Politics and the Media
PS 312 (#35202) / CMN 325 (#53589) / MACS 322 (#58054)
T Th 9:30am–10:50am
103 Transportation Building
Fall 2017

Instructor
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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 national 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 effects of media messages on audiences; the politics of media control; the role of political communication in election campaigns; the impact of new mass communication technologies; 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 and processes

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

Students are also required to obtain a set of additional electronic readings which will be distributed over the 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 (course enrollment required for access): https://learn.illinois.edu/

Assignments

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

- Weekly online reactions to assigned readings (20% of final grade)
- Three hourly exams (20% each; 60% of final grade)
- Two short news analysis papers (10% each, 20% of final grade)

Each week, students are required to submit a short online reaction to one or more assigned readings. Prompts will normally be provided on the Friday prior to the week each reaction is due, and the reactions will normally be posted to Moodle before the start of class each Tuesday. These online reactions are short responses—normally one or two paragraphs in length—to questions posed by the instructor about one or more of the assigned readings. These responses are designed to ensure that students are deeply engaging with the reading material, and they will be graded on the basis of how much the response reflects an accurate and nuanced understanding of a given reading. These responses will be graded as receiving full credit, partial credit, or no credit.

The three examinations for the class draw equally from course readings and lecture material. The exams may consist of multiple-choice, definition, short answer, short essay, long essay, and/or article analysis questions. The third exam will emphasize the material on media effects 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 third exam can be considered cumulative.

Students will write two short news analysis papers in the last third of the semester which should come it at between two and three pages of double-spaced text each (using 1" margins, standard font sizes—generally 10 to 12 points—and not counting the title page or reference list page). These short papers are designed to help you develop skills at critically analyzing news coverage produced by mainstream news organizations. Details about each of these paper assignments will be provided later in the semester. These papers will be turned in via Moodle. I expect proper bibliographic references in the paper and prefer the APA author-date style (for details, see http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/). However, you may follow one of the other standard bibliographic reference systems (Chicago, MLA, Turabian, etc.) so long as you do so consistently.

Final grades for the course are calculated by weighting the respective component grades and adding half a percentage point (to clear all “borderline” cases into the next highest grade category). Cutoffs are as follows:

- A+ ≥97.0%
- A 93.0-96.9%
- A– 90.0-92.9%
- B+ 87.0-89.9%
- B 84.0-86.9%
- B– 80.0-83.9%
- C+ 77.0-79.9%
- C 74.0-76.9%
- C– 70.0-72.9%
- D+ 67.0-69.9%
- D 64.0-66.9%
- D– 60.0-62.9%
- F ≤60.0%
Extra Credit Policy: There are no extra credit opportunities available to students taking this course.

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. The third exam cannot be made up.

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
- Readings assigned for particular days should be read prior to coming to class.
- 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.
- 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.
- If you miss a class, you'll need to get a copy of lecture notes from another student. Handouts are posted on the course Moodle. I don't provide copies of my notes or PowerPoint presentations to students.

Tentative Weekly Schedule for Class Topics and Reading Assignments

8/29  Introduction
8/31  The Marketplace of Ideas


9/5, 7  What Is the News Supposed to Do?

Optional video: “Media by Milosevic”


9/12, 14  Audience Trends in News Consumption and News Sharing


9/19  FIRST EXAM

9/21, 26, 28  Economics of the News-Making Process


10/3, 5, 10  Structure and Tempo of the News-Making Process


10/12  SECOND EXAM

10/17, 19  How Journalists Decide What to Cover and How to Cover It

Optional video: “Buying the War”


10/24, 26  How Strategic Communicators Try to Influence the Content of News Coverage

*10/26: First Short News Analysis Paper Due at Start of Class*


*Wolfsfeld, Gadi. 2011. *Making sense of media and politics*. Chapter 1, “Political power and power over the media” and chapter 2, “Political control and media independence”

10/31, 11/2  Ideological Bias in the News


11/7, 9  Cultural and Narrative Bias in the News


11/14, 16  The Search for Media Effects

11/16: Second Short News Analysis Paper Due at Start of Class


11/21, 23  NO CLASS—FALL BREAK

11/28  The Search for Media Effects (CONTINUED)


11/30  Yes, Victoria, There Are Large Media Effects

In-class video: “Obedience”


12/5, 7  The Psychology of Media Effects


12/12  Where Do We Go From Here?

*Wolfsfeld, Gadi. 2011. *Making sense of media and politics.* “Introduction” (pp. 1-6) and “A Postscript” (pp. 119-122)

12/15  THIRD EXAM  1:30pm to 4:30pm 103 Transportation Building
Run > Hide > Fight
Emergencies can happen anywhere and at any time. It is important that we take a minute to prepare for a situation in which our safety or even our lives could depend on our ability to react quickly. When we’re faced with almost any kind of emergency – like severe weather or if someone is trying to hurt you – we have three options: Run, hide or fight.

**Run**
Leaving the area quickly is the best option if it is safe to do so.

- Take time now to learn the different ways to leave your building.
- Leave personal items behind.
- Assist those who need help, but consider whether doing so puts yourself at risk.
- Alert authorities of the emergency when it is safe to do so.

**Hide**
When you can’t or don’t want to run, take shelter indoors.

- Take time now to learn different ways to seek shelter in your building.
- If severe weather is imminent, go to the nearest indoor storm refuge area.
- If someone is trying to hurt you and you can’t evacuate, get to a place where you can’t be seen, lock or barricade your area if possible, silence your phone, don’t make any noise and don’t come out until you receive an Illini-Alert indicating it is safe to do so.

**Fight**
As a last resort, you may need to fight to increase your chances of survival.

- Think about what kind of common items are in your area which you can use to defend yourself.
- Team up with others to fight if the situation allows.
- Mentally prepare yourself – you may be in a fight for your life.

Please be aware of people with disabilities who may need additional assistance in emergency situations.

**Other resources**

- [police.illinois.edu/safe](http://police.illinois.edu/safe) for more information on how to prepare for emergencies, including how to run, hide or fight and building floor plans that can show you safe areas.

- [emergency.illinois.edu](http://emergency.illinois.edu) to sign up for Illini-Alert text messages.

- Follow the University of Illinois Police Department on Twitter and Facebook to get regular updates about campus safety.