

# The New York Times



## PSC 337-01: Politics & the Media

209 Graham Building  
Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:30-10:45  
Fall 2008

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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? 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 do the media affect campaigns? How do politicians employ paid media and manipulate free media to get their messages out? Do negative political advertisements have any redeeming value? Do political blogs create a marketplace of ideas that leads to more informed citizens? Or, do they form an echo chamber that serves to polarize citizens even further? 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: 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;
- undertake a content analysis of political coverage in the broadcast and print media to generate data for use in the course term paper.

## 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 assignment. 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 components of the course include in-class writing assignments and participation, two essay-oriented exams, and a research paper based on a class-wide content analysis project. You can make up the first exam, scheduled for October 9, *only* if you provide me with documented notice of a reasonable excuse (*e.g.*, extracurricular commitment, illness, family issue) *in advance of the exam*. Students who miss the first exam and do not notify me in advance will receive a non-negotiable zero. You cannot make up the December 11 final exam. I will allow an incomplete grade *only* under extraordinary circumstances that are carefully documented. The research paper, which is due December 4, will require students to analyze data drawn from media coverage of the presidential campaign. 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.

### • Reading

The following required texts are available at the UNCG 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.

Throughout the semester, I will also ask you to read book chapters or articles that I have placed on electronic reserve. An asterisk (\*) in the course outline below indicates that the reading material is on e-reserve, available via Blackboard, and identifiable by the author's last name.

- **Grading**

Grades for the course are based on the following:

|                                    |           |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| In-class assignments/participation | 15%       |
| Content analysis paper             | 30        |
| First exam                         | 25        |
| 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: “Representing the words of another, as one’s own in any academic exercise.”

In other words, exams are closed book, closed notes. You may study together if you like – in fact I encourage you to form study groups – but think for yourselves. In your papers, 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/>.

• ***Deus ex machina*: Not in this class**

In literature, the theater – and now, political science – a *deus ex machina* is any unlikely occurrence or device that magically resolves the difficulties or the seeming hopelessness of the plot – or semester. All the poor decisions leading to a story’s climax are wiped away by an improbable intervention at the last moment. If you’ve ever read a book in which the heroine realizes that the horrors visited upon her were all just a dream, or watched a play in which the hero, facing disaster, is saved just before the curtain falls by some unlikely contrivance of the playwright, you’re familiar with this literary gimmick. There will be no such last-second interventions in this class. My responsibilities to you include making my expectations transparent and treating you – and everyone else in the class – fairly. My responsibilities do not include wiping away poor decisions with last second offers of extra credit. Such behavior on my part would be unfair to others in the class who worked hard enough to meet or exceed my expectations. There are no exceptions. So don’t ask for one.

## Course Outline

| Date                         | Topic   | Readings                       |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| August 26                    | <b>I. Introduction</b>  | Syllabus                       |
| August 28                    | <b>No Class – American Political Science Association Annual Meeting</b>   |                                |
| September 2                  | A. Mass Media & Politics in the U.S.  | Leighley, ch. 1 & 2            |
| September 4<br>September 9   | B. What’s News? Or, if it bleeds, it leads.   | Leighley, chs. 3 & 4           |
| September 11<br>September 16 | <b>II. The Fourth Branch</b><br>A. Congress, the Presidency, the Courts,<br>and the Media: Separate Institutions<br>Sharing Power | Leighley, ch. 5<br>Cook, ch. 1 |

|                              |   |                                     |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| September 18<br>September 23 | B. Evolution of the News Media  | Cook, chs. 2 & 3                    |
| September 25<br>September 30 | C. Media as Institution   | Cook, chs. 4 & 5                    |
| October 2<br>October 7       | E. Governing as Campaigning   | Cook, chs. 6, 7, & 8                |
| <b>October 9</b>             | <b>EXAM #1</b>  |                                     |
| October 14<br>October 16     | <b>Mandatory Class Sessions –</b><br>A. Introduction to Content Analysis<br>B. How to Content Analyze Daily Media | Farnsworth *                        |
| October 21                   | <b>Fall Break</b>   |                                     |
| October 23<br>October 28     | <b>III. Media Effects</b><br>A. Theories of Media Effects   | Leighley, ch. 6<br>Hibbing *        |
| October 30                   | B. Agenda-Setting, Priming, & Framing   | Leighley, ch. 7                     |
| November 4                   | <b>No Class – ELECTION DAY – Vote!</b>  |                                     |
| November 6<br>November 11    | B. Agenda-Setting, Priming, & Framing, continued  | Krosnick *<br>Iyengar *             |
| November 13                  | C. New Media  | Woodley *, Munger *                 |
| November 18                  | D. Impersonal Influence   | Mutz (1) *                          |
| November 20<br>November 25   | E. The Media & Hostility  | Dalton *<br>Mutz (2) *              |
| November 27                  | <b>No Class – Thanksgiving</b>  |                                     |
| December 2<br>December 4     | F. The Media & Elections  | Leighley, ch. 8<br>Brians *, Kahn * |
| December 9                   | <b>Reading Day</b>  |                                     |
| <b>December 11</b>           | <b>EXAM #2 (8:00 am)</b>  |                                     |