

PSC 300.102 MEDIA & POLITICS

Fall 2009
MW, 12:45-2:05pm
CH 020

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS

The media have long been recognized as a key component of American politics. Reflecting the oft-cited designation of the press as the “fourth branch” of government, political observers from the earliest days of the republic noted the indispensable role of the mass media in a democratic society. Even before the signing of the Constitution, the seminal debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists over its adoption took place in the newspaper. News outlets, moreover, have a long tradition as agents of partisan warfare, promoting and perpetuating party loyalties and voter turnout in the 19th and early 20th centuries. And in the summer of 2009, the media were central to the debate over health care, with opponents of Democratic proposals using town hall meetings and the ensuing news coverage to attract wide attention for their concerns. Even as President Obama has found himself frustrated by the nature of the debate—“TV loves a ruckus,” he laments—he would be the first to agree that it is impossible to fully comprehend American politics without understanding the mass media.

This course provides an overview of the media’s role in American political life. In doing so, we will focus on several broad themes: the relationship between the media and government; the process of newsmaking and how it shapes the content of political news; the effects of the media on public opinion and voting behavior; and the critical changes to the media (new and old) taking place today. We will devote many of our class discussions and readings to scholarship in political science and communications. But we will also pay special attention to the content of the news we encounter every day—be it about the historic presidential contest between Barack Obama and John McCain, the high-decibel, raucous debate over health care reform, the war in Iraq, Iranian election protests and the rise of Twitter, or the revealing of secret anti-terrorism programs.

In the end, the course has four goals:

- To help you understand the development of the mass media and its role in American politics
- To help you understand how the interaction among journalists, politicians, and citizens shapes contemporary American politics
- To help you learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about politics
- To help you become a savvy consumer of political news, in this class and beyond

ATTENDANCE

It is imperative that you attend class. We will monitor your attendance with that great American icon, the pop quiz. **Six** times throughout the semester, we will give a quiz consisting of one question about current events. If you are present for at least **four** of the quizzes, you will receive full credit for attendance. If you are present for fewer than four, **you will lose 5 points** on your final grade.

Now, the good news. Correct answers to the quizzes will earn you bonus points: for each quiz you answer correctly, one-third of a point will be added to your final grade. For example, if you correctly answer all six quizzes throughout the semester, you will receive a 2-point bonus on your final average. If you think the attendance policy will be difficult for you to adhere to, drop this course.

READINGS

There is no textbook for this course. Most of the readings—mostly journal articles and book chapters—will be available for download through our course's Blackboard page (<http://blackboard.syr.edu>). The rest are available online. You are also expected to keep up with current events by regularly reading a newspaper.

Articles and Chapters

There are several assigned articles or book chapters for most weeks. Some are freely available on the Internet, with the URLs listed in the course schedule below. The rest are posted on Blackboard. On the Blackboard page for this class, click the "Documents" button on the left-hand menu, and then click the "Course Readings" folder. Here, you'll find PDF versions of each week's readings. Even factoring in the cost of printing (and those outrageously priced printer cartridges!), my hope is that this will be less expensive than purchasing a course packet of photocopied readings. The flip side, of course, is that it will be your responsibility to download the items as they are assigned. It might be worthwhile to print the readings early in the semester, which will keep you from having to do this every week.

The Newspaper

It should come as no surprise that in a class called Media and Politics, you are expected to keep up with political news. Reading a newspaper is the best way to do this. Our discussions in class will frequently touch on current events, often as a way to illustrate a concept from lecture or a reading. Not only will regularly consuming the news bring course material to life, it will undoubtedly make the class more interesting. (And as a non-trivial side benefit, being a news junkie invariably gives you interesting things to talk about at parties when you find yourself in a conversation that has lapsed into awkward silence.)

