

PSC 129

The Media & Politics

Fall 2008

CRN: 56350

TTh 11:10-12:25, 1957 E Street, Room 214

Professor John Sides

469 Monroe

Office hours: Wednesdays, 2-4:30 pm, and by appt.

(202) 994-3538

jsides@gwu.edu

Rachel Whitlark

202 Davis-Hodgkins House

Office hours: Wednesdays, 8:45-10:45 am

(202) 994-2532

whitlark@gwmail.gwu.edu

This course investigates the interaction among the media, politicians, and citizens. The three main questions that we will discuss are:

- 1) What is the media's place in American politics?
- 2) How are the media organized, and what rules and norms govern its coverage of politics?
- 3) How do citizens respond to the media's coverage of politics and politicians' use of media?

This course has several goals. First, we will encounter media coverage of politics in various ways—newspapers, television, archives of campaign advertising, guests from the world of journalism—and learn to recognize in this coverage the strategies and practices that journalists and politicians employ.

Second, we will learn to think in more nuanced ways about the media's coverage of political news. Rather than fall back on the usual caricatures of the media, we will instead identify what the media does well (and why) and what it does not do as well (and why). We will also ponder how to improve the media's coverage of politics.

Third, we will better understand how our own attitudes about politics do and do not derive from the information we encounter on the media. It is too simplistic to portray the public as gobbling up every morsel the media feeds them. Similarly, it is wrong to believe that we are too savvy ever to be influenced by the information we encounter on television and elsewhere. The truth is somewhere in between.

Blackboard. The syllabus, PowerPoint presentations, and any other key course documents will be posted on the Blackboard page for this course at <http://blackboard.gwu.edu>. The syllabus is available, unsurprisingly, under "Syllabus." The PowerPoint presentations will be available under "Lectures."

Required reading. There is one book assigned for this course, which is available at the Student Store:

Iyengar, Shanto, and Jennifer A. McGrady. 2007. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. New York: Norton.

All other readings are available on Blackboard or on other webpages. All .pdf files of readings, as well as clickable links to these webpages, are posted on Blackboard under "Readings."

Attendance. Your attendance in class is important. I monitor attendance with pop quizzes. Six (6) times through the semester, I will give a pop quiz consisting of one question pertaining to current events. If you are present at least four (4) of those six times, you will receive an A for the participation portion of your grade. If you are present on fewer than 4 occasions, you will receive an F for participation. This will subtract 5 points from your final grade. Correct answers on the pop quiz will earn you bonus points: each correct

answer will add one-third of a point to your final grade. Thus, correct answers to all six questions translate into a two-point bonus. Forging a pop quiz for another student is considered cheating and will be punished accordingly. **If you will have trouble abiding by the attendance policy, you should not take the class.** Of course, if a serious illness or an emergency results in your missing classes, we can make alternative arrangements.

Course assignments. The course assignments are 3 short (2-page) papers and three exams. The paper topics will be discussed later, but the gist of each assignment is a brief reaction to a reading or to course topics. The topics will be handed out throughout the semester, and you will have a week to complete the assignment. These papers will not be formally graded. They are merely to engage you and stimulate your thinking. Thus, you will receive full credit as long as your paper credibly attempts to complete the assignment. Half-hearted or incomplete attempts will be awarded only partial credit. Of course, papers that are turned in late or not at all will be penalized, as specified below.

These exams will combine multiple choice, identifications, and short essays. They will each count equally towards your grade. Thus, there is no cumulative final exam in this course. Here are the dates of the exams:

Tuesday, Oct. 4	exam #1
Thursday, Oct. 30	exam #2
TBD	exam #3

Course grades. Your final grade will be a weighted average of the components of the course:

attendance	10%
short papers	15%
exam #1	25%
exam #2	25%
exam #3	25%

I will grade on the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59). Note that there are no +/- grades in the D or F range.

Here are several important details of my policy on course grades:

- If you have questions about the grade you received on an assignment, I encourage you to come talk to me. I am happy to answer any questions and suggest ways that you can do better.
- If you would like me to re-grade an assignment, you must submit to me a formal appeal in writing, explaining why you think the grade you received is not a fair reflection of the quality of your work.
- If you do not complete an assignment, I will give you a 0 for the assignment.
- I do not tolerate late assignments. I will lower your grade one-half of a letter grade for each day it is late. That is, if the assignment is due on Tuesday and you complete it on Wednesday, the highest grade you can make is a B+. If you complete it on Thursday, the highest grade you can make is a B-. And so forth.
- The only acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time are illness or family emergency. If either circumstance arises, I will give you extra time, but **only** if you (1) communicate with me **before** the assignment is due, and (2) provide documentation of the circumstance. You **must** do both of these things in order to avoid penalties for a late assignment.
- There are no opportunities to re-do assignments or to do extra-credit work in this course.
- I do not “curve” grades. At the end of the semester, I will calculate your grade as described above and then round to the nearest whole number (e.g., an 86.5 becomes an 87). That grade becomes your final grade. I will not increase any person’s grade solely to change their letter grade. So if you make an 89.4, you will make a B+, not an A-. No amount of pleading will change this outcome.

