about is not the primary aim of this course, I use the context of international communications to look also at our own media environment and give students these tools to help them think more carefully about their news consumption.

00:03:55:15 – 00:04:08:12

Sarah Dove

I find myself saying similar things to students when I do have classrooms of students that they're just inundated with too much information all the time. How do you choose what to focus on and which causes the one you're going to really drive your stakes into?

00:04:08:19 – 00:04:51:28

Jeffrey Trimble

And you know, one particular part of this that I think helps to focus students attention on the importance of information is introducing in the context of this course that we're in the midst of a now 16 year decline in democracy around the world and rise of authoritarianism and decline in media freedom around the world, including here in the United States, as measured by international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders, and to have students most of whom are native here to the United States come into contact with information about the decline of democracy around the world, the decline in media freedom in our own media environment is a kind of a wake up call.

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Jeffrey Trimble

They have to understand and appreciate that it's going to fall to them. The rising generation to address some of these issues and ensure that some of our most basic freedoms, including freedom of speech, freedom of expression, are protected, and they're the ones who are,

and we have to protect it.

00:05:07:00 – 00:05:24:10

Sarah Dove

How does the International Perspectives on Communication course being online allow you to expand the diversity of voices that you include? And how have you creatively utilized online course format to leverage relevant and exciting learning experience for your students?

00:05:24:19 – 00:05:55:12

Jeffrey Trimble

So building on a solid framework of studying the history of communication and in international communication, I emphasize particularly the compression of history in the development of communications. And we look at theories and models of communication. We have a strong textbook in the course, so they have a fundamental underlying academic background of the issues, and they get the tools that they need to look at, understand, appreciate media environments around the world.

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Jeffrey Trimble

But to make it real, I'm looking each semester for events that are taking place around the world, and I can plug the students into to say, Look, this is happening right now in Ukraine, this is happening in Belarus, this is happening in China. And to focus on the news of the day and how that news is being gathered, the challenges being presented to international journalists as they're doing their job and how that information is being disseminated and what the stories are themselves, and how different media outlets from around the world are looking at the same story and the richest way in which I'm able to do this, thanks in part to my own background, in media

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Jeffrey Trimble

and communication, is to reach out to people with whom I have some kind of relationship around the world. Maybe the freshest example is that at the very beginning of the semester, here, I brought in from Kiev, Ukraine, Natalia Gumenyuk an outstanding journalist based in Kiev. And this was prior to the Russian heavy invasion. The Russians really did their invasion in 2014, but the heavier invasion that's taking place right now.

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Jeffrey Trimble

And so having spoken with Natalia about challenges in Ukraine as a journalist and I've been able to have the students follow up and read her coverage in the Guardian in Rolling Stone and other outlets where she's present and feel very very connected to the moment about these incredible events that are taking place on the other side of the

world.

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Sarah Dove

This kind of informality of being in each other's home spaces I think does introduce a different kind of dynamic. The fact that people maybe are a little bit more at ease or comfortable with where they are located and having students also be in that setting does introduce a different kind of dynamic. And I think especially when you're talking about people who are right on the hot seat of these global perspectives, that's it's a tremendous kind of dynamic shift.

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Jeffrey Trimble

Right, in that it affects not only the students and their relative comfort level, but it affects the speakers as well. When we started last semester course, it was when events were moving very quickly in Afghanistan. And on the very first day of class, I had dialed in via Zoom, a senior national security correspondent from one of the world's major global news agencies.

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Jeffrey Trimble

But he was sitting in the basement of his house wearing a Grateful Dead t shirt, talking to the class while at the same time working two telephones in real time, trying to help Afghan correspondents of that news agency get out of the country. And he would drop the F bomb word because he'd been cut off on a line.

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Jeffrey Trimble

But it created a kind of an amazing informality when at the end of the course. One question I always ask on the final exam, spoiler alert students is, okay, you've been exposed to these speakers from around the world. Tell me a bit about one of them made a particular impression on you and why. And that can be personal.

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Jeffrey Trimble

But I also want you to reflect on things we've learned in the course and probably 85% of the students pick that particular session because it was so vivid and genuine and real for them in that online environment that in a way that even if they'd been sitting in the classroom, he'd felt obliged to put on a shirt and tie or whatever.

00:09:28:14 - 00:09:32:24

Jeffrey Trimble

It would have been a different kind of experience and probably less memorable for the students.

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Sarah Dove

As you said, you're getting students from a multiplicity of departments across the university that are engaging with this, and it just sounds like such an exciting and engaging course all around you now. It's the kind, of course, that I wish I had taken as an undergrad.

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Jeffrey Trimble

I think that and this goes back into ancient history when I would have been in high school, this whole issue of teaching what in the old days we would have called civics the tools you need to be a stakeholder in society. And we started the beginning of the conversation on that note, that understanding what's happening around you, having access to media that are pluralistic in nature, where you get multiple perspectives, is an important part of contributing to your development as a stakeholder.

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Jeffrey Trimble

So media literacy as a part of civics education, which is an area, it seems to me, in which generally we sort of fallen behind as a society Part of it is media literacy, part of its other aspects of understanding Constitution and American history. To the extent that I can build that into this particular course, as a tool, as as a takeaway for students.

00:10:44:24 – 00:11:15:21

Jeffrey Trimble

And that's important. We'll say one more thing about the student mix. I very much take advantage of the presence of international students in this course. They bring unique abilities. They come from other cultures. They know other languages. We talk about the role of language in communication. I draw them into the conversation and have them teach with me about how do you think differently in other language?

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Jeffrey Trimble

How do you process information in Swahili as opposed to when we're speaking English here? And their own personal experiences can contribute as well. So I think I have learned from them and taken things on board from some of the things I've learned and I've heard from international students and trying to be sensitive to their needs and also simply where where they're coming from that the Chinese student wants to speak up and talk about what he or she thinks is the advantages of an authoritarian media environment in the role the media has to carry out the policies of the state and promote them well.

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Jeffrey Trimble

We need to understand that perspective because more of the world's population lives in those kinds of media environments that live in the kind of media environment that we live in. And to have an awareness of that, not to say that's we think that's the best way, but to have an awareness that much of the world's population live in those fire moments, I think is an important kind of sub element.

00:12:10:20 – 00:12:13:18

Jeffrey Trimble

And of course, like this and understanding what's going on around the world.

00:12:18:01 – 00:12:55:08

Sarah Dove

We want to express our gratitude to Jeff Trimble for participating in our Instructor Spotlight series. Trimble was also featured as a panelist in one of our recent teaching forum events, "Facilitating Student Collaboration and Peer Engagement." More information about this event as well as a recording can be found on our website, ascodesu.edu. Thank you to all those listening for joining us for this installment of the Office of Distance Education's Instructor Spotlight. Visit ascodesu.edu/resources

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Sarah Dove

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