

Media and Politics
Florida State University
Department of Political Science

Course information:

POS 4235.01

Fall, 2012

HCB 212, Tuesday and Thursday: 12:30-1:45

Course Website: Blackboard

Contact Information for Instructor:

Instructor: Ms. Jaclyn Bunch

Office: Bellamy 216

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 2:00- 3:00pm or by appointment

Email: JBunch@fsu.edu (Best Form of Contact)

Department Phone: 850-644-5721

Course Objective:

“On a Thursday morning, came the news of an armistice and people gave vent to their unutterable relief that the slaughter was over. Yet in the five days before the real armistice came, though the end of the war had been celebrated, several thousand young men died on the battlefields. Looking back we can see how indirectly we know the environment in which nevertheless we live. We can see that the news of it comes to us now fast, now slowly; but that whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself.”

--Walter Lippmann in *Public Opinion*, 1922

The media, often seen as the "fourth branch" of American government plays an intricate and important role in politics. Instrumental in political communication, manipulation, and overall information distribution, the impact of the media and extensive use of the media by government and politicians alike, render it nearly indiscernible from political culture.

The objective of this course will be to provide an overview of the role and instrumentation of media in American politics and governance. Beginning with the individual consumer and extending to the institution of media and its impact, each student should leave the course with a well rounded view regarding the role of media in the American experience. While this course does contain a lecture, each meeting should be viewed as a discussion and as an opportunity to learn from and apply the theoretic knowledge gained to the current events and distributions that surround us.

"Whoever controls the media, controls the mind"

-- Jim Morrison

Required Texts:

We will primarily be utilizing three texts throughout the duration of the course. The texts, are as stated, **required**. The collection of works represents three distinctly different approaches to understanding the role of media and news within the political approach. Thus, it is highly recommended that you have access to all three texts to prepare for and participate within class appropriately. There will also be additional materials, such as scholarly articles, which will either be posted on the Blackboard site or are available through the library.

Text:

Bennet: *News: Politics of Illusion*, Ninth edition (Previous editions of this book are acceptable back until the 7th.)

ISBN: 9780205082414

Graber: *Mass Media & American Politics*, Eight edition

ISBN: 9781604264609

Delli Caprini and Keeter: *What Americans Know about Politics and Why it Matters*

ISBN: 9780300072754

(DC)

Assignments and Grading:

Components:

- Attendance and Participation: 20%
- Campaign Advertisement Analysis: 10%
- Midterm Exam: 30%
- Final Exam: 40%

Grading Scale:

Letter	Range
A	94.0-100
A-	90.0-93
B+	87.0-89
B	84.0-86
B-	80.0-83
C+	77.0-79
C	74.0-76
C-	70.0-73
D+	67.0-69
D	64.0-66
D-	61.0-63
F	0-60

*Note that there will be no rounding. The grade earned is the grade received.

Exams:

There will be a total of two formal exams for this course. The **midterm exam** which will be held on **October 23rd**, will be worth 30% of your grade. The cumulative **final exam** which will be held on **December 13th**, will be worth 40% of your grade. The exams will be comprised of multiple choice, short answer, as well as essay questions and designed to test your mastery of topic terminology, concepts, and contemporary issues in government. The format and dates are subject to change at my discretion. There is a strict no make-up exam policy, which can be found in further detail below, in this document.

Participation and Attendance:

All students are expected to be present and engaged in course discussion. Attendance and participation accounts for 20% of your total grade. Five percent of this amount will be allocated to attendance while the other 15% will be derived from activity in class and Blackboard participation. Thus, the vast majority of this grade will be rewarded due to your active and beneficial contribution to class/Blackboard discussion and demonstration in class that you have read the required materials and can reflect upon them.

In addition to usual participation within class, you will be expected to contribute weekly to the 'contemporary' media discussion thread on Blackboard. The class will be divided and every other week each student is expected to post about a current political event or topic and remark upon how that week's material relates. Students will also be expected to provide at least one reply to another individual's thread. These topics may be brought up in class to further buttress concepts we are discussing and students should be prepared to speak regarding them. All original posts must be made by Wednesday at 5pm and all responses must be made prior to class on Thursday.

In sum: to earn full credit the student is expected to be attentive during lectures, answer question prompts accordingly, and contribute to discussions through Blackboard posts, replies, and in class discussions.

Campaign Advertisement Report:

While the course ultimately aims to educate about media and politics, one important side goal is to enable each student to be an informed and conscientious consumer of media and political information as a whole. In accordance with this goal an analysis will be performed on one media segment of your choice. You are to select a piece of media and evaluate it from the perspective of a political scientist. The report should be at least three to five pages in length and demonstrate your knowledge regarding the use of the media as a vehicle for information distribution. The report is due by the **last day of class** and should include political theory, approaches, and terms that we have learned to explain the origin, intent, and mechanisms of each segment. You will also be required to provide a working link (url or youtube address) so that I may view the item of choice while reading your analysis.

Possible forms of media include:

1. Campaign Advertisement from Candidate
2. Campaign Advertisement from PAC/Outside agent
3. Commercial advocating or opposing some political policy (Initiative, Referendum, Abortion, Gay Marriage, etc)

4. A short news clip or segment from a major and accredited news source

Further clarification regarding this project will be discussed in class later in the semester.

