This course investigates the interaction among the media, politicians, and citizens. The 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 learning objectives. 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:


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.

**NOTE:** There will be no class on Thursday, February 3. (I have jury duty.) We will hold class on the assigned make-up day: Tuesday, April 26.

**Course assignments.** The course assignments will consist of a short 3-4 page paper, a group research project that will culminate in a 5-page paper and in-class oral presentation, and two exams. The first paper assignment is under the “Assignments” section of Blackboard. Details about the group research project are forthcoming.

The two exams will combine multiple choice, identifications, and short essays, and will each count equally towards your grade. Thus, there is no cumulative final exam in this course, although the second exam will be held on the day that this course’s final exam is scheduled by the Registrar. You must take the exam at this time.

Here are some important dates for these assignments:

- **Thursday, February 10** first paper due in class
- **Tuesday, February 15** research project guidelines distributed
- **Thursday, March 3** first exam
- **Tuesday, March 8** research project proposal due
- **Thursday, April 7** research project paper due
- **April 12-19** presentations of research projects
- **TBD** second exam

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>short paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group project</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exam #1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exam #2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 am happy to help and to suggest ways that you can do better. If you are not satisfied with your performance in class, please ask for advice. Do not spend the semester disgruntled or wait until the end of the semester to complain.
- If you do not think that the grade you received reflects the quality of your work, you may ask for the assignment to be graded again. To do so, submit a formal appeal in writing, explaining why you think the
grade you received is not a fair reflection of the quality of your work. This second grade, whether higher or lower, will become your grade on the assignment.

- If you do not complete an assignment, you will receive 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. Judging from my own experiences and those of my colleagues, having a grandchild at GW is incredibly hazardous to your health. Thus, I must verify even deaths in the family. Better yet, you may communicate directly with the Dean of Students and that office can notify faculty of your absence.
- 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. Particularly common and ineffective are pleas claiming that your grade in this class will cause you to lose a scholarship, prevent you from attending the graduate or professional school of your choice, or lead to some other unfortunate, but unlikely, consequence.

**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](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  Jan. 11
- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 1.

I. The Media’s Place in American Politics  Jan. 13, 18
- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 2.

II. Freedom of the Press in the Age of Wikileaks  Jan. 20, 25, 27

Wikileaks
- For background on Wikileaks, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiLeaks
- Listen to the comments of Bill Keller, the Executive Editor of the New York Times, from the Nieman Foundation’s conference on “Secrecy and Journalism in the New Media Age.” His specific comments on secrecy begin at about the 6:00 mark. http://www.niemanlab.org/2010/12/bill-keller-on-how-wikileaks-has-evolved-the-nyt-reporting-process-and-threats-to-national-security/

III. Making the News  Feb. 1, 8, 10
(no class on Feb. 3)
- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 3 and pp. 85-89.
Values


The Reality of Media Bias


FIRST PAPER DUE ON THURSDAY, FEB. 10

Economics

- If you need some comic relief amidst all this bad news about newspapers: http://www.themonion.com/video/how-will-the-end-of-print-journalism-affect-old-lo,16909/

How Politicians Use the News

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 7 and 10.

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

Foreign Affairs & War

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


Afghanistan


The Policy Agenda and Policy Debates


Campaigns and Elections

- Iyengar and McGrady, ch. 6.


FIRST EXAM ON THURSDAY, MARCH 3

V. The Media and Public Opinion

*March 8-10, 22-31, April 5-7*

*A Primer on Research Design: How Can We Know that the Media Matters?*

- Iyengar and McGrady, pp.197-207.


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](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. 8-9.


RESEARCH PAPERS DUE ON THURSDAY, APRIL 7

Presentations of Research Projects

April 12, 14, 19

VI. What Might Save The News?

April 21, 26


Optional further reading:

  http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1877191-1,00.html
  http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/24/business/media/24carr.html
• Cowan, Geoffrey, and David Westphal. 2010. “Public Policy and Funding the News.” 
  http://fundingthenews.usc.edu/docs/Funding%20the%20News_report-optimized.pdf

SECOND EXAM (DATE TBD)