

# Poli Sci 217: Mass Media and Politics

Instructor: John Lovett

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Classroom and Class Time: 2:00-3:15, Kirby 102

Office Hours: Tuesday 10-noon, Wednesday 3:30-4:30, and by appointment

Office: Kirby 313

**Background:** The mass media is a unique creature within the context of politics (and in particular American politics): it is not connected to the government directly, and unlike interest groups and public policy, the two other main outside forces influencing American politics, its general goal is not necessarily to influence politics. Yet, the media plays an important role in American politics from a variety of fronts, whether as a source for individuals to get information on government, a shiner of light on corruption and government malfeasance, or potentially a reshaping of how individuals understand the world around them.

In this course, we will explore how the media plays a role in politics, using American politics as the primary front of discussion (though I'm more than happy to bring in the international context as well). What is the media's role in politics, and can the media influence people even though most people hold hard-to-change views? How do historical and other factors influence the media's place in politics? And what role does the increase of consumable media (from the earliest days of newspapers to the modern internet media environment) influence politics and those involved in politics? This course is a starting point on that line, from the printing press and the penny paper to the Twitter feed and the Snapchat filter.

**Reading Material:** The main books for this course are:

Atkinson, Mary Layton. *Combative Politics*. University of Chicago Press. 2017.

Graber, Doris A. and Johanna Dunaway. *Mass Media and American Politics, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition*. CQ Press (Hereafter GD)

**Computer and Technology (Cell Phone) Policy:** There is a lot of research related to the use of computers in the classroom, most of it noting that students are less likely to pay attention if they have their computers out versus if they are writing down their notes. I'm going to allow you to have your computers out, but make sure you are only using it for note-taking or occasional online activities that we will do during activity periods. As for cell phones, do not have your cell phone out unless you have spoken to me beforehand that there is a reason you may need to have it out.

**Policy on Academic Dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty is broadly defined as submitting work that is not your own without attribution, and is not acceptable in this or any other academic course. Any academic dishonesty found on an assignment results in a failing grade for that assignment and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent permissible under the Wake Forest honor

code. If you have any questions or want to make sure you are citing something correctly, contact me and I'll be happy to help.

**Test Policy:** On examination day, you may only have a writing utensil and food/drink with you for the exam. All other things (including cell phones) must be placed in your bag and left in the bag for the duration of the exam.

**Accommodations Statement:** Wake Forest University provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you are in need of an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact me privately as early in the term as possible. Retroactive accommodations will not be provided. Students requiring accommodations must also consult the Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services (118 Reynolda Hall, 336-758-5929, lac.wfu.edu).

## Grading

Individual Paper based on analysis of a media source's coverage/focus (3-5 pages) – 10%

Reading Quizzes (11 opportunities, lowest grade dropped): 10%

Group Project based on looking at how media covers a public policy area – 30%

- Paper (10-12 pages) – 15%
- Presentation (15 minutes) – 10%
- Reflection Paper (1-2 pages) – 5%

Take-Home Midterm – 20%

Take-Home Final Exam – 30%

The individual paper will be due at the end of September. Pick a news source (either a national or local newspaper, cable or local television, or a website based on a list of sources I'll provide the first week of class) and follow their coverage for a week. What does the news source focus on? How do they focus on it (we will not have covered framing fully yet so I'm more interested in how you're interpreting what you're seeing rather than specific frames or constructions)? Is coverage consistent in terms of topic or focus, or all over the place? If you'd like to choose a different source rather than one from the list you will need to clear it with me, as I want us to focus on political news rather than, say, sports or video games. Related: if you send me a picture of a Pokémon via email before October 1 you will get a bonus point on the final exam. After October 1 it's a half point. Well done in reading the syllabus!

Instructions for the longer group project will be posted to Sakai by the end of September. In the group project, you will choose a topic from a list of 10 potential topic areas and be grouped with others to look at how media in general covers these topic areas. Sign-up for topics (and ordering) will occur in mid-September. You may not get your preferred topic, so let me know your top 5 choices (I'll set up a forum for this at that time to ensure that is possible).

On the group project, you will want to look at multiple sources and multiple constructions to see how they cover these areas. More instructions will be given in late September.

Quizzes will be randomly given throughout the semester based on the major topics in the readings. There will be 11 quizzes total, with the lowest grade dropped. I will allow quiz

makeups if you let me know before class of a conflict (either due to university event, sickness, or medical/family emergency).

Both the midterm and final examinations will be essay-based and take-home. The midterm will be posted early in October and the final exam posted during the final exam period. Both will be turned in through Sakai.

### **Grades**

Academic achievement in this class is graded on the following basis:

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

## **Schedule**

### **PART 1: A General Overview of Media**

**August 26<sup>th</sup> – Opening of Class – What is Media? (and a brief history of media)**

Take a look at the syllabus.

