

The New York Times



PSC 337: Politics & the Media

209 Graham Building
Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:30-1:45
Fall 2007

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Course Description

This course will examine the interaction between the mass media, political institutions, and the public. We will pay particular attention to a variety of questions over the course of the semester. What roles do the media play in our society and within our constitutional framework? When we study the media, should we treat it any differently than the other major institutions of American government, including the executive branch and the Congress? How does the business side of the media affect political coverage? How do the various media outlets – print, broadcast, internet – differ in their political coverage? When should reporters grant their sources, both those inside the government and those critical of it, anonymity? These questions will motivate our discussions of media and politics during the first half of the course.

After the first exam, we will turn our attention to how the media affect the political knowledge and attitudes of Americans. How does ideological bias in the media *and* the public affect political coverage? How do the media affect campaigns? How do politicians employ paid media and manipulate free media to get their messages out? Do negative ads have any redeeming values? While these concerns will be of particular importance during the second half of the course, keep in mind that underlying our discussions throughout the semester will be the following questions: How far does the

public's "right to know" extend, particularly in war time? What is the purpose of a free press in a democratic society? How are contemporary media living up to their various responsibilities to *our* democratic society? Assuming your grade for the media's performance is not "A+", what reforms might we consider to improve the media's crucial contribution to the American political system?

Course Goals

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- identify and critique the roles news media play in contemporary American society;
- describe trends including those associated with increasing corporate ownership of media outlets and the public's relationship with the media;
- appreciate the highly complex, highly symbiotic relationship among politicians, the media, and the public;
- construct and communicate clear, concise arguments regarding the media's role in society.

Course Requirements

This course will be run more as a seminar than a series of lectures. You will be expected to read and attempt to understand a significant amount of material. My assumption throughout the semester will be that when you come to class, you will be prepared to discuss, ask questions, and write about the day's material. Your active participation in such endeavors is a crucial component of the course. Moreover, quality participation in discussion and in-class assignments will be rewarded as a significant portion of your overall course grade.

I cannot stress this enough. Showing up ready to participate actively and well will not only benefit your participation grade, but will, obviously, go a long way toward improving performance on exams and the paper assignments. Poor attendance, on the other hand, will start you on a downward spiral from which it will be difficult, if not impossible, to recover. If you do not plan to attend regularly and make a good-faith effort to keep up with the readings, drop the class.

The other components of the course include two essay-oriented exams, a research paper, and three short essays (about 600 words) that you will write in response to questions I pose about the readings. The exams will be given on October 11 and December 13. The research paper, which is due December 6, will require students to analyze data. Students who have taken PSC 301, Research Methods in Political Science, will be familiar with the kind of data analysis required. More information regarding the exams and paper will be provided in class.

The response memos will give you an opportunity to write a short essay in response to class readings. These essays will be due the day before we meet to discuss the readings in question. Understand that I may ask you to comment on your essay in class, so think about and be prepared to discuss your work. While there is no unambiguously correct answer to any of the questions I will pose, ask yourself the following before turning in these assignments:

- Have I not only read, *but made an honest effort to understand* the material?
- Have I contributed something more than a summary of the reading(s)? In other words, have I made an insightful comment or raised an interesting question that I would like to discuss in class? Is this contribution a result of my own reflection or is it drawn from another source? If the latter, have I explicitly cited my source?
- Does every word of my essay count, or am I simply throwing words on the page to meet the word count? If the latter, why am I wasting the time of the professor and all of my colleagues?

• Reading

The following books are required for the course and are available at the university bookstore:

Cook, Timothy E. 2005. *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*, Second Edition. University of Chicago Press.

Leighley, Jan E. 2004. *Mass Media and Politics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Supplementary readings, available on Blackboard, are denoted by an * in the course outline below.