Academic dishonesty. In the Code of Academic Integrity, the University defines academic dishonesty as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or extension on a test, quiz, or assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two different courses without the prior permission of faculty members. By accepting this syllabus and participating in the course, you have agreed to abide by this Code. Students who violate the Code are subject to disciplinary penalties, including failure on the assignment in question, failure in the course, and other penalties imposed by the University. See: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/index.html>

Medical needs, illnesses, and other emergencies. As noted above, if a medical need will result in your missing or completing assignments, please communicate with me. I am willing to be accommodating but communication and documentation is necessary.

Special needs. George Washington University provides appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. To determine if you qualify, contact the Disability Support Services at (202) 994-8250 (V/TDD). If they certify your needs, I will work with you to make arrangements.

Religious holy day observance. If an assignment or exam is due on a day when you are observing a religious holy day, I will work with you to find an acceptable alternative time to complete the assignment.

Course Plan

Introduction

Sept. 2

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 1.

I. The Media’s Place in American Politics

Sept. 4, 9

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 2.
- Schudson, Michael and Susan E. Tifft. 2005. “American Journalism in Historical Perspective.” In Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Press*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hallin, Daniel C. and Robert Giles. 2005. “Presses and Democracies.” In Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Press*. New York: Oxford University Press.

II. Freedom of the Press (Is the *New York Times* Dangerous?)

Sept. 11, 16

- Sanford, Bruce W. and Jane E. Kirtley. 2005. “The First Amendment Tradition and Its Critics.” In Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Press*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ivers, Gregg. 2002. *American Constitutional Law: Power and Politics, Volume II (Civil Rights and Liberties)*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Chapter 5 (“Freedom of the Press”), pp. 165-183.
- Lichtblau, Eric, and James Risen. 2006. “Bank Data Shifted in Secret by U.S. to Block Terror.” *New York Times*, June 23, p. A1.
- Baquet, Dean, and Bill Keller. 2006. “When Do We Publish a Secret?” *New York Times*, July 1.

- Watch two stories on “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” about the Lichtblau and Risen story. The first features interviews with Lichtblau and then Rep. Curt Weldon (R-PA). The second features interviews with *Times* Executive Editor Bill Keller and former National Security Agency Director Admiral Bobby Inman.
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june06/leak_06-26.html
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/july-dec06/nytimes_07-05.html
- Toobin, Jeffrey. 2006. “Name That Source: Why Are the Courts Leaning on Journalists?” *New Yorker*, 16 January. pp. 30-36.

III. Making the News

Sept. 18-30

Norms, Values, & Economics

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 3 and pp. 85-89.
- Gans, Herbert. 1979. *Deciding What's News*. New York: Pantheon Books. Chapter 2 (“Values in the News”).
- Auletta, Ken. 2005. “Fault Line.” *The New Yorker*, 10 October. pp. 51-61.
- Project for Excellence in Journalism. 2008. “The Changing Newsroom: What Is Being Gained and What Is Being Lost in America’s Daily Newspapers?” <http://journalism.org/files/PEJ-The%20Changing%20Newspaper%20Newsroom%20FINAL%20DRAFT-NOEMBARGO-PDF.pdf>. (Read the Introduction and Sections I-II, pp.1-13 of the report.)
- Hamilton, James T. 2004. *All the News That's Fit to Sell*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 6 (“The Changing Nature of the Network Evening News Program”).

The Reality of Media Bias

- Read pp. 24-26 of this on-line pdf file, i.e., the section entitled “Section IV: Values and the Press”:
<http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/prc.pdf>
- Niven, David. 2002. *Tilt? The Search for Media Bias*. Westport, CT: Praeger. Chapter 3 (“The Jury Is Still Out: Academic Evidence on Media Bias”).
- Vallone, Robert P., Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper. 1985. “The Hostile Media Phenomenon: Biased Perceptions and Perceptions of Media Bias in Coverage of the Beirut Massacre.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 49 (3): 577-85.

