

FALL 2023: **GOVT 370S, THE NEWS MEDIA AS A POLITICAL INSTITUTION**

Unique No.: 38425
Class Meeting: PHR 2.114, 1:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m.
Instructor: Bartholomew H. Sparrow
Professor of Government
Office: Batts 3.142, ph: 512.232-7207
bhs@austin.utexas.edu
Office Hours: M: 3:00-4:40 pm, TH: 1:30-3:00 pm, or by appt.

Course Description

“The News Media as a Political Institution” examines the roles the media play in the U.S. political system. In an overview of the interaction of the print, video, and social media with politics, government, and the public, the course explains why Americans get the political news they do. It investigates the systematic factors involved in the production of the news and how the media, including the social media, came to where it is today. It addresses two issues in particular: the collapse of local news, and the instrumental nature of the news—calculated and shaped to reach desired audiences.

- Texts and other class materials are posted on Canvas, are accessible through the PCL online catalog, or, with movies, need to be located on YouTube or other streaming services.
- Course readings, lectures, and in-class discussions are supplemented by films: *All the President's Men*; *The Post*; *Not Okay*; and *The Social Dilemma*.

Grades:

- Quizzes, 4 in all (10% each); 40% of total. No make-up quizzes.
- Media log (24 hrs.) and an analytic essay based on your journal, maximum 1,500 wds (10% and 10% respectively); 20% total.
- A short independent research paper (2,000-2,500 wds.) with a topic either of your own choice or assigned to you by the instructor (20%).
- Class presentation (two, total) as a “student of the day” who selects a quotation (from a couple of sentences to a paragraph in length) from that day’s reading and then asks a question generated by the selected quotation (5%).

Note: the question should be *based on the author’s argument or the theory in discussion*, and not merely a question about what others think about the quotation or how the quotation matches the present-day reality. You will be graded on the quality of the question as well as your quotation (Q&Q).

- Class participation (15%), which includes speaking (and listening!) in class, both with respect to quality and quantity; attendance, where 3 tardies count as 1 absence and every absence after the 4th absence results in each additional two-point penalty from the class participation grade and thus from your total grade.
- Grade breakdown: quizzes (40%); media log and paper (20%); research paper (20%); class quotations and questions (5%); class participation (15%).

Expectations:

- As a student in the class, you are expected to demonstrate the following:
- intellectual engagement in the texts and topics of the course
 - honesty, responsibility, self-motivation, and hard work
 - self-reflection and on-going assessment of your own learning: your instructor is available during office hours, and by appointment if you are unable to make office hours. He is also usually available a few minutes before and after class.
 - respect for your fellow students and the teacher.
 - reading the day's assigned text *before* class and attending class.
 - keeping up with the course's Canvas site and your own email (email constitutes official UT correspondence)
 - formatting your emails as business correspondence (with a title/greeting and signature).
- N.B.: I shall try to get to you emails within 24 hours—typically much sooner—unless I am indisposed. I may also respond to the class via Canvas should you voice a general concern where I believe it would be useful to share my response with the entire class.

Other Rules:

- Mobile telephones and other electronic devices need to be turned off: *using devices in class counts as an absence*. Note that I may not necessarily call you out in class; such silence does not mean that you 'phone usage is unobserved. You may use computers only for notetaking or, if appropriate, looking things up or reviewing readings. If you are using them for something else, non-class related, it counts as an absence.
- Quizzes may not be made up. Special arrangements for changing the date when an assignment is due may be considered on an individual basis only *in exceptional circumstances* and only *in advance of the due date*.
- Let your instructor know in advance if you know you will be late for class or if you need to leave early for extraordinary reasons (e.g., job interview, court appearance). Also, let him know ahead of time if you have miss assignments for any reason or cannot otherwise participate in the class as expected.
- Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/> Please inform the instructor of your condition by the 2nd week of classes.
- Special arrangements for the assignments may be considered on an individual basis in exceptional circumstances, but only if you discuss this with the instructor in advance.
- By UT Austin policy, you must notify your instructor of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

THE NEWS MEDIA AS A POLITICAL INSTITUTION
COURSE SCHEDULE

Introduction: The Media, Politics, and Government

Aug. 21, M: The Media as a Political Institution
Introduction; review of syllabus

Aug. 23, W: The Media Today
• Victor Pickard, *Democracy Without Journalism?* Intro., Ch. 1, pp. 1-10, 11-39
Canvas Reading (under “Files”: **CR hereafter**)

Aug. 28, M: Watergate
• *All the President's Men* film (watch outside of class)

Aug. 30, W: Watergate Reconsidered: Nixon's Revenge?
• Background: <https://www.thejournal.ie/what-was-watergate-14-facts-richard-nixon-494970-Jun2012/>
• Mark Feldstein, “Watergate Revisited,” *American Journalism Review*, Aug/Sept 2004, 60-68. <https://ajrarchive.org/Article.asp?id=3735>
• Jon Marshall, “Nixon is Gone, but His Media Strategy Lives On,” *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2014: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/08/nixons-revenge-his-media-strategy-triumphs-40-years-after-resignation/375274/>

Sept. 5, M: Labor Day Holiday; no class

Sept. 7, W: Media Failure
• William Haltom and Michael McCann, “Java Jive,” *Distorting the Law: Politics, Media, and the Litigation Crisis*, Ch. 6, 183-226. **e-book, PCL (e-PCL)**
• **Media log: 24 consecutive hours: you may choose when to begin**

