

POLS 302-100: The Mass Media and Politics

Texas A&M University

Summer 2010

M T W Th F, 2:00 – 3:35 p.m., Allen 1005

Instructor Christopher Olds

Office Location: Allen 2067

Office Hours: Monday and Tuesday 3:45 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. and by appointment

Course email: pols302@yahoo.com

Course Description from Texas A&M University Undergraduate Catalog: Examination of mass media impact on politics and political behavior, and governmental impact on the mass media. Prerequisite: POLS 206 or approval of department head.

Specific Goals of the Course: This course is designed to introduce students to the interactions occurring between the various forms of mass media and major political institutions/actors in the political process. This topic has become increasingly complex in recent years given the influx of alternative means of communication available (e.g. the growth of internet based political news and commentary blogs like The Huffington Post, RedState, and The Daily Kos). The goal of the course is to find some clarity and determine the ways in which the mass media can shape our understanding of the political environment, and vice-versa. The major question we will explore then is the following: does the media merely reinforce/reflect the existing views in the political environment, or can the media transform our outlook on important concepts?

In examining this question, we will address ways in which the media is perceived as an independent actor in the political process, and ways in which it is perceived as a conduit for formal political elites to communicate their positions with the public. Simply put, this course will discuss the role(s) of the mass media in the American political system.

The first half of the course will provide a general overview of the major concepts and themes related to mass media interactions with the political environment. The second half of the course will focus on academic debates in the media and politics scholarship where a variety of theories/hypotheses and findings offer contrasting views of mass media interactions with the political environment.

Course Objectives: As the instructor of this course, I expect that my students at the end of the course will-

1. Be able to identify the frequently used practices/techniques of the mass media in covering the political environment.
2. Be able to evaluate whether these practices/techniques of the mass media have the capacity to influence public opinion and behavior, as well as the opinions and behaviors of formal political actors.
3. Be able to discuss and differentiate the theories/hypotheses and findings presented in academic research covering the interactions between the mass media and the political environment.

Course Format: In each class session, there is a mixture of lecture and discussion. I want students to be able to express their ideas regarding the course materials. The ability to think critically and evaluate the numerous existing perspectives on the media and politics is crucial to a successful performance in the course. Sheer memorization of facts, dates, and vocabulary terms will not suffice. An open dialogue with your fellow students and the instructor is a key way to develop a higher-level understanding of the concepts and themes of the course. In order to contribute to the discussion, students are expected to complete the reading assigned for each particular class session before that specific session. On select days, clips from major films and documentaries on the role of the media in politics will be screened. The expectation is that we will analyze the clips and relate them to the concepts and themes addressed in the reading and lecture materials.

Grades: Grades will be based on the following items. Students can earn one hundred points in this course. Please note that this is a course where extra credit assignments are not made available. Your grades will reflect your performance on the four items only. Given that participation is an important part of the course grade, consistent attendance is expected.

Late assignments will not be accepted without a University excused absence.

Special Note: You cannot turn in the assignment late and say that the assignment did not go through to the class e-mail account. If in the very rare case that the e-mail cannot get through, submit it to my general school account, colds1@tamu.edu or my department account, colds1@politics.tamu.edu. Barring any unforeseen circumstances like a mass power outage or natural disaster, an assignment submitted just one minute late (based on the timestamp of the email) is considered a late assignment. Do not wait until the last minute to complete and submit your work.

Item #1--30 points: Discussion Points

In order to facilitate discussion in class, for each day in which readings are assigned, you will submit three discussion points. These discussion points can be a specific question related to the reading of that day, a critique of a point made in the reading of that day, a comparative analysis of the current reading material to past materials in the course, etc. The intention is to show that you have made an effort to read the material and attempted to analyze it.

