

GOV 2070: Mass Media in American Politics

Fall 2013
Druckenmiller 004
TR 2:30-3:55 PM

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Office Hours:

Tuesday, 9:30am-11am
Wednesday, 2pm-4pm
And by appointment

This course examines the role of the mass media in American politics. *This is not a course on how to be a journalist or how to cover the news.* It is a political science course that investigates and analyzes the media in American political life. The course is split into two main sections. **First**, we consider the media as an institution, as the so-called “fourth branch” of government. We ask: how has the media changed over the course of American political development, and specifically with the rise of the Internet? We consider also the media in action. Is the media biased? How would (do) we know? What is the (ideal) relationship between the media and government? How do the media frame the events they cover? **Second**, we investigate media effects. What are the effects of media coverage on citizens—more specifically on citizens’ trust in government and voting behavior? How do citizens respond politically to the nature of news coverage? Throughout the course we will spend considerable time discussing the impact of different media forms—for example, social media, talk radio, and entertainment media.

Course Requirements

There are five major components to your grade:

1. **Five reading reactions** (15 points; each worth 3 points)—these are short reactions of about 2 pages (double-spaced). I will evaluate these on the basis of how well you react to the readings (namely, originality of thought and conciseness). There are no right or wrong answers, but I will challenge you to think logically. These papers are due **in class** on Tuesday or Thursday, and they should focus on the readings for that day. Because there are only 5 of them, you can choose which days you want to turn them in. *You must hand in reaction papers in class; late papers or emailed papers will NOT be accepted.*
2. **Participation** (10 points)—this includes attendance AND class participation. Attendance is **REQUIRED**, and I will take regular note of who is and who is not in class. I understand that people get sick, have doctor’s appointments, and so on, but I only grant excused absences in rare circumstances. Be advised, simple attendance is not sufficient. I have established a Blackboard Discussion Page for our class, and I encourage people to comment on class readings or current events as you see fit. This is an important opportunity to contribute to a dialogue about course concepts. *I expect some participation in this venue by every student at some point in the semester.*

3. **Midterm Exam** (25 points)—scheduled for *Thursday, October 24th*. The exam is open book and open note. The format will be short answers and essays, and both will be derived from readings and lectures. Exams will be transmitted to you electronically, and you will have a specific time (two hours) and page limit (six total pages—double spaced, 12-point font). More information will be provided as we approach the exam.
 *The six-page limit will be strictly enforced. I will not read past Page 6.
 **You are NOT allowed to work with another student on these exams. ANY evidence of collaboration is grounds for failure of the class.
4. **Final Exam** (25 points)—a take home exam that is NOT cumulative; it is on the lectures and readings for all classes after the mid-term. The parameters of the exam are the same as the mid-term. The exam is scheduled for *December 18th*.
5. **Final paper** (25 points)—this is a critical review that compares and contrasts news content across organizations. It is *due on December 3rd*. See the details at the end of the syllabus.

Readings

There are four books for this course, and a number of outside articles. All four books are available through the campus bookstore, and all of the outside readings can be accessed through Blackboard.

1. Shanto Iyengar. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. 2nd Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
2. Jonathan Ladd. *Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
3. Markus Prior. *Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Elections*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
4. Tim Groseclose. *Left Turn: How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Mind*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Other Issues

1. I expect all students to abide by the Bowdoin Academic Honor Code, which can be accessed online at <http://www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/forms/>. If you have any concerns or questions about how to cite work appropriately, please consult me or a reference librarian.
2. If you have chosen to take the class as Credit/D/F, I will only grant a Credit grade if the student has completed all of the work for the class.

Part 1—Media as an Institution

September 5—Introductions and Expectations

September 10—The Early American Press

- Ladd, Chapters 1-3

September 12—The Development of Modern American Media

- Ladd, Chapter 4

September 17 —American Media in Comparative Perspective

- Iyengar, Chapter 2

September 19—The Media Marketplace

- Iyengar, Chapters 3-4

September 24—New Media

- Iyengar, Chapter 5

September 26—New Media, cont.

