

Politics and the Media

PS 312 (#35203) / CMN 325 (#53589) / MS 322 (#53590)

T Th 11:00am–12:20pm

213 Gregory Hall

Fall 2009

Instructor

Professor Scott Althaus

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Grader

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Hours: Mondays 12:30pm–1:30pm, Tuesdays 12:30pm–1:30pm, and by appt.

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Course Overview

This course examines the processes of mass-mediated political communication in democratic societies. Although these processes can be studied in a variety of contexts, this course will focus primarily on the interaction between news media, audiences, and strategic communicators in the United States. Special emphasis will be given to the role of news media in democratic theory; the politics of media control; the role of political communication during elections and time of war; the impact of new mass communication technologies; the effects of media messages on audiences; and factors shaping the construction of news such as journalistic routines, media economics, and the strategic management of news by politicians.

Course Objectives

This course has four primary objectives. By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- identify the roles played by news media in contemporary American politics
- appreciate the production of political news as a complex interaction between news organizations, audiences, and politicians
- understand how the “marketplace of ideas” constituted by mediated political communication affects democratic politics, and how the content of this marketplace is affected by the constraints under which the news media operate
- analyze critically a variety of news texts

Required Reading

Students are required to obtain the following book, which is available at local bookstores (one copy will also be on reserve at the Undergraduate Library):

- Iyengar, Shanto, and Jennifer McGrady. (2006). *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. New York: Norton. [aka *MP*]

Students are also required to obtain a set of additional readings which will be distributed by the instructor via our course Moodle.

Course Moodle Site

This course has a Moodle site that will be the primary vehicle for receiving course assignments and distributing course-related materials in electronic form. The Moodle site can be accessed here (access requires an enrollment key): <https://courses.las.illinois.edu/course/view.php?id=103>

Assignments

Your final grade for this course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

- Two hourly exams (25% each; 50% of final grade)
- News analysis paper (15% for first section, 15% for second section; totals 30% of final grade)
- Final exam (20% of final grade)

The **three examinations** for the class draw equally from course readings and lecture material. The first and second exams may consist of multiple-choice, definition, short answer, short essay, and/or article analysis questions. The final exam will be a timed, open-book exam consisting entirely of essay-type questions. This final exam will emphasize the material on strategic communication from the last third of the class, but since a proper understanding of this material requires a solid grasp of concepts and relationships covered in the earlier parts of the course, the final exam can be considered cumulative.

Students will write a **news analysis paper** in two sections over the course of the semester. Details on this assignment will be provided for each stage of the paper. Papers should be stapled and begin with a *separate title page* which includes the paper's title, your name, and relevant course information. *Your name and any other identifying information should appear nowhere else in the paper.* I expect proper bibliographic references in the paper and prefer the APA author-date style—see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> for details). However, you may follow one of the other standard bibliographic reference systems (Chicago, MLA, Turabian, etc.) so long as you do so consistently. Papers should be typed or word-processed, double-spaced, stapled and set in a standard font (generally 10-12 point sizes).

Extra Credit Policy: Students taking this course can earn a small amount of extra credit (up to half a percentage point of their final grade) by participating as a subject in an experimental research project authorized by the instructor. Details about this extra credit option will be provided at some point during the first third of the class. *No extra credit can be earned after the 22nd of October, which is the date of the second hourly exam.*

Makeup Exam Policy: I understand that circumstances occasionally arise that require students to miss a scheduled exam. My policy is to allow those students to take a makeup exam that is more difficult than the scheduled in-class exam, since people taking the makeup will have had more time to prepare for it than did students taking the in-class exam. Makeup exams will consist entirely of short answer, essay, and analysis questions.

Late Assignment Policy: Unless you make prior arrangements with me, assignments turned in past deadline will lose one full letter grade for each day of class that the assignment is late (beginning with the day the assignment is due). Only in extraordinary circumstances will I grant extensions when the request is made in the 48-hour period before the time the assignment is due.

