**SHATTERED GLASS** [2003], directed by Billy Ray and starring Hayden Christensen as Stephen Glass and Peter Sarsgaard as Chuck Lane. There are a number of things to consider when watching this film that are connected to the concerns of a social science class. In no particular order, these include the following: Is everything “just a story?” That is, does everything in a book or in the media that claims to explain something, of equal weight to alternative explanations? In another context, this relates to current political debates. As citizens, we need to be informed; we may also need interpretations as well as facts. But, what if the information is fabricated? What if one is dealing not just with different interpretations but with outright lies? The press is supposed to be a kind of watchdog in looking at the performance of political and corporate institutions. But who is watching the press? When supposedly unbiased [or, at least, relatively balanced] media organs are found to be publishing lies, this could provide cover for the truly biased and make the public even more cynical and alienated.

In telling stories, embellishment may be common. When does embellishment make the transition to distortion and when does distortion become fabrication? Many people lie to get ahead in life. While this may always have been the case, is it more of a problem today? Are there generational issues to consider? If so, why? Is one factor—for both journalists and the public—the intensification of the culture of celebrity as opposed to accomplishment? This question, in turn, leads to a consideration of status in the contemporary world.

The film also addresses workplace issues. What is the role of loyalty to colleagues and/or to subordinates or bosses? In journalism, can friendship overcome what is supposed to be a professional value of skepticism? Finally, the film addresses in very interesting ways the seriousness of trying to do good writing. Connected to this is the dilemma of how much one is on one’s own in journalism and to what extent one needs to rely on teamwork. This emerges in the film both in the setting of “The New Republic” and in that of the on-line magazine staffed by characters played by Steve Zahn and Rosario Dawson in small but strikingly good performances.