Each discussion point should not be greater than 300 words. You will submit the three discussion points in an e-mail to the instructor by 1 p.m. for each day there is assigned reading. I will select from each student's discussion points for potential use in class discussion for that day. The first day in which the discussion points are due is Thursday, June 3rd. The e-mail address to submit your discussion points is the following: pols302@yahoo.com

Please note for those days where there are multiple readings assigned, you cannot get full credit for the discussion points of that day if you elect to write discussion points about a single reading.

Although the discussion points are not a traditional writing assignment like a reflection essay or a research report, there is still the expectation that students will avoid frequent spelling and grammatical errors.

Item #2—10 points: Participation in Discussion

It is not enough to just write discussion points on the readings- you must actively participate in the actual class discussion as well. Students should display a willingness to contribute to the dialogue for each day of class. This means being able to contribute to the discussion not only when your own discussion points are raised during class time, but the discussion points of others as well. It should be noted that clips from films and documentaries on the role of the mass media in the political environment will be shown during class time. Students should also display a willingness to discuss the themes raised in these clips.

Item #3-- 30 points: First Take-Home Examination

The exam will be distributed to students on Wednesday, June 16th in class. Students will select two prompts to write from out of the three essay-based questions that will be distributed to students. Students will have 48 hours in which to answer the two questions they selected. Each of the question responses is worth fifteen points. The test is open-note, meaning students can refer to the required reading materials assigned in the course, as well as notes they have personally taken during lectures and while reading the assigned materials. The student should cite course materials using guidelines presented in the American Political Science Association Style Manual. Throughout the time of the examination, students cannot discuss any of the test items with other students in the course.

All essay responses must be typed in a word-processing computer program and follow specific formatting rules (12-pt Times New Roman font, double spaced, and one inch margins). Students should avoid frequent spelling and grammatical errors when constructing their responses. Microsoft Word .doc files or Adobe Acrobat .pdf files are preferred. Finished exams have to be submitted to the instructor by e-mail Friday, June 18th by 3:35 p.m. The email address to submit exams is the following: pols302@yahoo.com

Item #4-- 30 points: Second Take-Home Examination

The exam will be distributed to students on Friday, July 2nd in class. Students will select two prompts to write from out of the three essay-based questions that will be distributed to students. Students will have 74 hours in which to answer the two questions they selected. Each of the question responses is worth fifteen points. The test is open-note, meaning students can refer to the required reading materials assigned in the course, as well as notes they have personally taken during lectures and while reading the assigned materials. The student should cite course materials using guidelines presented in the American Political Science Association Style Manual. Throughout the time of the examination, students cannot discuss any of the test items with other students in the course.

All essay responses must be typed in a word-processing computer program and follow specific formatting rules (12-pt Times New Roman font, double spaced, and one inch margins). Students should avoid frequent spelling and grammatical errors when constructing their responses. Microsoft Word .doc files or Adobe Acrobat .pdf files are preferred. Finished exams have to be submitted to the instructor by e-mail Monday, July 5th by 5:30 p.m. The email address to submit exams is the following: pols302@yahoo.com

Upon completion of the four items, final class grades will be assigned with the following grading scale, out of one hundred total points possible.

A = 89.50 – 100 B = 79.50 - 89.49 C = 69.50 - 79.49 D = 59.50 - 69.49 F = 0 - 59.49

Course Readings

There are three books used in this course. Readings from academic journal articles and select book chapters will be posted on course reserves online.

Graber, D.A. 2010. *Mass Media and American Politics*, 8th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Bennett, W.L. 2009. *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 8th edition. New York: Pearson-Longman.

Iyengar, S. and D.R. Kinder. 1989. *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

The three assigned texts should be available on reserve at the Policy Sciences & Economics Library (PSEL) in the Annenberg Presidential Center adjacent to the Allen Building.

Statement about Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room B118 of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637.

Statement about Course Materials/Copyright and Plagiarism

The materials used in this course are copyrighted. By “materials,” I mean anything generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, presentations, web pages, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission. As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is a serious offense and students can face severe consequences if they have been found to plagiarize the work of others. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Texas A&M University web site, <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>.