Special Accommodations: All qualified students entitled to special testing accommodations or assignment deadlines should let me know as early in the semester as possible so I can make appropriate arrangements. Do not be shy about asking for appropriate accommodations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—if you have qualified for them, then you deserve to have them. I am committed to making sure that all students taking the course have

equal opportunities for doing their best work on assignments and exams.

Expectations for Students

1. Readings assigned for particular days should be read prior to coming to class.
2. Conflicts with deadlines or other matters should be brought up with me **well in advance** of the conflict. I will do my best to find a remedy for the conflict, so long as I am given adequate time to do so.
3. You must attend class. Class sessions will not normally be devoted to repeating material covered in readings. Rather, classes will typically relate relevant material not covered in the readings, use the readings as background for discussing particular examples, go deeper into details or specifics, or use the readings as a springboard for discussion.
4. If you miss a class, you'll need to get a copy of lecture notes from another student. I don't provide copies of my notes or PowerPoint presentations to students.

Tentative Weekly Schedule for Class Topics and Reading Assignments

8/25 **Introduction**

8/27 **When Good Media Go Bad**

Video: "Media by Milosevic"

Mutz, Diana C., and Paul S. Martin. 2002. Facilitating communication across lines of political difference: The role of mass media. *American Political Science Review* 95 (1):97-114.

9/1, 3 **What is the News Supposed to Do?**

Baker, C. Edwin. 2002. *Media, Markets, and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press) pp. 125-153.

Schudson, Michael, & Tiftt, S. E. 2005. American journalism in historical perspective. In K. H. Jamieson & G. Overholser (Eds.), *Institutions of American democracy: The press* (pp. 17-47). New York: Oxford University Press.

MP, chp. 5 "The Rise of New Media"

9/8 **Audience Trends in News Consumption**

Althaus, Scott L. 2007. Free falls, high dives, and the future of democratic accountability. In *The politics of news: The news of politics*, edited by D. A. Graber, D. McQuail and P. Norris. Washington D. C.: CQ Press.

Prior, Markus. 2002. Liberated viewers, polarized voters: The implications of increased media choice for democratic politics. *The Good Society* 11 (3):10-16.

9/10, 15, 17 Media Effects on Audiences

Lowery, Shearon, and Melvin L. DeFleur. 1995. *Milestones in mass communication research*. 3rd ed. (White Plains, NY: Longman) Chapter 7, "Experiments with film: Persuading the American soldier in World War II"

MP, chp. 8 "News and Public Opinion" (also read appendix to chp. 8, pp. 230-6)

Leighley, Jan. 2004. *Mass Media and Politics: A Social Science Perspective*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin) Chapter 7, "Agenda Setting, Priming, and Framing."

Lodge, Milton, and Charles S. Taber. 2007. The rationalizing voter: Unconscious thought in political information processing. Unpublished manuscript: Stony Brook University.

9/22 FIRST EXAM

9/24, 29 Economics and Structure of the News-Making Process

MP, chp. 2 "The Press and the Democratic Process"

MP, pp. 48-66 (the first half of chp. 3, "The Media Marketplace: Where Americans Get the News")

Tuchman, Gaye. 1978. *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. (New York: Free Press.) Chapter 2, "Space and the news net."

Crouse, Timothy. 1973. *The Boys on the Bus*. (New York: Ballantine) Chapter 1, "On the Bus."

10/1 Looking Behind the Curtain: What Explains the News?

10/1 First Section of News Analysis Paper Due at Start of Class

Video: "Spin"

MP, pp. 66-82 (the second half of chp. 3, "The Media Marketplace: Where Americans Get the News")

10/6, 8, 13 Organizational Processes and News Norms

Darnton, Robert. 1990. Journalism: All the news that fits we print. In *The kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in cultural history*, edited by R. Darnton. New York: Norton.

Tuchman, Gaye. 1972. Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity. *American Journal of Sociology*. 77: 660-679.