You are free to read (in print or online) any paper(s) of your choosing, with the following limitation. You need to choose a news source that includes frequent coverage of national politics. For that reason, *The Daily Orange*, fine publication that it is, does not count. The following are a few suggestions, any of which are excellent sources of political news:

The New York Times: www.nyt.com (requires free online registration)

The Wall Street Journal: www.wsj.com (requires paid online subscription)

The Los Angeles Times: www.latimes.com

The Washington Post: www.washingtonpost.com (requires free online registration)

EVALUATION

Your grade in this class will be based on class attendance, an in-class midterm exam, two short writing assignments, a research paper, and a take-home final exam. The breakdown is as follows

- Attendance: 5%
- Midterm exam: 20%
- Two short assignments: 20% total (10% each)
- Research paper: 30%
- Take-home final exam: 25%

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale:

A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59). (Note that there are no +/- grades in the D or F range.)

Exam Format

Both the midterm and final will consist of essay questions and short-answer identifications. The midterm will be taken in class on **October 19**, but we will hand out a list of possible essay questions one week earlier. One of the questions will appear on the exam. The short answers will relate to the essay questions that are not chosen. The final exam will be a take-home. We will distribute it on **December 14**, and it will be due **December 18**. It will not be cumulative.

Makeup exams will be given only in extreme circumstances, such as the death of an immediate family member. We will be the final arbiters of what “extreme” means. If you miss an exam or assignment, it is your responsibility to notify us *immediately*.

Assignments

Twice during the semester, we will hand out a short assignment that will be due several classes later. These assignments will ask you to write a short paper (2-4 pages typed, double-spaced) engaging a question raised by a reading or class discussion. Missing the due date will cost you one-third of a letter grade for each day the assignment is late. For example, if your paper is three days late, you can score no higher than a B+. These deductions are not negotiable.

Research Paper

On **November 23**, you will turn in a 9-12-page research paper. Your paper will involve an original “content analysis” of media coverage of a current policy debate in the United States—health care, the war in Afghanistan or Iraq, the release of the convicted Pan-Am 103 bomber, the economic crisis, etc. The specific topic will be of your choosing, but we will provide some guidelines for the paper within the first few weeks of the semester. We will talk more about content analysis, which involves quantitative analysis of mass media content, as the semester proceeds.

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Thinking about cheating? Don't do it. The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that involves discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics. It is my hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where all of us will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students' grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

ACCOMMODATIONS

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs, although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

It is the policy of Syracuse University that no student should be refused admission or be expelled because he or she is unable to participate in any examination, study, or work requirement because of his or her religious holy day requirements. An opportunity will be provided to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may have been missed because of an absence due to a religious observance *providing that I have been notified in writing one week before the absence*. No fees will be charged to the student for the costs incurred by the University for such makeup work. In effecting this policy, the University agrees that no adverse or prejudicial effect should result to any student who avails herself or himself of its provisions.

THOSE INDISPENSABLE CELL PHONES

I love technology (though not as much as Napoleon Dynamite's brother, Kip). And while I'm as big a fan as anyone of hearing Ray LaMontagne's "Trouble" as a ringtone, the fact is that cell phones are a distraction. As a courtesy to me and your classmates, please turn off yours before entering class. If you don't, the rule is this: If your phone rings in class, I get to answer it and talk to whomever is on the line—whether it's your mother, brother, or that person you met at Chuck's night. So leave it on at your own peril.

I hope it also goes without saying that texting during class is prohibited. It's distracting to me and to your fellow classmates. If I see you texting, I will, in the middle of lecture, summon my most parental, nagging, irritating voice to call you out and ask you to leave the class for the day. Sounds like a bad scene. Let's avoid it.

COURSE SCHEDULE (*Note: This is subject to change as we proceed through the semester.*)

August 31: Course Introduction

Part I: The Media's Place in American Politics

(September 2–14)

September 2: The Role of the Media in a Democracy

- Graber, Doris A. 2006. *Mass Media and American Politics*, 7th ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press. Chapter 1 ("Media Power and Government Control"), pp. 1-30.
- Schudson, Michael. 1996. *The Power of News*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Introduction ("News as Public Knowledge"), pp. 1-37.

- “Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources: Audience Segments in a Changing News Environment.” 2008. Report of Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. Online at: <http://people-press.org/report/444/news-media>.