Classroom Protocol

Since this course will cover substantive issues in contemporary society, class discussion might raise views or positions you have strong personal feelings about. Nonetheless, the best learning experience is one where we respect differing viewpoints, and express our own viewpoints in a civil way. It is important that students be respectful of each other and the instructor. If any student does not follow these guidelines, I reserve the right to excuse them from the classroom.

Statement about University Excused Absences

The following reasons are deemed by Texas A&M University as acceptable reasons for being absent to a class (from Section 7.1 from student rules <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>)

1. Participation in an activity appearing on the university authorized activity list. Notify me prior to your participation in this activity.
2. Death or major illness in a student's immediate family.
3. Illness of a dependent family member.
4. Participation in legal proceedings or administrative procedures that require a student's presence.
5. Religious holy day.
6. Illness that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class (to be

- determined by Health Center or off-campus physician).
7. Required participation in military duties.
 8. Mandatory admission interviews for professional or graduate school that cannot be rescheduled.

Students who are unable to complete graded work by the due date as a result of an excused absence have a very limited amount of time to notify the instructor that the absence is an acceptable excused absence given university policy and need to provide documentation.

From Section 7.3 on the timeframe for excused absences (<http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>): Students may be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Section 7.1, or other reason deemed appropriate by the student's instructor. Except in the case of the observance of a religious holiday, to be excused the student must notify his or her instructor in writing (acknowledged e-mail message is acceptable) prior to the date of absence if such notification is feasible. In cases where advance notification is not feasible (e.g. accident, or emergency) the student must provide notification by the end of the second working day after the absence. This notification should include an explanation of why notice could not be sent prior to the class. Accommodations sought for absences due to the observance of a religious holiday can be sought either prior or after the absence, but not later than two working days after the absence. If needed, the student must provide additional documentation substantiating the reason for the absence, that is satisfactory to the instructor, within one week of the last date of the absence. If the absence is excused, the instructor must either provide the student an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other graded activities or provide a satisfactory alternative to be completed within 30 calendar days from the last day of the absence.

Course Outline

If any changes are necessary during the term, I will announce them in class

*Section One of Course - General Scope of Media and Politics

Week 1

**Tuesday, June 1st*

Introduction to Class

No Reading for Today

**Wednesday, June 2nd*

General Background on Media and Politics

Reading- 1. Graber Ch. 1 "Media Power and Government Control"

**Thursday, June 3rd*

Reading- 1. Bennett. Ch. 1 "The News about Democracy"

**Friday, June 4th*

Media Control

Reading- 1. Graber Ch. 2 "Ownership, Regulation, and Guidance of Media"
2. Bennett Ch. 7 "The Political Economy of News"

Week 2

**Monday, June 7th*

Press Freedom

Reading- 1. Graber Ch. 3 "Press Freedom and the Law"

**Tuesday, June 8th*

News, Objectivity, and Bias

Reading- 1. Graber Ch. 4 “News Making and News Reporting Routines”

**Wednesday, June 9th*

Reading- 1. Bennett Ch. 2 “News Content: Four Information Biases that Matter”
2. Bennett Ch. 5 “How Journalists Report the News”

**Thursday, June 10th*

Reading- 1. Bennett Ch. 6 “Inside the Profession: Objectivity and the Political Authority Bias”

**Friday, June 11th*

The Role(s) of the News Media in Policy Making and Public Opinion

Reading- 1. Graber Ch. 6 “The Media as Policymakers”

Week 3

**Monday, June 14th*

Reading- 1. Graber Ch. 7 “Media influence on Attitudes and Behavior”
2. Bennett Ch. 3 “Citizens and the News: Public Opinion and Information Processing”

**Tuesday, June 15th*

News Media and Formal Political Actors

Reading- 1. Graber Ch. 9 “The Struggle for Control: News from the Presidency and Congress”
2. Bennett Ch. 4 “How Politicians Make the News”