MP, chp. 4 "Reporters, Official Sources, and the Decline of Adversarial Journalism"

Sheafer, Tamir, and Gadi Wolfsfeld. 2009. Party systems and oppositional voices in the news media: A study of the contest over political waves in the United States and Israel. *International Journal of Press/Politics* 14 (2):146-165.

10/15, 20 News Bias

- Banfield, Ashleigh. 2004. A Shot Messenger's Observations. In *Into the Buzzsaw: Leading Journalists Expose the Myth of a Free Press* (revised and expanded edition). Kristina Borjesson, ed. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Rather, Dan. 2004. The Patriot and the Censor's Necklace. In *Into the Buzzsaw: Leading Journalists Expose the Myth of a Free Press* (revised and expanded edition). Kristina Borjesson, ed. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Gilens, Martin. 1996. Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 60: 515-541.
- Gilens, Martin, and Craig Hertzman. 2000. Corporate Ownership and News Bias: Newspaper Coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. *Journal of Politics* 62(2): 369-86.
- D D'Alessio, M. Allen. 2000. Media bias in presidential elections: a meta-analysis. *The Journal of Communication* 50 (4):133-156.

10/22 SECOND EXAM

10/27 Introduction to Strategic Communication

Video: "The Press Secretary"

- Kumar, Martha Joynt. 2005. Presidential press conferences: The importance and evolution of an enduring forum. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35 (1):166-192.

10/29, 11/3 Strategic Communication as Democratic Governance

MP, chp. 7 "Going Public"

- Gurevitch, Michael, Stephen Coleman, and Jay G. Blumler. 2009. Political communication --Old and new media relationships. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625 (1):164-181.
- Wolfsfeld, Gadi. 1997. *Media and Political Conflict*. (New York: Cambridge University Press) Chapters 1, "The Structural Dimension: The Struggle over Access", and 2, "The Cultural Dimension: The Struggle over Meaning"

11/5, 10, 12 Strategic Communication in Wartime

11/5 Second Section of News Analysis Paper Due at Start of Class

Video: "Buying the War" (Bill Moyers)

- Kumar, Deepa. 2006. Media, war, and propaganda: Strategies of information management during the 2003 Iraq War. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3 (1):48-69.
- Althaus, Scott L. 2003. When news norms collide, follow the lead: New evidence for press independence. *Political Communication* 20 (4):381-414.
- Hayes, Danny, and Matt Guardino. Forthcoming. Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq. *Political Communication*.
- Cortell, Andrew P., Robert M. Eisinger, and Scott L. Althaus. 2009. Why embed? Explaining the

Bush Administration's decision to embed reporters in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.
American Behavioral Scientist 52 (5):657-77.

11/17, 19 Trends in Public Support for War

Eichenberg, Richard C. 2005. Victory has many friends: U.S. public opinion and the use of military force, 1981-2005. *International Security* 30 (1):140-177.

Baum, Matthew A., and Tim Groeling. 2009. Shot by the messenger: Partisan cues and public opinion regarding national security and war. *Political Behavior* 31 (2):157-186.

11/24, 26 NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK

12/1, 3 Strategic Communication in Election Campaigns

MP, chp. 6 "Campaigning Through the Media"

MP, chp. 9 "Campaigns that Matter"

Dalton, Russell J., Paul A. Beck, and Robert Huckfeldt. 1998. Partisan Cues and the Media: Information Flows in the 1992 Presidential Election. *American Political Science Review* 92(1): 111-26.

Martin Gilens, Lynn Vavreck, Martin Cohen. 2007. The Mass Media and the Public's Assessments of Presidential Candidates, 1952-2000. *The Journal of Politics* 69 (4), 1160–1175.

12/8 Where Do We Go From Here?

Zaller, John. 2003. A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen. *Political Communication* 20 (2):109-130.

Bennett, W. Lance. 2003. The Burglar Alarm That Just Keeps Ringing: A Response to Zaller. *Political Communication* 20 (2):131 - 138.

12/17 FINAL EXAM QUESTIONS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED BY EMAIL AND MOODLE AT 1:00PM; ANSWERS MUST BE POSTED ON MOODLE BY 4:30PM