

Political Science 243: Mass Media and American Politics

Dickinson College, Spring 2022
TF 1:30-2:45, Denny Hall – Room 203

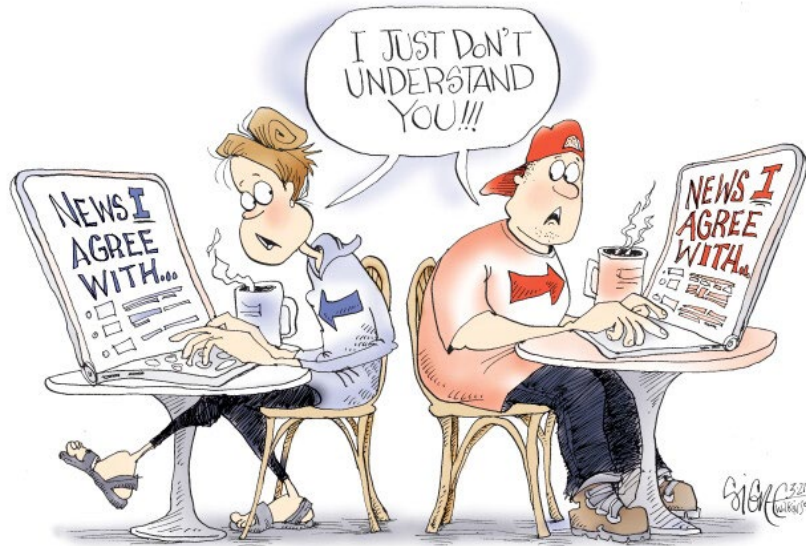
Professor Sarah Niebler

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Source: <https://www.cartoonistgroup.com/cartoon/Signe+Wilkinson%27s+Editorial+Cartoons/2021-03-31/188292>

Course Description and Learning Objectives

Nearly everything we learn about the American political system comes via 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 considers the role of the media in a democracy, the historical development of the mass media, the values of and constraints on the media in the United States, the effect the media has on the public and the American political process, and contemporary issues affecting the relationship between media and politics today.

By the end of the course, students should...

- Understand the role of the mass media in contemporary American politics
- Thoughtfully analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view of authors who study mass media and American politics
- Learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about media and politics
- Become savvy consumers of political news

Course Materials

There are no required books for you to purchase for this course. Readings will be available online, on Moodle and/or through the Dickinson College library as specified on the syllabus and on Moodle.

Requirements and Grading

Students learn best by directly engaging with course materials and thinking about (and discussing) readings. I expect students to answer questions that are posted, ask questions about concepts that are not clear, engage viewpoints that are presented moving beyond simple “agree” or “disagree” statements, and think critically. 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 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.

While it is my hope that students will attend in-person class meetings, please know that **I would prefer that you NOT to attend class if you are feeling sick**. It is incumbent upon all of us to keep one another healthy. The best thing to do if you miss one class is to talk with a classmate about what you missed and get notes from them. **If you miss multiple class meetings in a row, please get in touch with me so we can figure out the best path forward and make sure you do not fall behind.**

Beyond attendance and participation, your grade will be based on a series of reading check-ins, a media journal and reflection paper, three reading response papers and sets of discussion questions, a video news story project and reflection paper, and a final media analysis podcast project. The reading checks are in lieu of a midterm or final exam and are short answer questions that must be answered **PRIOR** to the start of class on the days you select. You should plan to complete 12 reading check-ins over the course of the semester and I will drop your lowest two grades. Thus, there will be 10 grades for reading check-ins and they will be graded on a 0-2 scale. You will earn zero points if you do not complete the check-in; one point if you attempt the check-in but your answers are insufficient; and two points if your answers are sufficient. The purpose of these check-ins is to help you prepare to participate in class discussion, so the points are rolled into the overall participation and engagement component of the course. *You should not complete a reading check and response paper on the same day.*

Information on the other assignments will be distributed and discussed in class and the posted to Moodle. The relative weight and due date of each component is in the table below.