• Grading

Grades for the course are based on the following:

In-class assignments/participation	15%
Response memos	15
Data-based paper	20
First exam	20
Second exam	<u>30</u>
	100%

Please note that failure to complete either of the exams or the paper assignment will result in a non-negotiable F for the class.

The exams and papers will be graded on a 100-point scale. When computing the final course grade, I will calculate the overall numerical averages and use the following table to convert them to letter grades:

Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades	Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades
A	>92	C	>72, <77
A-	>=90, <=92	C-	>=70, <=72
B+	>=87, <90	D+	>=67, <70
B	>82, <87	D	>62, <67
B-	>=80, <=82	D-	>=60, <=62
C+	>=77, <80	F	<60

• Special Needs

If you have any special needs that will affect your ability to learn in this class, please inform me immediately and appropriate steps will be taken to assist you.

• Cheating & Plagiarism

The university's Academic Integrity Policy, which addresses the consequences of cheating and plagiarism, is available via the web at: <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/>.

The Honor Policy defines cheating as: "Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise." The policy defines plagiarism as: "Intentionally or knowingly representing the words of another as one's own in any academic exercise."

In other words, exams are closed book, closed notes. Collaborative work on the exams, the papers, or the in-class exercises is considered cheating. You may study together if you like – in fact I encourage you to form study groups – but think for yourselves. Also, if you are using words that are not your own – whether a sentence, a paragraph or a longer passage – put them in quotation marks and attribute them to the proper source. *Even if you paraphrase information, you must still properly cite your source.* If you have questions about the appropriate format for citations, make sure that you ask me before turning in the paper or consult this Jackson Library web site:

<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.asp>. Turabian is the preferred citation style for the social sciences. You can also visit the Writing Center (3211 HHRA) for additional assistance with citations. For more information, visit the Writing Center's web page at <http://www.uncg.edu/eng/writingcenter/>.

- **Miscellaneous**

You can make up the midterm exam *only* if you provide me with advanced, written notice of a reasonable excuse (e.g., extracurricular commitment, illness, family issue). Students who miss the midterm and do not notify me in advance will receive a non-negotiable zero. You cannot make up the final exam. Incompletes are not available.

Course Outline

Date	Topic	Readings
August 21	I. Introduction	Syllabus
August 23	A. Mass Media & Politics in the U.S.	Leighley, ch. 1
August 28	B. Media as Institution (Introduction)	Leighley, ch. 2
August 30	No Class	
September 4 September 6	C. What's News? Or, if it bleeds, it leads.	Leighley, chs. 3 & 4
September 11 September 13	II. The Fourth Branch A. Congress, the Presidency, the Courts, and the Media: Separate Institutions Sharing Power	Leighley, ch. 5 Cook, ch. 1
September 18	B. Evolution of the News Media	Cook, chs. 2 & 3
September 20 September 25	C. Media as Institution (In detail)	Cook, chs. 4 & 5
September 27 October 2	D. Governing as Campaigning	Cook, chs. 6 & 7
October 4 October 9	E. Current Topics: National Security vs. the Right to Know	Handouts
October 11	EXAM #1	
October 16	No Class - Fall Break	

October 18 October 23	III. Media Effects A. Theories of Media Effects	Leighley, ch. 6 Hibbing *
October 25 October 30 November 1	B. Agenda-Setting, Priming, & Framing	Leighley, ch. 7 Krosnick * Iyengar *
November 6	C. Impersonal Influence	Mutz *
November 8 November 13	D. Media Bias	Gilens * Dalton *
November 15 November 20	E. Media & Elections	Leighley, ch. 8 Brians *
November 22	No Class - Thanksgiving	
November 27	E. Media & Elections, continued	Ansolabehere * Kahn *
November 29	F. Current Topics: Political Blogs	Handouts
December 4 December 6	IV. Wrapping Up: A Media Policy for the Future	Leighley, ch. 9 Cook, ch. 8
December 11	Reading Day	
December 13	EXAM #2 (Noon)	