Sept., 12, M: Who Guards the Guardians?
• *The Post* (2017), dir. Steven Spielberg (Amazon Prime Video or YouTube). **Film** (watch outside of class)
• Bartholomew Sparrow, “Shake up the FCC,” in *Fixing American Politics*, ed. Roderick P. Hart. New York: Rutledge, 2022. pp. 161-71. **CR**

Part II: The Loss of the Local

Sept. 14, M: Newspapers of the 21st Century
• Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless, “The Local Political Engagement Puzzle,” *News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-14. **e-book, PCL catalog (e-PCL)**
• **Quiz 1**

Sept. 16, W: The Collapse of Metropolitan and Local Newspapers
• Hayes and Lawless, “The Great Gutting of US Newspapers,” *News Hole*, Ch. 2, 15-40. **e-PCL**

Sept. 21, M: The Most Impoverished
• Hayes and Lawless, “Where Local News Has Suffered Most,” *News Hole*, Ch. 3, pp. 41-60. **e-PCL**

Sept. 23, W: The Most Disaffected
• Hayes and Lawless, “As Local News Goes, So Does Political Engagement,” and “Everyone Loses When Local News Goes,” *News Hole*, Ch. 4, 5, pp. 63-89, 90-107. **e- PCL**

Sept. 28, M: Reviving the Local?
• Hayes and Lawless, “Saving Local News,” and “Local News and American Democracy,” *News Hole*, Ch. 6, 7, pp. 108-36, 137-44. **e-PCL**

Part III The Business of the News

Sept. 30: W: News as Commerce
• Victor Pickard, *Democracy Without Journalism?* Ch. 3. **CR**

Oct. 2, M: Surveillance Capitalism
• Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. New York: PublicAffairs Press, 2019. Ch. 1, pp. 3-17; Ch. 12, pp. 376-397. **CR**

Oct. 4, W: Surveillance Capitalism II:
• Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Ch. 18, pp. 495-525. **CR**
• Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/aug/07/on-earth-4000-weeks-so-why-lose-time-online-distraction-oliver-burkeman>
• **Analytic Paper Due** (by 1:00 pm)

Part IV Internet, Social Media, and Political Communication

Oct. 9, M: Social Media: Is the Personal Political?
• *Not Okay*, Directed by Quinn Shepherd. **film** (watch outside of class)
• **Quiz.2**

Oct. 11, W: Digital Journalism: Introduction
• Caitlin Petre, *All the News That's Fit to Click: How Metrics Are Transforming the Work of Journalists*. Introduction, pp. i-vi, viii-x, 1-19, **e-book, PCL catalog**

Oct. 16, M: Digital Journalism: What It Offers
• Petre, *All the News*, “Digital Journalism: Putting the Case in Context,” Ch. 1, pp. 20-44 **e-book, PCL catalog**

Oct. 18, W: Participant Observation
• Petre, *All the News*, “The Traffic Game,” Ch. 2, pp. 47-67. **e-PCL**

- Oct. 23, M: [The Influence of Facebook](#)
Petre, *All the News*, “Enchanted Metrics,” Ch. 3 pp. 95-112. **e-PCL**
• **Quiz 3**
- Oct. 25, W: [Political Knowledge](#)
• *Social Dilemma*, directed by Jeff Orlowski. Documentary. **film**
- Oct. 30, M: [Are Metrics the Last Word?](#)
• Petre, *All the News*, “The Interpretive Ambiguity of Metrics,” and “Clean and Dirty Data,” Chs. 4 and 5, pp. 95-112, 113-134. **e-PCL**
- Nov. 1, W: [Sort-of Gatekeepers](#)
• Petre, *All the News*, “The Struggle to Monopolize Interpretive Labor,” Ch. 6, pp. 137-157. **e-PCL**
- Nov. 6, M: [The Workplace](#)
• Petre, *All the News*, “The Autonomy Paradox,” Ch. 7, pp. 158-81. **e-PCL**
- Nov. 8, W: [Wrapping Up: An Assessment](#)
• Petre, *All the News That's Fit to Click*, “Conclusion,” pp. 182-92. **e-PCL**
- Part V: Media and Identity Politics**
- Nov. 14, M: [Constructing Race and Gender](#)
• Luisi, Monique L. R., Robert Jones, and Tim Luisi, “Randall Pearson: Framing Black Identity, Masculinity, Adoption and Mental Health in Television,” *Howard Journal of Communications*, Vol.31, No.1 (2019): 71-85. **CR**
- Nov. 16, W: [Portraying Immigrants](#)
• Scott Parrott, Jennifer Hoewe, Minghui Fan & Keith Huffman, “Portrayals of Immigrants and Refugees in U.S. News Media: Visual Framing and its Effect on Emotions and Attitudes,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 63:4 (2019), 677-697. **CR**
- Nov. 21, 23: [Thanksgiving Break](#)
- Nov. 28, M: [Student Research Presentations](#)
No assigned readings
• **Quiz 4**
- Nov. 30, W: [Student Research Presentations](#)
No assigned readings
- Dec. 5: M. [Student Research Presentations](#)
• **Research Papers Due**