Participation and Engagement, including Reading Checks	20%	Ongoing
Reading Response Papers and Discussion Questions	30% (3 @ 10 % each)	(1) <u>February</u> _____ (2) <u>March</u> _____ (3) <u>April</u> _____
Media Journal and Reflection Paper	10%	February 11
News Story Video	10%	March 4
News Story Video Reflection Paper	5%	March 11
Final Project – Media Analysis Podcast	25%	Monday, May 16 @ noon

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 for ideas 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/download/downloads/id/963/community_standards.pdf)

Students must complete their own work. You may discuss your ideas with your colleagues, but the work you hand in must be your own. In everything you write in this course, you must properly cite all your sources. I prefer for you to use Chicago style with in-text citations (as opposed to footnotes). If you do not know how to do this, please consult the library's research guides and/or the library liaison for political science, Ian Boucher (boucheri@dickinson.edu). If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please ask sooner rather than later.

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/ADS, email access@dickinson.edu, call

(717) 245-1734, or go to the ADS office in Room 005 of Old West, Lower Level (aka "the OWLL").

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please follow the guidance at www.dickinson.edu/AccessPlan for disclosing the accommodations for which you are eligible and scheduling a meeting with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your accommodations and finalize your Access Plan. If test proctoring will be needed from ADS, remember that we will need to complete your Access Plan in time to give them at least one week's advance notice.

Please know that I am committed to working with all students so they can succeed in this course. I encourage you to contact me via email or come to office hours if you have any questions or concerns.

Covid-19 and the Spring 2022 Semester

While it is my sincere hope that we will be able to conduct this entire semester in person, we all now know how quickly things can change. First and foremost, please know that I value your health and well-being and am happy to work with you if unexpected things arise throughout the semester. **I do ask you to communicate with me, however.** I do not expect you to disclose particular circumstances of any challenges you are facing (although I am happy to try to recommend resources as I am able) but **I cannot work with you if we are not in touch.**

Outline of the Course

Unit 1: The Role of the Media in a Democracy and History of Journalism in the U.S.

January 25

- Introduction and Course Expectations, No Reading

January 28 – **Media's Role in a Democracy**

- Schudson, Michael. 2015. "How to Think Normatively About News and Democracy." *Oxford Handbooks Online*. (on Moodle)

February 1 – **Media's Role in a Democracy, cont.**

- Steinberg, Brian. 2021. "TV News Scrambles to Cover Insurrection at U.S. Capitol in Surreal National Moment." *Variety*. Available at: <https://variety.com/2021/tv/news/tv-news-scramble-capitol-trump-insurrection-protest-1234879851/>
- Degans, Eric and David Folkenflik. 2021. "A Look at How Different U.S. Media Outlets Covered the Pro-Trump Riot on Capitol Hill." *NPR*. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/07/954562181/a-look-at-how-different-u-s-media-outlets-covered-the-pro-trump-riot-on-capitol->
- Brown, Danielle K. 2021. "The Insurrection at the Capitol Challenged How U.S. Media Frames Unrest and Shapes Public Opinion." *The Conversation*. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/the-insurrection-at-the-capitol-challenged-how-us-media-frames-unrest-and-shapes-public-opinion-152805>
- Bauder, David. 2021. "Riot? Insurrection? Words Matter in Describing Capitol Siege." *AP News*. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-capitol-siege-riots-media-8000ce7db2b176c1be386d945be5fd6a>

February 4 – **History of Journalism in the U.S.**

- Schudson, Michael. 2003. “Where News Came From: The History of Journalism” in The Sociology of News. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- 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. (on Moodle)

February 8 – **History of Journalism in the U.S., cont.**

- Bossetta, Michael. 2018. “The Digital Architectures of Social Media: Comparing Political Campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Election.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 95(2): 471-496. (on Moodle)

Unit 2: Values of and Constraints on Media in the U.S.