How Politicians Use the News

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 7 and 10.
- Fowler, James. 2008. “The Colbert Bump in Campaign Donations: More Truthful than Truthy.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41(3): 533-39.

EXAM #1

Oct. 2

IV. News Coverage of Politics: War, Public Policy, and Campaigns

Oct. 7-28

Foreign Affairs & War

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 4 (review pp. 85-89 and then focus on the remainder).

- Barstow, David. 2008. "Behind TV Analysts, Pentagon's Hidden Hand." *New York Times*, 20 April 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/washington/20generals.html>.
- Guardino, Matt, and Danny Hayes. 2008. "Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq." http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/dwhayes/iraq_mpsa08.pdf.
- Aday, Sean, Steven Livingston, and Maeve Hebert. 2005. "Embedding the Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 10(1): 3-21.
- Project for Excellence in Journalism. 2007. "The Portrait from Iraq—How the Press Has Covered Events on the Ground." http://www.journalism.org/files/Iraq%20Content_Web%20version.pdf.

The Policy Agenda and Policy Debates

- Bosso, Christopher. 1989. "Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and the Discovery of Famine in Ethiopia." In Michael Margolis and Gary A. Mauser (eds.), *Manipulating Public Opinion: Essays on Public Opinion as a Dependent Variable*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing.
- Lawrence, Regina G. 2000. "Game-Framing the Issues: Tracking the Strategy Frame in Public Policy News." *Political Communication* 17: 93-114.

Campaigns and Elections

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 6.
- Patterson, Thomas. 2002. *The Vanishing Voter*. New York: Knopf. Chapter 3 ("The News Media: The Politics of Anti-Politics").
- Project for Excellence in Journalism. 2008. "Character and the Primaries of 2008: What Were the Media Master Narratives about the Candidates during the Primary Season?" http://www.journalism.org/files/MASTER%20NARRATIVES%20FINAL_NOEMBARGO.pdf
- Iyengar, Shanto, Helmut Norpoth, and Kyu S. Hahn. 2004. "Consumer Demand for Election News: The Horse Race Sells." *Journal of Politics* 66 (1): 157-75.

EXAM #2

Oct. 30

V. The Media and Public Opinion

Nov. 4 - 20

How We View and Use the Media

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 5.
- Iyengar, Shanto, and Richard Morin. 2006. "Red Media, Blue Media." <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/03/AR2006050300865.html>

Media Effects on What We Know and Think

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 8.
- Sears, David O., and Richard Kosterman. 1994. "Mass Media and Political Persuasion." In Sharon Shavitt & Timothy C. Brock (eds.), *Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. pp. 251-278.

- Phillips, David P. 1979. "Suicide, Motor Vehicle Fatalities, and the Mass Media: Evidence toward a Theory of Suggestion." *American Journal of Sociology* 84 (5): 1150-1174.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Erik C. Snowberg, and James M. Snyder, Jr. 2005. "Unrepresentative Information: The Case of Newspaper Reporting on Campaign Finance." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(2): 213-231.
- Bai, Matt. 2005. "The Framing Wars." *New York Times Magazine*, 17 July.
- Iyengar, Shanto, and Richard Morin. 2006. "Natural Disasters in Black and White." http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/07/AR2006060701177_pf.html

Campaign Effects on Whether and How We Vote

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 9.
- Stimson, James. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 4 ("The Great Horse Race: Finding Meaning in Presidential Campaigns").
- Zaller, John. 2001. "Monica Lewinsky and the Mainsprings of American Politics." In W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman (eds.), *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 252-278.

VI. The Changing Media Environment: Content and Consequences

Nov. 25-Dec. 4

Has Television Ruined Democracy?

- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Chapter 13 ("Technology and Mass Media").
- Mutz, Diana C. and Byron Reeves. 2005. "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust." *American Political Science Review* 99(1): 1-15.
- Mutz, Diana C. 2007. "Effects of 'In-Your-Face' Television Discourse on Perceptions of a Legitimate Opposition." *American Political Science Review* 101(4): 621-636.

Are More Media Choices Better?

- Wattenberg, Martin P. 2007. *Is Voting for Young People?* (2nd edition). New York: Pearson Longman. Chapters 1-3.
- Prior, Markus. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 577-592.
- Farrell, Henry, Eric Lawrence, and John Sides. 2008. "Self-Segregation or Deliberation? Blog Readership, Participation, and Polarization." Working paper.

EXAM #3

TBD