

GOV 208: Mass Media in American Politics

Spring 2007
Adams 208

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Office Hours:

Tuesday, 10am-12pm
Thursday, 2:30pm-4:30pm
And by appointment

This course examines the role of the mass media in American politics. The course is split into three sections. **First**, we consider the media as an institution, as the “fourth branch” of government. We ask, what is news? Who is a journalist? How has the media changed over the course of American political development, and specifically with the rise of the Internet? **Second**, we consider the media in action—that is, how journalists cover the news. Is the media biased? How would (do) you know? What is the relationship between the media and government? How do the media frame the events they cover? **Finally**, we investigate media effects. What are the effects of media coverage on citizens—more specifically on citizens’ trust in government and political behavior? How do citizens respond to the nature of news coverage? Throughout the course we will spend considerable time considering the impact of different media forms—for example, blogging, talk radio, and entertainment media.

Course Requirements

There are six 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 Thursdays about the readings for that week; this means that simply reiterating the discussions in class is not enough. Because there are only 5 of them, you can choose which Thursdays on which to write a paper.
*You may NOT hand in more than one reaction paper in a week
**You must hand in reaction papers in class; late papers or emailed papers will NOT be accepted
***You cannot hand in a reaction paper on the week of the mid-term or on the final day of class.
2. **Five media reactions** (5 points; each worth 1 point)—these are very short (1-2 paragraphs) reactions to some form of media from the previous day. See the “Media Sources” section of this syllabus for some recommendations. You are to read, watch, or listen to some media broadcast and write a short critical review. Did you like the coverage? Did you think it was biased? You must publish these reactions on the class blog (<http://polarmemo.blogspot.com/>). I’ll discuss the blog in more detail early in the semester.
*You can write more than one in a week, BUT only one per week counts. In other words, you MUST do a media reaction in five different weeks.

**I also encourage you to respond to each other's blog entries. However, merely responding to someone else's post does not count as a media reaction.

3. **Class 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 will only grant excused absences in rare circumstances. Be advised that simple attendance is not enough!! I expect students to have read for each class and to come prepared for some discussion.
4. **Midterm Exam** (25 points)—scheduled for Thursday, March 8th. It will be an in-class essay exam dealing with the readings *and lectures* up through March 1st. Note that class on March 6th will be review.
5. **Final Exam** (25 points)—an in-class essay exam that is NOT cumulative; it is on the lectures and readings for all classes after the mid-term. Note that the last class of the semester will be review.
6. **Final paper** (20 points)—this is a 10-12 page critical review of media coverage on a specific topic, *due on April 26th*. You are to listen to two or three media sources and compare coverage of some event. For example, you might listen to talk radio about the war in Iraq, and then watch the national news. You should do this for about a week. Record your reactions, and write a review of how the different media forms covered the event. *Your paper should also include some literature review of relevant academic work.* I strongly encourage you to come and talk with me about your paper prior to beginning the content analysis.
*There are no extensions for this paper except under extraordinary circumstances; plan in advance to get this paper done on time.

Readings

There are four books for this course, and a number of outside articles. The first three books are available through the campus bookstore, and all of the outside readings (and the Zaller book) are on electronic reserve (which can be accessed through Blackboard and the library website).

1. *Mass Media and Politics: A Social Science Perspective*, by Jan Leighley
2. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*, by Shanto Iyengar
3. *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, by Jack Germond
4. *A Theory of Media Politics: How the Interests of Politicians, Journalists, and Citizens Shape the News*, by John Zaller

Other Issues

1. I expect all students to abide by the Bowdoin Academic Honor Code, which can be accessed online at <http://library.bowdoin.edu/>. Click on "Getting Started," and then "Concerning Plagiarism." If you have any concerns or questions about how to cite work appropriately, please consult me or a reference librarian.
2. Finally, I will make use of Blackboard to convey information and class discussion topics. I have also posted the syllabus there, and I encourage you to check the course page frequently.

3. 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. This means completing all five reading and media reactions, the final paper, and both exams.

Media Sources

Below, I have listed a number of media sources that you might consider following. The list is not exhaustive, so consider this as a guide only. When appropriate I have split the sources into liberal or conservative.

Blogs

Liberal

1. www.talkingpointsmemo.com
2. www.dailykos.com
3. AMERICAblog.com

Conservative

1. www.andrewsullivan.com/
2. www.redstate.com/
3. www.powerlineblog.com/

Talk Radio

Liberal

1. Air America Radio
 - a. Portland, ME – WLVP 870 AM
 - b. www.airamericaradio.com/

Conservative

1. Sean Hannity Show
 - a. Portland, ME—WLOB 1310 AM or 96.3 FM
 - b. 3pm-6pm
 - c. www.hannity.com/
2. Laura Ingraham Show
 - a. Portland, ME—WLOB 1310 AM or 96.3 FM
 - b. 9am-noon
 - c. www.lauraingraham.com/