**Wednesday, June 16th*

Alternative Directions in Media and Politics

Reading- 1. Graber Ch. 12 “Current Trends and Future Directions in Media Policy”
2. Bennett Ch. 8 “All the News that Fits Democracy: Solutions for Citizens, Politicians, and Journalists”

First examination passed out in class

**Thursday, June 17th*

Work on examination - No class today

**Friday, June 18th*

Examination due by email to pols302@yahoo.com today by 3:35 p.m. – No class today

*Section Two of Course - Research on Media and Politics

Week 4

**Monday, June 21st*

Media Objectivity and Bias

~ Clips from Outfoxed (2004)

- Reading-1. Vigna, S.D. and E. Kaplan. 2007. "The Fox News Effect: Media Bias and Voting." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 122(3): 1187-1234.
2. Fridkin, K.F. and P.J. Kenney. 2002 "The Slant of the News: How Editorial Endorsements Influence Campaign Coverage and Citizens' Views of Candidates" *American Political Science Review*. 96(2): 381-394.
 3. Druckman, J.N. and M. Parkin. 2005. "The Impact of Media Bias: How Editorial Slant Affects Voters." *Journal of Politics*. 67(4): 1030-1049.
 4. Kuklinski, J.H. and L. Sigelman. 1992. "When Objectivity is Not Objective: Network Television News Coverage of U.S. Senators and the 'Paradox of Objectivity.'" *Journal of Politics*. 54(3): 810-833.
 5. Gilens, M. and C. Hertzman. 2000. "Corporate Ownership and News Bias." *Journal of Politics*. 62(2): 369-386.

First Examination Returned to Students Today. Deadline to drop a course with no penalty (Q-drop) is 5 p.m. today

**Tuesday, June 22nd*

~ Clips from Control Room (2004) - No Reading for Today

**Wednesday, June 23rd*

Priming and Framing

~ Clips from Frontline: Stories From a Small Planet (2004)

Reading- 1. Iyengar, S. and D.R. Kinder. 1989. *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Thursday, June 24th*

~ Clips from Frontline: What's Happening to the News? (2007)

- Reading- 1. Krosnick, J.A. and D.R. Kinder. 1990. "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming." *American Political Science Review*. 84(2): 497-512.
2. Valentino, N.A., V.L. Hutchings, and I.K. White. 2002. "Cues that Matter: How Political Ads Prime Racial Attitudes During Campaigns." *American Political Science Review*. 96(1): 75-90.
 3. McGraw, K.M. and C. Ling. 2003. "Media Priming of Presidential and Group Evaluations." *Political Communication*. 20(1): 23-40.
 4. Druckman, J.N. 2004. "Priming the Vote: Campaign Effects in a U.S. Senate Election." *Political Psychology*. 25(4): 577-594.
 5. Althaus, S.L. and Y.M. Kim. 2006. "Priming Effects in Complex Information Environments: Reassessing the Impact of News Discourse on Presidential Approval." *Journal of Politics*. 68(4): 960-976.

**Friday, June 25th*

~ Clips from Frontline: Secrets, Sources, and Spin (2007)

- Reading- 1. Nelson, T.E., R.A. Clawson, and Z.M. Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review*. 91(3): 567-583.
2. Berinsky, A.J. and D.R. Kinder. 2006. "Making Sense of Issues Through Media Frames: Understanding the Kosovo Crisis." *Journal of Politics*. 68(3): 640-656.
 3. Kellstedt, P.M. 2000. "Media Framing and the Dynamics of Racial Policy Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science*. 44(2): 239-255.
 4. Cappella, J.N. and K.H. Jamieson. 1996. "News Frames, Political Cynicism, and Media Cynicism." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 546: 71-84.
 5. Shah, D.H., M.D. Watts, D. Domke, and D.P. Fan. 2002. "News Framing and Cueing of Issue Regimes: Explaining Clinton's Public Approval in Spite of Scandal." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 66(3): 339-370.