Tentative Class and Assignment Schedule:

Overview of the course: The course will cover a wide range of topics, touching upon the many facets of media and the American experience. It will begin by discussing the consumer, the target of all media communication, the average American citizen. Weeks 1-5 will address our relative level of knowledge, ability to process information, and the expression of opinion. Weeks 6-8 will address the media as an institution; discussing business practices, reporting, and campaigns.

Following the midterm, attention will be turned from the operations to the actual impact. We will study and learn about spin, bias, agenda setting and how politicians use the media for their own gains.

Week 1: An Introduction

August 28 th	Introduction
August 30 th	<i>Due:</i> Bennet Chapter 1

Week 2: The American Condition

September 4 th	<i>Due:</i> DC Chapter 1
September 6 th	<i>Due:</i> DC Chapter 2

Week 3: Who is Informed? Political Knowledge

September 11 th	<i>Due:</i> DC Chapter 3
September 13 th	<i>Due:</i> DC Chapter 4

Week 4: Political Knowledge Continued

September 18 th	<i>Due:</i> Erikson, Mackuen, Stimson <i>The Macropolity</i> : Chapters 1 and 3 (Blackboard)
September 20 th	<i>Due:</i> DC Chapter 5

Week 5: Information Processing

September 25 th	<i>Due:</i> Bennet Chapter 3
September 27 th	<i>Due:</i> Zaller <i>Nature and Origin Chapter</i> (Blackboard)

Week 6: Ownerships and the Institution: Basics

October 2 nd	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 1
October 4 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 2

Week 7: Reporting

October 9 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 4
October 11 th	<i>Due:</i> Bennet Chapter 2

Week 8: Campaigns

October 16 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 8 Class: The War Room
October 18 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 8

Week 9: Spin

October 23 rd	MIDTERM EXAM
October 25 th	<i>Due:</i> Class: Secrets, Sources, and Spin

Week 10: Information Bias

October 30 th	<i>Due:</i> Turner: Messenger Overwhelming the Message (Blackboard) <i>Due:</i> Taber and Lodge: Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs (Blackboard)
November 1 st	<i>Due: Articles TBA</i>

Week 11: Media Impact on Attitudes and Behavior

November 6 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 7
November 8 th	<i>Due:</i> Nyhan and Riefler <i>Due:</i> Red Media Blue Media

Week 12: Agenda Setting

November 13 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 5
November 15 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 6

Week 13:

November 20 th	Journeys with George
November 22 nd	Thanksgiving.

Week 14: Politicians: Hands in the Cookie Jar

November 27 th	<i>Due:</i> Bennet Chapter 4
November 29 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 9

Week 15: Reflection: Media and Democracy and Where Do We Go From Here?

December 4 th	<i>Due:</i> Bennet Chapter 8
December 6 th	<i>Due:</i> Graber Chapter 12

Week 16: Finals Week

December 11 th	Final Exam Week
December 13 th	Final Exam

Absences and Tardiness

Attendance is required and expected of all students. Attendance may be taken at random at any point throughout the semester and during the class period. Any missed classes without documented excuse or prior acceptable arrangements with me will count against your final grade. Excessive tardiness will result in a reduction in your final grade as it is considered disruptive and disrespectful of your peers and me (for further clarification see classroom decorum).

Classroom Decorum

All students are expected to hold themselves to the utmost degree of decorum in the classroom. This means that each student is expected to be respectful and tolerant of other students and the professor. Any behavior that results in a loss of mutual respect, as determined by me, will result in a reduction of the student's final course grade. Some examples of unacceptable forms of behavior are: not respecting the speaker whether it is me or a fellow student and causing loud or noisy interruptions such as entering the classroom late or speaking in a non-productive manner. The use of any **cellular device**, for any form of communication including texting is **prohibited**. Permission to use a laptop for the purpose of note taking must be obtained from me. If at any time the student is found or suspected of utilizing the laptop for any purposes other than note-taking the permission will be revoked and may result in the **reduction of one's final course grade**.

Extra-Credit Work

Under no circumstances will extra credit work be permitted.

Late Work

All assignments are to be turned in on the announced due date. Late assignments will not be accepted without legitimate or documented excuses. I retain the right to determine legitimate excuses.

Missed Exams

All students are expected to be present and take an exam at the time it has been scheduled. There will not be make-up exams provided for any student who has not supplied me with a documented excuse, which I deem as acceptable, at least 24 hours prior to the exam. Failure to be present for an exam, without making the proper arrangements with me, will result in an **F** for that unit exam.

Breach of the Academic Honor Code

Every student is expected to educate themselves in regards to the Academic Honor Code, published in the *Florida State University Bulletin* and *The Graduate Handbook*. Any and all suspected violations of this code, including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, and academic misrepresentation, will be reported to the Graduate Director for university sanctions and the **offending student will receive an F** for the course.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should:

(1) Register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact:

Student Disability Resource Center

97 Woodward Avenue, South
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
sdrc@admin.fsu.edu

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus provided should be considered a guideline for the course and is subject to change at any time, for any reason, as deemed necessary by the instructor.