February 11 – **The First Amendment**

- Wasser, Melissa, Michael Luo, and Erin Coyle. 2020. “Freedom of the Press: Part 1” *Civics 101 Podcast*. Available at: <https://www.civics101podcast.org/civics-101-episodes/freedomofpress1>
- Fisher, Anthony L. 2017. “Fake News is Bad. Attempts to Ban it are Worse.” *Vox*. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/7/5/15906382/fake-news-free-speech-facebook-google>

February 15 – **The First Amendment, cont.**

- *Bosler Session on Video Recording and Best Practices for Recording Interviews*
- “Defamation” *What Roman Mars Can Learn About Con Law Podcast*. Available at: <https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/what-roman-mars/16-defamation-i92wlr8hkPe/>

February 18 – **Economics**

- Hamilton, James T. 2005. “The Market and the Media,” in The Press edited by Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. New York: Oxford University Press.

February 22 – **Economics, cont.**

- “The Future of Media Project.” 2021. *Harvard University Institute for Quantitative Social Science*. Available at: <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/futureofmedia/us-media-index>
- Liptak, Adam. 2021. “Supreme Court Lets F.C.C. Relax Limits on Media Ownership.” *New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/us/supreme-court-media-ownership.html>
- Stroud, Natalie Jomini and Ashley Muddiman. 2018. “Political Coverage on Facebook.” *Center for Media Engagement*. Available at: <https://mediaengagement.org/research/political-coverage-on-facebook>

February 25 – **Values of News Organizations**

- Bennett, W. Lance. 2011. “News Stories: Four Information Biases That Matter,” In News: The Politics of Illusion. New York: Pearson. (on Moodle)
- Gans, Herbert J. 2005. “Values in the News,” in Deciding What’s News. New York: Pantheon Books. (on Moodle)

March 1

- *Bosler Work Day, No Reading*

March 4

- *News Videos Due Prior to Class, No Reading*

March 8 – **Bias, Objectivity, and Balance**

- Wolfsfeld, Gadi. 2011. “No Such Thing as Objective News,” in Making Sense of Media and Politics: Five Principles in Political Communication. New York: Routledge. (on Moodle)
- Niven, David. 2012. “An Interesting Bias: Lessons from an Academic's Year as a Reporter” *P.S. Political Science and Politics* 45(2): 259-264.
- Blake, Aaron. 2021. “What to do about Whataboutism in Politics.” *The Washington Post*. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/04/20/what-do-about-whataboutism-politics/>

March 11 – **Novelty and Conflict**

- Patterson, Thomas E. 1993. “The Miscast Institution.” In Out of Order. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Sides, John and Kalev Leetaru. 2016. “A Deep Dive into the News Media’s Role in the Rise of Donald J. Trump.” *The Washington Post*. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/06/24/a-deep-dive-into-the-news-medias-role-in-the-rise-of-donald-j-trump/>

March 15

- *Spring Break, No Reading*

March 18

- *Spring Break, No Reading*

Unit 3: Media Effects and Controversies in Media and Politics Today

March 22 – **Media Effects**

- Iyengar, Shanto. 2018. “A Typology of Media Effects,” in Oxford Handbook of Political Communication. (Go to scholar.google.com, then type “A Typology of Media Effects”. You should be able to read the chapter (pages 59-68) in Google Books.)

March 25 – **Agenda Setting**

- McCombs, Maxwell E. and Donald L. Shaw. 1972. “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media.” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 36(2): 176-187. (on Moodle)

March 29 – **Priming & Framing**

- Iyengar, Shanto and Donald R. Kinder. 1987. “The Priming Effect,” in News that Matters. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. (on Moodle)
- Gubitz, S. R., Samara Klar, Joshua Robinson, and James N. Druckman. 2019. “Political Dynamics of Framing,” in New Directions in Media and Politics, edited by Travis N. Ridout. New York: Routledge. (on Moodle)

April 1 –

- *Professor Niebler at PPSA Conference, No Reading*
- *Enjoy your day off!*

April 5 – **The Demise of Local News**

- Darr, Joshua, Matthew P. Hitt, and Johanna L. Dunaway. 2018. “Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior.” *Journal of Communication* 68: 1007-1028. (on Moodle)
- Hayes, Danny and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2015. “As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections.” *Journal of Politics* 77(2): 447-462. (on Moodle)