September 7: No class—Labor Day

September 9, 14: The American Media: A Comparative and Historical Perspective

- Hallin, Daniel C. and Robert Giles. 2005. “Presses and Democracies.” In Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Press*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 4-16.
- Schudson, Michael. 2003. *The Sociology of News*. New York: W.W. Norton. Chapter 4 (“Where News Came From: The History of Journalism”), pp. 64-89.

September 16: Interlude—A Content Analysis Workshop

- Neuendorf, Kimberly A. 2002. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications. Chapter 1 (“Defining Content Analysis”), pp. 1-25.

September 21: Eid Ul-Fitr—No class

Part II: Freedom of the Press and Current Controversies

(September 23 – October 5)

September 23: Freedom of the Press (Bonus: My mom visits class!)

- Sanford, Bruce W. and Jane E. Kirtley. 2005. “The First Amendment Tradition and Its Critics.” In Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Press*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 263-276.
- ASSIGNMENT 1 HANDED OUT

September 28: Yom Kippur—No class

September 30: Freedom of the Press (cont.)

- Jost, Kenneth and Alan Greenblatt. 2009. “Free-Press Disputes.” In *Issues in Media: Selections from CQ Researcher*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. pp. 71-92.
- Toobin, Jeffrey. 2006. “Name That Source: Why Are the Courts Leaning on Journalists?” *The New Yorker*, Jan. 16, pp. 30-36. Online at: http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/01/16/060116fa_fact

October 5: Is *The New York Times* dangerous?

- Lichtblau, Eric and James Risen. 2006. “Bank Data Sifted in Secret by U.S. to Block Terror.” *The New York Times*. June 23. Online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/23/washington/23intel.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all

- Baquet, Dean and Bill Keller. 2006. “When Do We Publish a Secret?” *New York Times*. July 1. Online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/01/opinion/01keller.html?pagewanted=all>.
- Watch two debates on PBS’ “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer”—one between *Times* reporter Eric Lichtblau and former U.S. Rep. Curt Weldon (R-Pennsylvania) and one between *Times* Editor Bill Keller and former National Security Agency Director Admiral Bobby Inman. Online at:
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june06/leak_06-26.html and
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/july-dec06/nytimes_07-05.html
- ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE IN CLASS

Part III: The Newsmaking Process

(October 7–14)

October 7, 12: Norms, Values, Economics, and Other Factors that Shape the News

- Gans, Herbert J. 1979. *Deciding What’s News*. New York: Pantheon. Chapter 2 (“Values in the News”), pp. 39-55.
- Bennett, W. Lance. 2007. *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 7th ed. New York: Pearson Longman. Chapter 2 (“News Content: Four Information Biases that Matter”), pp. 36-73.
- Auletta, Ken. 2005. “Fault Line.” *The New Yorker*. October 10. Online at:
http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?051010fa_fact1
- Iyengar, Shanto and Jennifer A. McGrady. 2007. *Media Politics: A Citizen’s Guide*. New York: W.W. Norton. Chapter 7 (“Going Public: Governing through the Media”), pp. 167-196.
- MIDTERM ESSAY QUESTIONS HANDED OUT OCTOBER 12

October 14: Media Bias: Reality, Myth, Evidence, and Perception

- Niven, David. 2002. *Tilt? The Search for Media Bias*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger. Chapter 3 (“The Jury is Still Out: Academic Evidence on Media Bias”), pp. 51-71.
- Vallone, Robert P., Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper. 1985. “The Hostile Media Phenomenon: Biased Perception and Perceptions of Media Bias in Coverage of the Beirut Massacre.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 49(3): 577-585.

October 19: **Midterm Exam**

Part IV: Policy Debates and Election Campaigns

(October 21 – November 9)

October 21, 26: Coverage of Policy Debates

- Bosso, Christopher. 1989. “Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and the Discovery of Famine in Ethiopia.” In Michael Margolis and Gary A. Mauser (eds.), *Manipulating Public Opinion: Essays on Public Opinion as a Dependent Variable*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing. pp. 153-174.