Week 5

*Monday, June 28th

Agenda Setting/Issue Attention

~ Clips from Frontline: Secrets, Sources, and Spin Part II (2007)

- Reading- 1. McCombs, M.E. and D.L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 36(2): 176-187.
2. Behr, R.L. and S. Iyengar. 1985. "Television News, Real-World Cues and Changes in the Public Agenda." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 49(1): 38-57.
 3. Erbring, L., E.N. Goldenberg, and A.H. Miller. 1980. "Front-Page News and Real-World Cues: A New Look at Agenda-Setting by the Media." *American Journal of Political Science*. 24(1): 16-49.
 4. Edwards, G.C. and B.D. Wood. 1999. "Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress, and the Media." *American Political Science Review*. 93(2): 327-344.
 5. Cook, F.L. et al. 1983. "Media and Agenda Setting: Effects on the Public, Interest Group Leaders, Policy Makers, and Policy." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 47(1): 16-35.

*Tuesday, June 29th

Media and Political Knowledge/Information

~ Clips from Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media (1992)

- Reading- 1. Bartels, L.M. 1993. "Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure." *American Political Science Review*. 87(2): 267-285.
2. Miller, J. and J.A. Krosnick. 2000. "News Media Impact on Presidential Evaluations: Politically Knowledgeable Citizens are Guided by a Trusted Source." *American Journal of Political Science*. 44(2): 301-315.
 3. Chaffee, S.H., X. Zhao, and G. Leshner. 1994. "Political Knowledge and the Campaign Media of 1992." *Communication Research*. 21(3): 305-324.
 4. Prior, M. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science*. 49(3): 577-592.
 5. Dalton, R.J., P.A. Beck, and R. Huckfeldt. 1998. "Partisan Cues and the Media: Information Flows in the 1992 Presidential Election." *American Political Science Review*. 92(1): 111-126.

*Wednesday, June 30th

Campaign Advertising

~ Clips from Frontline: The Persuaders (2004)

- Reading- 1. West, D.M. 2010. *Air Wars 1952-2008*. 5th ed. Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
2. Freedman, P., M. Franz, and K. Goldstein. 2004. "Campaign Advertising and Democratic Citizenship." *American Journal of Political Science*. 48(4): 723-41.
 3. Goldstein, K. and P. Freedman. 2002. "Lessons Learned: Campaign Advertising in the 2000 Elections." *Political Communication*. 19(1): 5-28.
 4. Goldstein, K. and P. Freedman. 2000. "New Evidence for Old Arguments: Money and Advertising in the 1996 Senate Elections." *Journal of Politics*. 62(4): 1087-1108.

*Thursday, July 1st

- Reading- 1. Ansolabehere, S., S. Iyengar, and A. Simon. 1999. "Replicating Experiments Using Aggregate and Survey Data: The Case of Negative Advertising and Turnout." *American Political Science Review*. 93(4): 901-909.
2. Ansolabehere, S., S. Iyengar, A. Simon, and N. Valentino. 1994. "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review*. 88(4): 829-838.
 3. Finkel, S.E. and J.H. Geer. 1998. "A Spot Check: Casting Doubt on the Demobilizing Effect of Attack

- Advertising." *American Journal of Political Science*. 42(2): 573–595.
4. Wattenberg, M. and C.L. Briens. 1999. "Negative Campaign Advertising: Demobilizer or Mobilizer?" *American Political Science Review*. 93(4): 891-899.
 5. Freedman, P and K. Goldstein. 1999. "Measuring Media Exposure and the Effects of Negative Campaign Ads." *American Journal of Political Science*. 43(4): 1189-1208.
 6. Brader, T. 2005. "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions." *American Journal of Political Science*. 49(2): 388-405.

*Friday, July 2nd

Review of course

No Reading for Today

Second examination passed out in class

*Monday, July 5th

Examination due by email to pols302@yahoo.com today by 5:30 p.m. – No class today