

From Nixon to Trump, and All the Presidents in Between

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Bob Woodward visits UNH

Tuesday, December 20, 2016



EDIE ALLARD '18, LEFT, AND UNH JOURNALISM PROFESSOR MEG HECKMAN INTERVIEW VETERAN JOURNALISM AND AUTHOR BOB WOODWARD AS PART OF THE RUTMAN LECTURE SERIES 2016 EVENT.

December 6 was a big news day in the nation's capital.

It was the day veteran journalist Bob Woodward's latest story broke. By the afternoon, the story was being read by 17,000 new readers every second on washingtonpost.com. Woodward and a fellow Washington Post reporter had co-authored an in-depth

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article investigating how the Pentagon buried the evidence of \$125 billion in bureaucratic waste.

And yet, on one of his busiest days, Woodward was here in Durham, talking one-on-one with budding young journalists, sharing stories from his long and decorated career as an investigative reporter and speaking to a public audience in the evening, covering everything from the Watergate break-in to Trump's America.

Woodward was the keynote speaker for the Rutman Distinguished Lecture Series on the American Presidency, which is generously supported by J. Morgan '84 and Tara Rutman in collaboration with the President's Distinguished Speakers Series. The lecture series focuses on American political history with an emphasis on the modern and historical context of the presidency.

Woodward rose to fame in 1972 when he and Post colleague Carl Bernstein did the original investigation and reporting on the Nixon Watergate scandal. Since then, he's written 18 nonfiction books and remains a reporter and associate editor at the Post. He's helped earn the newspaper two Pulitzer Prizes, one for the Watergate coverage and one for Sept. 11 coverage. At UNH, he shared how he first became interested in journalism — in the attic of

A Storied Career: Advice and Anecdotes

Bob Woodward shared valuable insights with UNH journalism students and a public audience during his visit. Among the gems:

Always go to the scene.

There's an old journalism saying: "You don't know if you don't go." Woodward said that was his golden rule of journalism: Get to the scene, no matter what the story is. "You can't

the law office where his father worked. Woodward was working there as a janitor and, out of curiosity, began looking through what his father called the “disposed files” of the various members of the small community of Wheaton, Illinois, where Woodward grew up.

He discovered the unknown truths of many of the local townspeople — “there was domestic abuse, DUIs, child abuse, drugs,” he recalled. That’s when he realized that there are the surface exteriors of what people present and then there are the things they don’t want you to know. “I guess in my mind, journalism is the pursuit of ‘disposed files.’”

“What’s hidden often defines people better than their presentation of themselves,” he told the group of roughly 20 journalism students and faculty members who had gathered for a discussion with him in the Memorial Union Building.

duplicate the experience of being there for yourself,” he says.

There’s no such thing as investigative reporting. All good reporting mandates investigation. “There’s no reporters and then investigative reporters; it’s all the same.”

Upset that Trump got elected? Don’t blame the media. One audience member asked Woodward if the media had gone overboard in their coverage of Trump, and gave him the upper hand in the election. Woodward balked at the idea. “You cannot avoid somebody like that, particularly when he became the frontrunner for the Republican nomination.” He said it wasn’t media coverage that tipped the scales, it was the voters who made Trump “plausible and viable.”

Woodward attended a special reception held in his honor before speaking to a wider public audience of about 700 people, touching on everything from Nixon's legacy to his Pulitzer Prize-winning work with Bernstein exposing the Watergate scandal, from wiretapping and the NSA to Snowden and Wikileaks.

Morgan Rutman, who serves as the chairman of the UNH Foundation Board of Directors and is also a USNH trustee, helps choose the speaker each year along with UNH's history and political science departments. He noted that he and others on the series committee pushed for Woodward and moved the date of the event to after the 2016 election — a two-step move made for good reason. “I felt that back in the spring, when we were deciding, we realized that no matter who you support, this is going to be a very contentious

Hillary's challenge?

Connecting. In this time of post-election “what just happened?” disbelief and analysis, Woodward pointed out that one of Hillary Clinton's challenges was her failure to communicate effectively with people who weren't already her natural supporters.

Sometimes common

sense is your best

weapon. Speaking about the Watergate break-in in 1972: “It wasn't just five burglars ... it was five burglars in business suits.” Woodward knew something different was going on.

Everybody thinks

they're a journalist, it

seems.

Covering the White House is much different than it used to be, Woodward explained, especially in the area of access to information. “Nowadays you call the deputy press secretary, and you talk to someone

election,” he explained, and so the committee wanted to have someone who could explain the political forces at work in the election with real-time urgency.

“My father was an academic, and he used to say that you have to wait until 50 years after an event to have the real context to form a historical perspective,” says Rutman, whose father, Darrett B. Rutman, was a distinguished scholar of early American history who served on the faculty of the UNH history department from 1968 to 1984. Rutman’s mother, Anita, was a historical researcher and co-author with his father on several works. “We were honored to host Bob, who is so current and articulate and knowledgeable, to share his expertise and his experiences — he’s interviewed practically every president of the past 40 years.”

Woodward closed out his visit by taking questions from the crowd and from UNH journalism professor Meg Heckman and Edie Allard '18, a student in the journalism program, during a post-lecture panel.

“It really was like watching living history,” says Rutman.

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who says, ‘Why is *that* a story?’ after you explain what you’re looking for. The flow of information is not good.”

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