- Lawrence, Regina G. 2000. "Game-Framing the Issues: Tracking the Strategy Frame in Public Policy News." *Political Communication* 17: 93-114.
- Jamieson, Kathleen Hall and Joseph N. Capella. 1998. "The Role of the Press in the Health Care Reform Debate of 1993-1994." In Doris A. Graber, Denis McQuail, and Pippa Norris (eds.), *The Politics of the News*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. pp. 110-131.
- Lawrence, Regina G. 2000. *The Politics of Force: Media and the Construction of Police Brutality*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press. Chapter 5 ("Making Big News: Story Cues and Critical Coverage of Policing"), pp. 86-111.

October 28, November 2: Coverage of Foreign Policy and War

- Bennett, W. Lance. 1994. "The News about Foreign Policy." In W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz (eds.) *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 12-40.
- Hayes, Danny and Matt Guardino. Forthcoming. "Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq." *Political Communication*. Online at: http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/dwhayes/iraq_media_PC.pdf.
- Barstow, David. 2008. "Behind TV Analysts, Pentagon's Hidden Hand." *New York Times*, April 20. Page A1. Online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/us/20generals.html?pagewanted=all>.
- ASSIGNMENT 2 HANDED OUT OCTOBER 28

November 4, 9: News Coverage of Election Campaigns

- Patterson, Thomas E. 1994. *Out of Order*. New York: Vintage. Prologue and Chapter 1 ("Truth and Falsehood on the Campaign Trail," "The Miscast Institution"), pp. 3-52.
- Hayes, Danny. Forthcoming. "The Dynamics of Agenda Convergence and the Paradox of Competitiveness in Presidential Campaigns." *Political Research Quarterly*. Online at: http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/dwhayes/convergence_prq.pdf.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Helmut Norpoth, and Kyu S. Hahn. 2004. "Consumer Demand for Election News: The Horse Race Sells." *Journal of Politics* 66(1): 157-175.
- "Winning the Media Campaign: How the Press Reported the 2008 General Election." 2008. Report of the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Online at: <http://www.journalism.org/node/13307>. (Read just the overview on the main page.)
- ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE NOVEMBER 4

Part V: The Media and Public Opinion

(November 11–23)

November 11, 16, 18, 23: Media Effects on Public Attitudes

- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 6-28.

- Page, Benjamin I., Robert Y. Shapiro, and Glenn R. Dempsey. 1987. "What Moves Public Opinion?" *American Political Science Review* 81(1): 23-44.
- Zaller, John. 2001. "Monica Lewinsky and the Mainsprings of American Politics." In W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman (eds.), *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 252-278.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. 1982. "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs." *American Political Science Review* 76(4): 848-858.
- Druckman, James N. 2004. "Priming the Vote: Campaign Effects in a U.S. Senate Election." *Political Psychology* 25(4): 577-594.
- Bai, Matt. 2005. "The Framing Wars." *New York Times*, July 17. Online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/17/magazine/17DEMOCRATS.html>.
- RESEARCH PAPER DUE NOVEMBER 23

November 26: No class—Thanksgiving (Stuff yourselves!)

Part VI: The Changing Media Environment: Content and Consequence
(November 30 – December 14)

November 30, December 2: Has Television Ruined Democracy?

- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Chapter 13 ("Technology and Mass Media"), pp. 216-246.
- Mutz, Diana C. and Byron Reeves. 2005. "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust." *American Political Science Review* 99(1): 1-15.

December 7, 9, 14: The Newest Media Era: Softer News, More Choice, a Revolution in Tweets?

- Baum, Matthew A. 2007. "How Soft News Brings Policy to the Inattentive Public." In Doris A. Graber (ed.), *Media Power in Politics*, 5th ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. pp. 138-153.
- Prior, Markus. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 577-592.
- Lawrence, Eric, John Sides, and Henry Farrell. Forthcoming. "Self-Segregation or Deliberation? Blog Readership, Participation, and Polarization in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics*. Online at: <http://home.gwu.edu/~jsides/blogs.pdf>.
 - Read also a *Los Angeles Times* editorial by Sides and Lawrence that summarizes the main findings of the paper. Online at: <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-op-sides13-2008jul13,0,3601017.story>
- Grossman, Lev. 2009. "Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement." *Time*, June 17. Online at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1905125,00.html>.
- TAKE-HOME FINAL HANDED OUT DECEMBER 14, DUE DECEMBER 18