

Scott Althaus, professor of political science and communication, and Kalev Leetaru, coordinator of research in the Cline Center for Democracy, recently found that the U.S. White House Web site has modified, and in some cases, deleted key documents in the public record.

When the U.S. invaded Iraq, the U.S. government released a statement on the White House Web site listing the nations involved in the "Coalition of the Willing." However, over a period of several years, different versions of the three releases all appear to be originals. In the case of two releases from the U.S. government Web site, the original document is completely missing from the site.

"I think that it raises the question of whether or not we can trust the government to maintain public records of things that were said or done that later prove embarrassing," Althaus said.

A proofreader reviewing an article Althaus co-authored discovered that a previously recorded Web address led to a blank page. Althaus confirmed that the document had been deleted. Related lists of coalition countries also appeared to contradict one another.

"It could be what we found is limited," Althaus said. "But if it is not, it certainly opens the finding up to larger questions."

According to the Cline Center for Democracy Web site, these findings suggest a pattern of revision and removal from the public record that spans from 2003 to at least 2005.

Instead of the White House Web site maintaining an updated list while preserving copies of the old ones or issuing revised lists in addition to the original posts, the White House removed original documents, altered them and replaced them with backdated modifications that only appear to be originals.

These findings were then shown to Leetaru who confirmed that several documents had been revised and listed different numbers and names of coalition countries.

"In many ways it is puzzling why so much effort was put into revising and deleting these documents," Althaus said. "This is mainly because the changes were pretty small potatoes."

On Nov. 24, Thom Shanker wrote an article in the New York Times, outlining these findings. Keith Olbermann of MSNBC has also recently mentioned the findings on his show.

The feelings students have about the publicity and the findings include mixed reactions.

"I think that it's cool to see your professor make a finding like this," said Eric Lavine, senior in LAS. "However, I am not surprised the Bush Administration was involved in this activity."

Other students were surprised with the revelation, hoping that mainstream news media would

pay closer attention to the findings.

"I was surprised by Professor Althaus's findings," said Jenn Rice, senior in LAS. "I was also surprised the story was not made into a bigger deal in other news sources."

However, Althaus claimed the publicity of his findings were not meant to be interpreted as political propaganda.

"Our findings out in the blogosphere are generally interpreted in a political lens, which was not our intention at all," Althaus said.

"Our intention was to alert scholars and journalists who rely on government documents to let them know the facts have been tampered with."

[Source...](#)