

POSC XXX: Media and Politics

Department of Political Science

Instructor: Nick Jenkins

Fall 2020

Office Location: Sproul Hall 2228

Classroom: CHASS 1020

Office Hours: W: 4-5pm; TH: 1:30-3:30pm

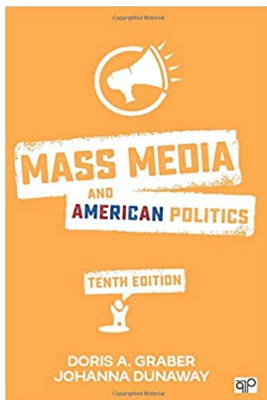
Class Times: MW: 9 - 10:15am

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Course Description

Does the media change what voters think and care about or do voters determine what the media reports on? How does the media influence public policy and elections? Is the media really all that important? In the class, we will investigate the answers to these questions. You will learn about the different types of media, how they can influence voters and elected officials, the role they play in our democracy, and how their influence in politics has changed over time. We'll also learn how political scientists go about investigating these questions.

Required Materials



To avoid using a boring and expensive textbook, I read reviews of books on media and politics and paid attention to prices. I picked one that had high ratings and wasn't crazy expensive. So, the winner of my search, and the book that we will use this semester is: [Mass Media and American Politics \(10th Edition\)](#)

In the course, we'll cover all but one chapter of the 10th edition of *Mass Media and American Politics* so you're not paying for a bunch of chapters that we aren't going to use. You can get a used copy on Amazon for around \$50 but know that **older editions are perfectly acceptable**. The [9th](#) and [8th Editions](#) will work just fine.

Throughout the course, we also read new stories as examples of the concepts that we learn about in lecture and the textbook. All of these readings will be posted in iLearn.

Course Promises

In this course, I will make the following promises to you. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Describe the role of the media in shaping voter's attitudes and the behavior of politicians.
2. Identify the influence of the media in the policy process.
3. Explain how the media helps to keep the government accountable.
4. Describe the freedoms that the press has to report on the news.
5. Research, prepare, and deliver a report that provides valuable information to your colleagues, and that sparks and holds their interest (this is what Political Scientists aim to do in their professional work).

Course Expectations

This course will only fulfill these promises if you promise the following in return:

1. **To attend class.** I have designed this class for the readings and lectures to complement one another. As a result, attending lecture will be an essential component for your to develop a mastery of the course material.
2. **To read the assigned materials.** Similar to the lectures, the readings will provide additional details on each topic that may not be covered in lecture. They will also give you an opportunity to practice applying your knowledge of American government to understand real world decisions that have been made.
3. **To be attentive and participate in class.** Participation does not only mean speaking aloud in class. Students should participate by actively following class discussions and engaging with lecture activities.
4. **To complete the required assignments in a timely fashion.** The assignments in this course are designed for you, and me, to measure your progress on meeting the course promises. Each assignment will give you practice at mastering these promises and I will give feedback to help guide you in your journey. Providing feedback is time consuming, however, so you will get the most useful feedback, and therefore the most use out of each assignment, only if you turn in your work on time.

Assignments and Evaluation

Because writing is an essential component of nearly all career paths (and learning to write well is hard!) we will have several short writing assignments in the course. These assignments are designed to help you become a better writer, to get you to think more carefully about the strategies that political parties and interest groups use, to get you to think more carefully about how actors other than voters shape political decisions, and how to use evidence to support an argument. Below is a list of the writing assignments that we will complete in the course and their requirements.

