

Political Science 243: Mass Media and American Politics

Dickinson College, Spring 2016
TR 10:30-11:45, Denny Hall – Room 304

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:00; Wednesdays 9:30-11:00; and by appointment

Course Description

Nearly everything we learn about the American political system comes via some kind of mass media because we directly experience very little of what we “know” about politics. This course examines the role of the mass media in American politics. It is not primarily a course on how to be a journalist or how to cover the news, although you will get some experience in those things. Instead, the class is a political science course that investigates and analyzes the role of the media in American political life. The course is split into four units. First, we consider the media as an institution, the so-called “fourth branch” of government and the normative role of the media in today’s political world. We ask: how has the media changed over the course of American history? How do news organizations decide what and how to cover the news? Second, we think about the relationship that political actors have and want to have with news organizations. Third, we examine the effects of media on: public opinion; election outcomes; and public policy. Finally, we consider campaign advertising as its own unique form of political communication and investigate what makes political ads effective and what their effect is on the political process.

As you know, 2016 is a presidential election year and this semester we will watch the Democratic and Republican presidential nominating contests unfold. In class, we will discuss the campaign and the role of the media in covering the electoral process. There are several blogs, some of which are curated by political scientists, you will likely find interesting and relevant to course content:

- "The Monkey Cage" hosted by *The Washington Post*
- "Mischiefs of Faction" hosted by *Vox.com*
- "Politics" hosted by *Fivethirtyeight.com*

Course Materials

There are two required books for the course (available at the bookstore):

- Graber, Doris A, ed. 2011. *Media Power in Politics, 6th Edition*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (MPIP)
- West, Darrell M. 2014. *Air Wars: Television Advertising and Social Media in Election Campaigns 1952-2012, 6th Edition*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Air Wars)

Additional readings are available on Moodle or online as specified in the syllabus.

Requirements and Grading

In order to succeed in the class, your consistent attendance and regular participation in class discussions is essential. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences; if you miss more than two course meetings, your attendance at participation grade will begin to be adversely affected. If something arises in your life that affects your ability to come to class and/or complete assignments in a timely manner, I encourage you to speak with me and/or your College Dean as soon as you are able so we can discuss potential accommodations.

Class participation involves regular, high-quality contributions to class discussion. Quality is more important than quantity, but during class meetings, I expect everyone to participate meaningfully in the discussion. High-quality comments are usually only possible when you have read carefully and prepared for the class session. For some, speaking up in class is an especially difficult challenge. If this is true for you, please come see me so we can talk about alternative ways to participate in the course overall.

Beyond participation, your grade will be based on your leading of class discussion; a media journal; two video projects; a midterm exam; and a final paper. The relative weight and due dates of each component are as follows:

Attendance and Participation	15%	
Discussion Leader and Paper	5%	
Media Journal	5%	February 9
Video News Story and Paper	10%	March 1 and March 3
Midterm Exam	25%	April 7
Video Advertisement and Paper	10%	May 3
Final Paper	30%	Thursday, May 12 at 5:00

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

A = 93-100	B- = 80-82	D = 60-69
A- = 90-92	C+ = 77-79	F = 0-59
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76	
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72	

How to calculate your own grade

Attendance and Participation = Graded out of 15 points

Discussion Leader and Paper = Graded out of 20 points (divide your points by 4)

Media Journal = Graded out of 20 points (divide your points by 4)

Video News Story = Group grade out of five points

- Video News Paper = Individual grade out of 20 points (divide your points by 4)

Midterm Exam = Graded out of 100 points (multiply your points by 0.25)

Video Advertisement = Individual grade out of 5 points

- Video Advertisement Paper = Individual grade out of 20 points (divide your points by 4)

Final Paper = Graded out of 100 points (multiply your points by 0.30)

Academic Integrity

From Dickinson College's Community Standards... "Respect for ideas — our own and others' — is a hallmark of academic integrity. We show respect by acknowledging when we have used another's words or ideas in our work. We expect others to acknowledge when they use our ideas or words in their work. Students are expected to do their own work on quizzes, papers, examinations, class assignments, etc. Normally, a paper may be submitted in fulfillment of an assignment in only one course. Exceptions require permission from the instructors. Collaboration must be noted in writing and requires the consent of all instructors."

(http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/)

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson College makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students requesting accommodations must make their request and provide appropriate documentation to the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Dana Hall, Suite 106. Because classes change every semester, eligible students must obtain a new accommodation letter from Director Marni Jones every semester and review this letter with their professors so the accommodations can be implemented. The Director of ODS is available by appointment to answer questions and discuss any implementation issues you may have. ODS proctoring is managed by Susan Frommer (717-254-8107 or proctoring@dickinson.edu). Address general inquiries to 717-245-1734 or e-mail disabilityservices@dickinson.edu. For more information, go to www.dickinson.edu/ODS.