- Lili Levy, “Social Media and the Press,” *North Carolina Law Review*, 2012, 90(5): 1531-1596.
- Danny Hayes, “The News Anew? Political Coverage in a Transformed Media Age,” in *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 2013, New York: Routledge

October 1—Media and Governing

- Iyengar, Chapters 7 and 10

October 3—Media Bias

- Groseclose, Preface, Introduction, and Chapters 1-5

October 8— Media Bias, cont.

- Groseclose, Chapters 6-8

October 10— Media Bias, cont.

- Groseclose, Chapters 9-17

October 15— No class (Fall Vacation)

October 16 evening talk with Portland Press Herald’s Colin Woodard

October 17—A conversation with *Boston Globe* reporter Josh Miller (Bowdoin ‘08)

October 22— Mid-Term Review

October 24— Mid-Term Exam

Part 2—Media Effects

October 29—Identifying Media Effects

- Iyengar, Chapter 8
- Samara Klar, Joshua Robison, and James Druckman, “Political Dynamics of Framing,” in *New Directions in Media and Politics*, 2013, New York: Routledge

October 31— Identifying Media Effects, cont.

- Groseclose, Chapter 18 through Epilogue

November 5—Detecting Bias in the Media

- Lauren Feldman, “Partisan Differences in Opinionated News Perceptions: A Test of the Hostile Media Effect,” *Political Behavior*, 2011, 33:407-432.

November 7— Sources of Media Trust

- Ladd, Chapters 5 and 6

November 12— Sources of Media Trust, cont.

- Ladd, Chapter 7

November 14—Post-Broadcast Democracy

- Prior, Chapters 1-2

November 19— A conversation with Jennifer Rooks (Maine Public Broadcasting Network)

November 21— Consequences of a Post-Broadcast Democracy

- Prior, Chapters 3-4

November 26— Consequences of a Post-Broadcast Democracy, cont.

- Prior, Chapters 5-6

November 28— No class (Thanksgiving)

December 3— Consequences of a Post-Broadcast Democracy, cont.

- Prior, Chapters 7-8

Research Paper due in Class

December 5— A Closer Look at Media Effects Across Citizens

- Gabriel Lenz and Chappell Lawson, “Looking the Part: Television Leads Less Informed Citizens to Vote Based on Candidates’ Appearances,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 2011, 55(3): 574-589.
- Matthew Baum and Angela Jamison, “The Oprah Effect: How Soft News Helps Inattentive Citizens Vote Consistently,” *The Journal of Politics*, 2006, 68(4): 946-959.

December 10—Final Exam Review

Final Exam: December 18th, 9:00am

Outline of Final Paper

You will write a 10-page paper (double-spaced) comparing and contrasting news content across organizations.

Choose three days (the same three days for all sources) on which to watch one national television newscast (e.g., NBC Nightly News, the News Hour on PBS) and read one major U.S. newspaper (e.g., *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*). You must add a third source, such as a national cable show (e.g., The O'Reilly Factor), local newspaper, or a major reporter's Twitter feed.

Answer the following questions in your analysis:

- Describe the first two news organizations in terms of their size, ownership and audience. Do the same for the third, but if you are following a Twitter account, note instead the number of followers and tweets.
- Did the three news sources emphasize different stories? What was the most prominent story for each? Did one organization cover a story that another completely ignored? What explanation do you have for any differences in emphasis that you found?
- How did coverage of the same story differ across the organizations? That is, how were the stories **framed**? Why might this be?
- Did you detect any political **bias** in any of the media? What evidence leads you to this conclusion?
- In your opinion, which news organization did the best job conveying political information? Why?

Be sure that you relate your discussion to the materials that we have read and discussed in class, and cite all sources using a generally accepted standard of citation. I will grade your assignment using several criteria, including the extent to which your paper:

- Presents observations and results in a complete, logical and clear fashion.
- Assesses, discusses, and reconciles the supporting data/evidence acquired from the exercise in relation to course content.
- Effectively identifies conclusions, implications and consequences.

There are no extensions for this paper except under extraordinary circumstances; plan in advance to get this paper done on time.

You **may** write this paper with another student. Groups of no more than 3 are allowed, however. If working alone, the paper should be about 10-pages (double-spaced). If you write with another student, the paper must be about 15 pages (double-spaced). In a group project you must include a section that explains any differences in interpretation of the data you collect. ***All members of the group must read and/or watch all three media sources.***