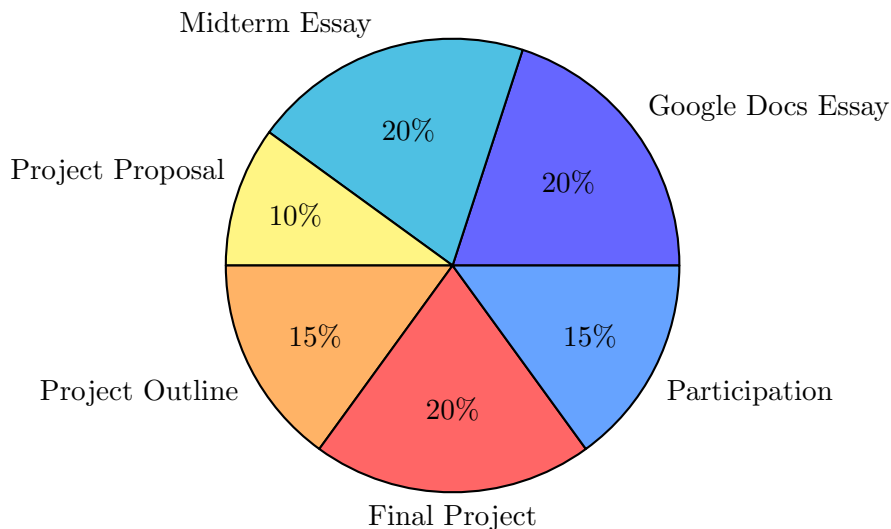
1. **Google Documents Essay:** For your first assignment, you will be given a prompt ahead of time and you will have 1 week to write an answer in **12pt font and 3 to 4 double-spaced pages**. Good news, I will help you write this paper! You will use a Google Document that I have created for each of you to write this essay and I will be logging in to give you feedback and suggestions as you write. There is one caveat - I will match your level of effort. If you put a lot of work into your thinking and writing, I will give you more feedback and guidance. **This assignment is due on October 30th.** On that day I will restrict your ability to make any changes to your paper and will begin grading them. By working with you write your paper, I will be able to help you improve your writing *before* you are graded on it and this will also allow me to encourage you think through your arguments, thus making you a better researcher and writer.
2. **Midterm Essay:** This essay will be written in class and you will choose 1 prompt from a list of 3 different prompts. Before the exam, however, I will post a list of 6 essay prompts on iLearn and I will choose 3 of these prompts for the exam. You will need to answer the question in a **maximum of 2 pages**. **Please bring a Blue Book to use for the exam.** **The midterm essay will be on November 6th.** This exam will require you to use your knowledge of the course material so far to support an argument.
3. **Research Essay:** The final essay will be an original research paper of **a maximum of 5 pages double-spaced**. This assignment will be completed in stages that mimic how political scientists investigate the influence of the media in our democracy. This project is an effort to teach you how to be a political scientist. We'll go use this guide in class to learn how to write a research paper: <https://politicalscienceguide.com/home/research-papers/>. This project will be completed in the following 3 stages:
 - Project Proposal: you will submit a project proposal that explains what question you will be researching and what you think the answer is in **about 250 words**. An essential aspect of any research project is identifying what puzzle you want to solve (the research

question), as well as a prediction about the answer based on your knowledge of the topic (a hypothesis). **This is due in-class on November 18th.**

- Project Outline: In a **maximum of 2 double-spaced pages**, you will create an outline of your paper. This outline should contain your research question, your argument, and how each paragraph will be used to support your argument. What evidence will you use? How will you convince your fellow political scientists that you are right? **Your project proposal will be submitted via iLearn on December 2nd.**
- Final Project: Write your most convincing case for why your answer to your research question is the right one in a **maximum of 5 double-spaced pages**. If you have done the previous stages correctly, this will involve transforming your outline into a complete paper. **The final paper will be submitted via iLearn on December 16th.**

In addition to these assignments, you will also be evaluated based on your participation in class activities. This involves being engaged during partner or group work, contributing to class discussions, and completing in-class participation assignments. You will also be asked to complete a short self-assessment of your participation in class at the end of the quarter. **This assessment will be completed online and is due on December 16th.**

These assignments will constitute your grade in the course and the weight of each of assignment are as follows:



The letter grades will be assigned according to these percentages:

A+	97-100%	B+	87-89%	C+	77-79%	D+	67-69%	F	0-59%
A	93-96%	B	83-86%	C	73-76%	D	63-66%		
A-	90-92%	B-	80-82%	C-	70-72%	D-	60-62%		

Classroom Decorum and Academic Discourse

For everyone to have the best possible learning experience, we will strive to create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the free exchange of ideas. As part of learning, it is essential to discuss topics with individual who have different viewpoints than your own and the only way we can better understand one another is if we can carry on a collegial discussion of the topic. Remember, the goal is to become better critical thinkers. To do so we must learn to listen to others and articulate our views in respectful ways. As such, the following principles will guide our discussions:

- Treat every member of the class with respect, even if you disagree with their opinion;
- Bring light, not heat;
- Reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions;
- Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights, it is not just encouraged, it is expected;
- No ideas are immune from scrutiny and debate;
- You will not be graded on your opinions;
- Arguments and evidence should be judged *independently* of who offers such arguments and evidence.