**August 28<sup>th</sup> – The Role of Media in Government**

GD Chapter 1

**September 2<sup>nd</sup> – Who is the Media? Control of Production**

GD Chapter 2

**September 4<sup>th</sup> – Media Law and Press Freedom**

GD Chapter 3

Lee, Timothy. “Why Gawker.com is shutting down next week.” *Vox* (Sakai)

## **September 9 and 11 – The Daily Me and the Consequences of Media Choice**

September 9 – Watch or read what you would normally consume for news  
September 11- Pick another source and think about how the sources cover similar things differently (if at all)

GD Chapter 4

The American Press Institute. “The Personal News Cycle: How Americans choose to get their news.” (Sakai)

## **Part 2: Types of Media and Ramifications**

### **September 16 and 18 – Traditional Media and Modern Challenges**

GD Chapter 5

Mundy, Gerald. “Don’t Cheer the Decline of the Newspaper Industry” *The American Conservative* (Sakai)

Fox, Justin. “Google May Employ More People Than the Entire U.S. Newspaper Industry.” *Bloomberg Opinion* (Sakai)

### **September 23 and 25 – The Role of Journalists**

(Note: We’ll revisit Gawker here, so in addition to the articles below revisit the Lee piece)

Folkenflik, David. “On The Demise Of Gawker.com: Unsparing, Satiric And Brutal.” *NPR* (Sakai)

Magary, Drew. “Michael Wolff Did What Every Other White House Reporter Is Too Cowardly to Do.” *GQ*. (Sakai)

Nolan, Hamilton. “Powerful Politicians' Family Members Should Not Hold Powerful Journalism Jobs, Ever.” *Splinter*. (Sakai)

Rosen, Jay. “Next time you wonder why New York Times people get so defensive, read this.” *Pressthink*. (Sakai)

### **September 30 and October 2 – Emerging Trends in Media (New Media and Social Media)**

Curtis, Bryan. “What “Pivoting to Video” Really Means” *The Ringer* (Sakai)

Greenwell, Megan. “The Adults In The Room.” *The Concourse*. (Sakai)

Kosoff, Maya. “Was the Media’s Big “Pivot to Video” all a Lie?” *Vanity Fair*. (Sakai)

Kreiss, Daniel, and Shannon C. McGregor. “The “Arbiters of What Our Voters See”: Facebook and Google’s Struggle with Policy, Process, and Enforcement around Political Advertising.” *Political Communication* (Sakai)

Lorenz, Taylor. “It’s Impossible to Follow a Conversation on Twitter.” *The Atlantic* (Sakai)

McGregor, Shannon C., Regina Lawrence, and Arielle Cardona. “Personalization, gender, and social media: gubernatorial candidates’ social media strategies.” *Information, Communication, and Society*.

### ***Short Papers must be submitted on Sakai by September 30 at 2 PM***

**October 7 – Review Session/Catchup if necessary**

**October 9 – No Class: Midterm Exam goes live on Sakai at 5 PM on October 7<sup>th</sup>, due October 9<sup>th</sup> at 5 PM on Sakai.**

## **Part 3 – The Role of Media in American Democracy**

**October 14 – Media and Political Institutions Part 1: The Judiciary**

GD Chapter 8, p. 211-220

Williams, Ryan, Anthony Chergosky, John Lovett, and Kelsey Shoub. “Supreme Court Headline News: How Television Affects Court Public Opinion.” Manuscript under review.

**October 16 – Media and Political Institutions Part 2: Congress**

GD Chapter 7, 196-210

Golbeck, Jennifer, Justin M. Grimes, and Anthony Rogers. “Twitter use by the U.S. Congress.” *Journal for the American Society for Information Science and Technology* (Sakai)... Note: This article is about 10 years old, so what I want you to think about while reading it is how things have changed.

**October 21-23 – Media and Political Institutions Part 3: The Presidency**

GD Chapter 7, p. 173-196

Christensen, Devin, and John Curiel. “What Trump’s tweets tell us about his TV viewing — and his thinking.” *The Washington Post*. April 13, 2017. (Sakai)

Edwards, George III and B. Dan Wood. “Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress, and the Media.” *American Political Science Review*. (Sakai)

Lorenz, Taylor. “James Madison Would Be Horrified by a Tweeting President.” *The Atlantic*.

### **October 28 - Media and State & Local Politics**

GD Chapter 8, p. 220-238

“Local TV News Factsheet” *Pew* (Sakai)

### **October 30 – Media and Public Policy**

GD Chapter 6

Boykoff, Maxwell T., and Jules M. Boykoff. “Climate change and journalistic norms: A case-study of US mass-media coverage.” *Geoforum* (Sakai)

Rose, Max and Frank R. Baumgartner. “Framing the Poor: Media Coverage and U.S. Poverty Policy, 1960–2008.” *Policy Studies Journal*. (Sakai)

## **Part 4 – Ramifications and Effects of Media and Politics**

### **November 4-6 – Media and Elections**

GD Chapter 11

“Election Night Special” *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* (Sakai)

Searles, Kathleen, and Kevin K. Banda. “But her emails! How journalistic preferences shaped election coverage in 2016.” *Journalism*. (Sakai).

### **November 11-13 – Framing and its Effects**

Atkinson Ch. 1-2

Hitt, Matthew P., and Kathleen Searles. “Media Coverage and Public Approval of the U.S. Supreme Court.” *Political Communication*. (Sakai).

### **November 18-20 – Information Processing and the Consequences of Framing**

Atkinson Ch. 3-6

GD Chapter 10

**November 25 – Media Bias**

GD Chapter 12

Puglisi, Ricarrdo, and James M. Snyder Jr. “Newspaper Coverage of Political Scandals.” *The Journal of Politics* (Sakai)

**November 27 – NO CLASS: Thanksgiving**

**December 2/4 – Group Presentations and Final Review**

**Final Exam will go live on Sakai December 9<sup>th</sup> at 9 AM, due December 12<sup>th</sup> at 5 PM on Sakai.**