

# Political Science 243: Mass Media and American Politics

Dickinson College, Spring 2020  
MR 1:30-2:45, Denny Hall – Room 304

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## 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, covering topics related to how news organizations decide what is news and how they cover political events; how members of the mass public consume and receive coverage of news and public affairs; and the role of social media and mobile technology.

As you probably know, spring 2020 features a number of significant American political events: Democratic (and Republican) nominating contests, a State of the Union Address, and an Impeachment Trial, among others. The final project in this class will ask you to critically analyze media’s coverage of these events.

## Course Materials

There is one required book for the course (available at the bookstore):

- Ridout, Travis N., ed. 2019. *New Directions in Media and Politics, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. New York, NY: Routledge. (New Directions)

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 attendance and participation, your grade will be based on a media journal and reflection, two reading response papers and discussion questions, a video news story project and reflection, an exam, and a final media analysis podcast project and reflection. The relative weight and due date of each component is in the table below. Further details about each component will be forthcoming.

Attendance and Participation	10%	
Reading Response Papers and Discussion Questions	15% (2 @ 7.5% each)	(1) _____ (2) _____
Media Journal and Reflection Paper	10%	February 3
News Story Video and Reflection Paper	15%	February 24
Exam	25%	April 13
Final Project – Media Analysis Podcast, and Reflection Paper	25%	Tuesday, May 5

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	

### 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” ([https://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean\\_of\\_students/867/community\\_standards/2](https://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/2)).

I expect you to do your own work in the class and to cite any and all sources you use in your writing. You will work in small groups on the news story video, and I will talk about collaboration on that specific project when I hand out the assignment guidelines. If you ever have any questions about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask.

### Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more

about available supports, go to [www.dickinson.edu/access](http://www.dickinson.edu/access), email [access@dickinson.edu](mailto:access@dickinson.edu), call (717)245-1734, or go to ADS in Room 005 of Old West, Lower Level (aka "the OWLL").

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can meet soon to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your Blue Forms. If you will need test proctoring from ADS, remember that you will need to provide them with at least one week's notice.

### 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

#### **Introduction and Corporate Nature of Mass Media**

January 20

- No Reading

January 23

- Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent, Chapter 1 (on Moodle);

#### **What Makes News, News?**

January 27

- Gans, Deciding What's News, Chapter 2 (on Moodle)

January 30

- Bennett, News: The Politics of Illusion, Chapter 2 (on Moodle)

#### **Agenda Setting, Priming, and Framing**

February 3

- *Media Journals and Reflection Papers Due*
- McCombs and Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media" (on Moodle)
- Iyengar and Kinder, News that Matters, Chapter 7 (on Moodle)

February 6

- *Media Center Visit: Best Practices for Videos and Interviews (Meet in Bosler)*
- New Directions, Chapter 3

### **Selective Exposure**

February 10

- New Directions, Chapter 2

February 13

- *Media Center Visit – iMovie (Meet in Bosler) [If you have a Mac, please bring it.]*
- Arceneaux et al, “Polarized Political Communication, Oppositional Media Hostility, and Selective Exposure” (on Moodle)

February 17

- Feldman et al, “Climate on Cable: The Nature and Impact of Global Warming Coverage on Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC” (on Moodle)
- Zuniga et al, “Selective Exposure to Cable News and Immigration in the U.S.” (on Moodle)

February 20

- *Media Center Workshop Day*

February 24

- *News Story Videos and Reflection Papers Due*

### **News Versus Entertainment**

February 27

- Prior, “News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge” (on Moodle)
- Anderson and Skovsgaard, “The X Factor of Opportunity Structures” (on Moodle)

March 2

- New Directions, Chapter 5
- Lau et al, “Effect of Media Environment Diversity and Advertising Tone on Information Search, Selective Exposure, and Affective Polarization” (on Moodle)

### **Trust in Media**

March 5

- New Directions, Chapter 4
- Pew Research Center, “Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era” (pages 1-13, on Moodle)

March 9

- *Spring Break!*

March 12

- *Spring Break!*

## **Deepfakes and Fake News**

March 16

- Chesney and Citron, “Deepfakes and the New Disinformation War” (on Moodle)
- On the Media, November 24, 2019, “Purple Episode 2: Low Information, High Misinformation Voters” (Full Episode (14:32)) (Available at: <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/452538775/on-the-media>)

March 19

- New Directions, Chapter 15
- Allcott and Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election” (on Moodle)

## **Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram) and Mobile Technology**

March 23

- *Media Center Visit – Audacity, Extracting Sound, Podcast Techniques (Meet in Bosler)*
- New Directions, Chapter 7

March 26

- Enli, “Twitter as an Arena for the Authentic Outsider” (on Moodle)
- Francia, “Free Media and Twitter in the 2016 Presidential Election” (on Moodle)

March 30

- New Directions, Chapter 8
- Bossetta, “The Digital Architectures of Social Media: Comparing Political Campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Election” (on Moodle)

## **Media Coverage of Elections and Candidates (and How Candidates Use Media)**

April 2

- New Directions, Chapter 9
- New Directions, Chapter 10

April 6

- New Directions, Chapter 11
- Ward, “Seeing Double: Race, Gender, and Coverage of Minority Women’s Campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives” (on Moodle)

## **Media Coverage of War & Foreign Policy**

April 9

- New Directions, Chapter 6
- On the Media, January 10, 2020, “Hurling Toward Catastrophe” (Beginning to 14:21) (available at: <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/452538775/on-the-media>)

April 13

- *Exam*

April 16

- *No class, Professor Niebler at Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Assoc.*
- *Work on your podcast projects!!*

## **Media Coverage and The Legislative and Executive Branches**

April 20

- New Directions, Chapter 12
- New Directions, Chapter 13
- On the Media, December 20, 2019, “Let the Record Show” (Beginning to 11:10)  
(Available at: <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/452538775/on-the-media>)

April 23

- *Media Center Workshop Day (Meet in Bosler)*

## **Media Coverage of Public Policy**

April 27

- New Directions, Chapter 14
- McGinty et al., “News Media Framing of Serious Mental Illness and Gun Violence in the United States, 1997-2012” (on Moodle)

May 1

- Wrap-up, Reading TBA

Tuesday, May 5

- *Final Podcast Projects and Reflection Papers Due*