Additionally, to build a classroom environment that maximizes everyone's ability to master the course material please be mindful to not distract your fellow learners with your phone, tablet, or computer. It's perfectly fine if you would like to use these devices to take notes during class, but don't use them to distract yourself or your peers! Similarly, if you come late (or must leave early) please to enter/depart the classroom in the least disruptive manner possible. This includes sitting near the door if you anticipate leaving early or taking a seat as near to the door as possible if you arrive late.

Academic Honesty

I expect that all work you produce for this course will be your own. If you plagiarize any material from outside sources for your written work or presentation in this course, or on the final exam, **it will result in a failure of the entire course.** There are no exceptions to this, and no second chances. Please refer to the university's [Academic Integrity Policies & Procedures](#) if you have questions about these standards.

Special Accommodations

If you need particular accommodations to help you succeed in mastering this course's material, please contact the [Student Disability Resource Center](#) on campus in Costo Hall 125 to get a personalized accommodation plan.

Course Outline

This syllabus is a working document. I reserve the right to make changes to the assigned readings (additions or deletions) or to the order of topics we cover as I deem necessary. Announcements regarding schedule changes will be made in class, in discussion sections, or on iLearn.

Also note that this schedule lists the topics of discussion for each class. To master the course material, you should finish each meeting's readings before we discuss them in class. This schedule also indicates which course promise(s) each class contributes to. They are listed as **CP** followed by the specific promise's number (listed above).

Tentative Schedule:

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
<div>Aug 31st</div> <div>1</div> <div>CP 1</div> <div>Course Introduction; What the political leanings of major media sources?</div>	<div>Sep 2nd</div> <div>2</div> <div>CP 1, 2, & 3</div> <div>Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 1: Why does the media matter?</div>
<div>7th</div> <div>Labor Day - No Class :(</div>	<div>9th</div> <div>3</div> <div>CP 1, 2, & 3</div> <div>Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 1: Does it matter who controls the media?</div>

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
14th 4 CP 1 & 3 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 2: Public vs. private media.	16th 5 CP 4 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 2: Should the media regulated? What pressures do they face?
21st 6 CP 4 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 3: What freedoms does the press have?	23rd 7 CP 4 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 3: Does the public have a right to important information?
28th 8 CP 1, 2, & 3 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 4: How has the media changed over time?	30th 9 CP 1 & 2 Google Docs Essay Due Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 4: How does the media affect campaigns and political participation?
<div>Oct 5th</div> 10 CP 1 & 2 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 5: Who and what makes the news?	7th 11 CP 1, 2, & 3 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 5: Reporting on extraordinary events and crises.
12th 12 CP 2 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 6: Can the media influence public policy?	14th 13 CP 2 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 6: How does the media get involved with politics?
19th 14 CP 1 & 3 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 7: The relationship between the media and the president.	21st 15 CP 1, 3, & 5 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 7: The relationship between the media and the president continued. How to write a research paper.

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
26th 16 CP 1, 2, & 3 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 8: The relationship between the media, Congress and the courts.	28th 17 CP 1, 2, & 3 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 8: The relationship between the media, Congress and the courts continued. <i>Last day of midterm content</i>
Nov 2nd 18 Midterm Essay (CP 1, 2, 3, & 4)	4th 19 CP 1 & 3 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 9: What about state and local media?
9th 20 CP 1 & 2 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 10: How does the media cover foreign affairs?	11th 21 CP 1 & 2 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 10: Media coverage of war.
16th 22 CP 1 & 2 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 11: Does the media influence people's political beliefs or do they only report on them?	18th 23 Project Proposal Due CP 1 & 5 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 11: Do voters selectively consume the news?
23rd Thanksgiving! - No Class :(25th Thanksgiving! - No Class :(
30th 24 CP 1 & 2 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 12: How has the media changed our politics?	Dec 2nd 25 Project Outline Due CP 1, 2, & 5 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 12: How has the media changed elections?
7th 26 CP 1 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 13: Is the media biased? How?	9th 27 CP 1 Mass Media and American Politics Ch. 13: Is biased media a bad thing?
14th 28	16th 29 Final Project Due (CP 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5) Participation Self-assessment Due