Television News

National Network News

1. NBC Nightly News; ABC World News Tonight; CBS Evening News (all 6:30pm EST)
2. The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer (PBS)
3. Sunday Morning News Shows
 - a. Meet the Press (NBC)
 - b. This Week with George Stephanopoulos (ABC)
 - c. Face the Nation (CBS)
4. Nightline (11:35 pm, nightly on ABC)

Cable Commentary

1. The O'Reilly Factor (Fox News, 8pm EST)
2. Hannity and Colmes (Fox News, 9pm EST)
3. Hardball with Chris Matthews (MSNBC, 7pm)
4. Countdown with Keith Olbermann (MSNBC, 8pm)
5. Scarborough Country (MSNBC, 9pm)

Print Media (many of these are available online or at the Hawthorne-Longfellow Library)*Newspapers*

1. *The New York Times*
2. *The Washington Post*
3. *The Washington Times*
4. *The Boston Globe*
5. *Los Angeles Times*
6. *Chicago Sun-Times*
7. *The Christian Science Monitor*
8. *The Baltimore Sun*

Magazines and Journals

1. *The Economist*
2. *Weekly Standard*
3. *National Review*
4. *The Nation*
5. *New Republic*

Part 1—Media as an Institution

January 23—Introductions and Expectations

January 25—Introducing the Players

- Jan Leighley, *Mass Media and Politics*, Chapter 1
- John Zaller, *A Theory of Media Politics*, Chapter 1-2

January 30—The Changing Media Institution

- Leighley, Chapter 2

February 1—Defining News

- Leighley, Chapter 3

February 6 —Defining News, cont.

- Leighley, Chapter 4
- Martin Giles and Craig Hertzman, "Corporate Ownership and News Bias: Newspaper Coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act," *Journal of Politics*. 62(2): 369-386.

February 8—Entertainment Media, Blogs, and Talk Radio

- Geoffrey Baym, “*The Daily Show*: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism,” *Political Communication*. 22: 259-276.
 - James Gimpel, “A Political Scientist Rides the Talk Radio Circuit,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 29(4): 717-719.
 - Murray Levin, *Talk Radio and the American Dream*, Chapter 2
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Part 2—Media in Action

February 13—Covering the News: Rule of the Market

- Zaller, Chapter 3

February 15—Media and Government

- Zaller, Chapters 4-5
 - Leighley, Chapter 5
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February 20—Rule of Anticipated Importance

- Zaller, Chapters 6
- Jack Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, Chapters 1-5
 - [The Germond readings for 2/20, 2/22, and 2/27 are suggested targets. We will discuss the full book on 3/1. You can write a reaction paper on the first part of the Germond book for 2/22, if you like.]

February 22—Rule of Product Substitution

- Zaller, Chapters 7
 - Germond, Chapters 6-10
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February 27—News Bias

- Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo, “A Measure of Media Bias.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120(4): 1191-1237.
- Germond, Chapters 11-15

March 1—Relationships between Reporters and Politicians

- Germond, Chapters 16-17

Review Sheet for Mid-Term Exam Handed Out

March 6—Mid-term Review

March 8—Mid-Term Exam

March 11-26—**Spring Break!!!!**

March 27—Television News Framing

- Iyengar, Chapters 1-3

March 29—Television News Framing, cont.

- Iyengar, Chapters 4-5
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April 3—Entertainment Media Framing

- R. Andrew Holbrook and Timothy Hill, “Agenda-Setting and Priming in Prime Time Television,” *Political Communication*. 22: 277-295.

April 5—Framing and Blogging

- News articles on blogs [hand-out]
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Part 3—Media Effects

April 10—The Media, Political Knowledge, and Political Attitudes

- Leighley, Chapter 6
- Diana Mutz and Paul Martin, “Facilitating Communication Across Lines of Political Difference,” *American Political Science Review*. 95(1): 97-114.

April 12—no class (conference)

April 17— Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing, cont.

- Leighley, Chapter 7

April 19—Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing

- Iyengar, Chapters 7-8
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April 24— Mass Media and Elections

- Leighley, Chapter 8

April 26— Mass Media and Elections, cont.

- Daron Shaw, “The Impact of News Media Favorability and Candidate Events in Presidential Campaigns,” *Political Communication*. 16:183-202.
 - ***Final Paper due!!!!!!***
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May 1— Mass Media and Elections, cont: Campaign Advertising

- Paul Freedman, Michael M. Franz, and Kenneth Goldstein. 2004. "Campaign Advertising and Democratic Citizenship," *American Journal of Political Science*. 48(3): 723-741

Review Sheet for Final Exam Handed Out

May 3—Effects of Entertainment Media

- Diana Mutz and Byron Reeves, “The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust,” *American Political Science Review*. 99(1): 1-15.
 - C. Richard Hofstetter et al, “Information, Misinformation, and Political Talk Radio,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 52(2): 353-369.
 - News articles on blogs [hand-out]
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May 8—Review for Final Exam

Final Exam: May 15th, 9:00am