April 8 – **Impact on Campaigns**

- Lawrence, Regina. 2019. “Do the Media Give Women Candidates a Fair Shake?” In *New Directions in Media and Politics*, edited by Travis N. Ridout. New York: Routledge. (on Moodle)
- Ward, Orlanda. 2016. “Seeing Double: Race, Gender, and Coverage of Minority Women’s Campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives.” *Politics & Gender* 12: 317-343. (on Moodle)
- 4:30 – *Interview/Discussion with Rep. Jordan Harris (either in person or on zoom) – More information forthcoming*

April 12 – **Impact on Congress**

- *Bosler Session on Audacity and Creating Podcasts*
- Vinson, C. Danielle. 2019. “Congress and the Media: Who Has the Upper Hand?” in *New Directions in Media and Politics*, edited by Travis N. Ridout. New York: Routledge. (on Moodle)

April 15 – **Trust of Media**

- Mourao, Rachel R., Esther Thorson, Weiyue Chen, and Samuel M. Tham. 2018. “Media Repertoires and News Trust During the Early Trump Administration.” *Journalism Studies* 19(13): 1945-1956. (on Moodle)
- Mitchell, Amy and Mason Walker. 2021. “More Americans Now Say Government Should Take Steps to Restrict False Information Online Than in 2018.” *Pew Research Center*. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/18/more-americans-now-say-government-should-take-steps-to-restrict-false-information-online-than-in-2018/>
- Gottfried, Jeffrey and Jacob Liedke. 2021. “Partisan Divides in Media Trust Widen, Driven by a Decline Among Republicans.” *Pew Research Center*. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/30/partisan-divides-in-media-trust-widen-driven-by-a-decline-among-republicans/>

April 19 – **Partisan Media and Selective Exposure**

- Levendusky, Matthew S. 2013. “Why Do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3): 611-623. (on Moodle)
- Arceneaux, Kevin, Martin Johnson, Rene Lindstadt, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2015. “The Influence of News Media on Political Elites.” Blog Published by *The American Journal of Political Science*. Available at: <https://ajps.org/2015/02/24/the-influence-of-news-media-on-political-elites/>

April 22 – **Partisan Media and Selective Exposure, cont.**

- Feldman, Lauren, Edward W. Maibach, Connie Roser-Renouf, and Anthony Leiserowitz. 2012. “Climate on Cable: The Nature and Impact of Global Warming Coverage on Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 17(1): 3-31. (on Moodle)
- Nadler, Anthony, Doron Taussig, Natacha Yazbeck, and Andrea Wenzel. 2021. “Unmasking Polarization: How Conservatives Make Sense of Covid19 Coverage.” *Columbia Journalism Review*. Available at: https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/polarization-covid-conservative.php

April 26

- *Bosler Work Day, No Reading*

April 29 – **Fake News and Misinformation**

- Allcott, Hunt and Matthew Gentzkow. 2017. “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election.” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31(2): 211-235. (on Moodle)

May 3 - **Fake News and Misinformation, cont.**

- van der Linden, Sander, Costas Panagopoulos, and Jon Roozenbeek. 2020. “You Are Fake News: Political Bias in Perceptions of Fake News.” *Media, Culture & Society* 42(3): 460-470. (on Moodle)
- Allen, Jennifer, Baird Howland, Markus Mobius, David Rothschild, and Duncan J. Watts. 2020. “Evaluating the Fake News Problem at the Scale of the Information Ecosystem.” *Science Advances* 6: 1-6. (on Moodle)

May 6 – **Does Fact Checking Help? and Wrap up**

- Walter, Nathan, Johnathan Cohen, R. Lance Holbert, and Yasmin Morag. 2019. “Fact-Checking: A Meta-Analysis of What Works and for Whom.” *Political Communication* 37: 350-375.