Technology in the Classroom

A recent study conducted by psychologists Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer shows that students who take notes on a computer do less well answering conceptual questions than do students who take notes by hand (<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>). However, I know that many students have become accustomed to using laptops and/or tablets for note-taking. I leave the decision to you as to what works best for you. As such, I do permit students to use technology in the classroom. In fact, there might be a few days I will explicitly encourage you to use online resources during class.

With respect to audio recording, however, Pennsylvania is a “two-party consent” state, meaning that it is a crime to “intercept or record a telephone call or conversation **unless all parties to the conversation consent**” (<http://www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-recording-law>). Practically, what this means is that you should not be using any device to record class lectures or discussions. If a student with an accommodation from ODS is permitted to record class, all members of the class will be informed; students with ODS accommodations agree to strict guidelines with respect to how they use the recording.

Outline of the Course

The Media's Place in American Politics

January 26 – Introductions and Expectations; No Reading

January 28 – Davis, The Press and American Politics, Chapters 2 and 3 (on Moodle);

February 2 – Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent, Chapter 1 (on Moodle); MPIP, Chapter 31 (pages 369-381)

February 4 – Gans, Deciding What's News, Chapter 2 (on Moodle)

February 9 – **Media Journals Due**; Bennett, News: The Politics of Illusion, Chapter 2 (on Moodle); MPIP, Chapter 3 (pages 33-44)

February 11 – MPIP, Chapters 33 and 34 (pages 395-419)

February 16 – MPIP, Chapter 36 (pages 431-442); Video News Story Technology Session

The Role of Political Actors

February 18 – MPIP, Chapters 19, 20, and 22 (pages 241-266 and 275-282)

February 23 – Video News Story Workshop; No Reading

February 25 – MPIP, Chapters 23 and 24 (pages 283-301)

March 1 – **Video News Story Projects Due**

Media's Effect on...Public Opinion

March 3 – **Video News Story Papers Due**; MPIP, Chapters 7 and 8 (pages 85-111)

March 8 – MPIP 9 and 12 (pages 113-128 and 153-164)

March 10 – MPIP 10 and 11 (pages 129-151)

March 15 – SPRING BREAK

March 17 – SPRING BREAK

Media's Effect on...Elections

March 22 – MPIP, Chapter 13 (pages 169-183); “Winning the Media Campaign, 2012,” Pew Research Center, available at (<http://www.journalism.org/2012/11/02/winning-media-campaign-2012/>)

March 24 – MPIP, Chapters 15 and 16 (pages 193-215)

March 29 – Iyengar, Norpoth, and Hahn, “Consumer Demand for Election News: The Horse Race Sells” (on Moodle)

Media's Effect on...Policy

March 31 – (Health Policy) – MPIP, Chapter 29 (pages 343-354); “Six Things to Know About Health Care Coverage,” Pew Research Center, available at (<http://www.journalism.org/2010/06/21/six-things-know-about-health-care-coverage/>)

April 5 – (Foreign Policy) – MPIP Chapters 26 and 27 (pages 315-336); “The Portrait from Iraq – How the Press Has Covered Events on the Ground,” Pew Research Center, available at: (<http://www.journalism.org/2007/12/19/the-portrait-from-iraq-how-the-press-has-covered-events-on-the-ground/>)

April 7 – **Midterm Exam**

Campaign Advertising

April 12 - Air Wars, Chapters 1 and 2 (pages 1-27)

April 14 –Air Wars, Chapters 4 and 5 (pages 49-86)

April 19 – Air Wars, Chapter 6 (pages 87-99); Video Advertisement Technology Session

April 21 – Air Wars, Chapters 7 and 9 (pages 101-116 and 133-146)

April 26 – Geer, In Defense of Negativity, Chapter 3: “The Information Environment and Negativity” (Available online through the Dickinson College library); Video Advertisement Workshop

April 28 – Brader, “Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions” (on Moodle)

May 3 – **Video Advertisements Due**; Air Wars, Chapter 10 (pages 147-162)

May 5 – (Future of Journalism) – Shirky, “The Value of Digital Data,” Columbia Journalism Review, available at: (http://www.cjr.org/analysis/the_value_of_digital_data.php);

Sian Wyde, “What is the Future of Journalism?” The Guardian, available at:

(<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/apr/15/what-is-the-future-of-journalism>);

Beutner, “Does Local Journalism Have a Future?”, CNN, available at:

(<http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/22/opinions/beutner-future-local-journalism/>);

Hathi, “The Changing Future of Political Journalism,” Duke Political Review, available at: (<http://dukepoliticalreview.org/the-changing-future-of-political-journalism/>)

Thursday, May 12 at 5:00 p.m. – **Final Papers Due**