

# COMM 413W: MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC

Spring 2022



Instructor: Ryan Wang

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🕒 **Time:** M/W/F 9:00 – 9:55AM  
✉ **Email:** ryanwang@psu.edu

📍 **Place:** Willard Bldg 270  
📅 **Office hours:** ZOOM(By Appt.)

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## Course overview

This class explores social-level political and communication theories of the relationships between media and public, media influences on public opinion, social pressure on the media and political communication.

## Objectives

Students who successfully complete assigned coursework should develop the following skills:

- Familiarity with the basic theories linking media and public
- Ability to critique scholarly media research in this area
- Understanding of how media contribute to effective citizenship
- Increased skill with written argumentation

## Suggested readings/materials

Please find the attached readings on course schedule. And I also recommend the following two documentaries on Netflix if you are interested:

- The Social Dilemma (Netflix docudrama)
- The Great Hack (Netflix documentary)

## Writing

This course fulfills the writing across the curriculum requirement for communication majors. It is primarily intended for juniors and seniors, and is meant to be taken after fulfillment of basic composition requirements. Given the assignments are writing-intensive, proper citations and appropriate paraphrasing is important (not copy from the work of others). More information about (accidental) plagiarism could be found on Penn State's Academic Integrity page.

## Prerequisites

Students are required to have completed COMM 304 or an equivalent research methods class prior to starting COMM 413W. A major component of your grade in this class is based upon your ability to read, understand and critique scholarly research articles based upon quantitative data. Students can and should ask questions about individual articles as necessary, but in general you should be able to consistently do the following:

- Recognize the use and relative merits of experimental, survey, and content analytical research, with a particular emphasis on the ability of each to offer evidence of causality
- Identify the sample employed and the implications of such a sample for inferential purposes and external validity
- Identify and describe the measurement of key IVs and DVs, based upon both theoretical descriptions and method sections
- Correctly interpret reported statistical results from bivariate (e.g., t-tests, correlations) and multivariate (e.g., ANOVA, regression) analyses, including the implications of including multiple IVs in analysis
- Understand the meaning of moderation and be able to explain the implications of significant interaction results

## Return to in-person classes policy

Other than the Zoom days as listed, we will be meeting in-person. I hope you are all as excited as I am to be back in the classroom! We will be:

- *Masked:* In accordance with Penn State policy, everyone in any Penn State building in the classroom must be masked, regardless of vaccination status. The mask must be worn properly, covering both the nose and mouth.
- *Maintain social distancing:* All students, faculty and staff are expected to maintain social distancing (i.e., maintain at least six feet of space between individuals) when possible. Seating patterns and attendance patterns, including assigned seating and closed-off desks/chairs/room sections, have been established to help allow for this distance for your safety. It is also important to follow related guidance communicated by the University and via public postings/signage related to directional traffic flow and maximum occupancy of spaces.
- *A Food-Free Zone:* With the exception of bottled water, all food and drink consumption is prohibited in classrooms. Those drinking water should be especially conscious of maintaining social distancing and minimizing the time their mask is moved aside; straws are recommended for this purpose.

## Grading scale

As per university policy, grades are awarded as shown below:

|    |   |           |
|----|---|-----------|
| A  | = | 93 – 100  |
| A- | = | 90 – 92.9 |
| B+ | = | 87 – 89.9 |
| B  | = | 83 – 86.9 |
| B- | = | 80 – 82.9 |
| C+ | = | 77 – 79.9 |
| C  | = | 70 – 76.9 |
| D  | = | 60 – 69.9 |

## Rubric

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Seminar Participation .....      | 20% |
| Class Quizzes (3) .....          | 15% |
| Reaction Essays (4) .....        | 20% |
| Annotated Bibliography .....     | 5%  |
| Rough Draft of Final Paper ..... | 10% |
| Research Presentation .....      | 10% |
| Final Paper .....                | 20% |

**Note:** All assignments should be submitted through Canvas. No assignments will be accepted via email.

### *Seminar Participation*

Participating regularly in class will be assessed depending on your class involvement, participation, and intellectual contributions. Thus, missing classes can potentially and severely affect your grade since you will not be able to participate when you miss class. The success of the seminar largely depends on the quality of the discussions during class time. I expect all of you to meaningfully intervene several times every class. Feel free to bring your notes and talking points. If talking in class is particularly stressful for you, I am happy to brainstorm additional strategies for participating in discussions.

You are expected to critically engage with the readings, and to contribute to a classroom environment in which ideas are debated in a respectful way. For each week's reading, you need to submit one (or more) questions through the discussion board on Canvas by Monday night: it could be your critiques on the paper, the confusion you still have after reading the paper, or anything you would like to learn more (i.e., topics, methods).

Also, occasionally, we will engage in individual, and group activities to either put into practice skills and critical thinking abilities drawing on class material, or to simply foster important points learned in class through practical means.

### *Class Quizzes*

There will be three **three(3)** quizzes throughout the semester. These multiple choice and some open-ended questions to assess how thoroughly you are digesting the class content. See schedule below for Quiz days.

## ***Reaction Essays***

You will have to hand in two (2) individual essays of thoughtful writing, integrating ideas and evidence from the readings, and two (2) revisions as well. This task is great for you to keep up with the content of the readings, and to make sure you articulate your thoughts briefly. Content is open as you can choose the angle, theme and what to discuss in your reaction essays (and if you are not sure about your approach, always feel free to consult with me). Follow APA 7th edition style for all in-text citations. The essays should be 4 - 5 pages (not including the references), double-spaced, 1 inch margin, 12 point *Times New Roman*.

The original submission and revision will be graded separately. The assessment of the original submission (6%) will focus on following two points:

- ***Writing and organization***: Paper is clearly written and organized, with minimal stylistic or grammatical errors. Paragraphs are logically organized, and effective transitions and structural language are used. Citations are provided in APA style.
- ***Evidence and comprehension***: Appropriate evidence is presented from a sufficient number of course readings, necessarily including but not limited to readings assigned. This evidence is presented in a way that a reader understands not only the empirical findings described but also the meaning of any specific concepts and theories being addressed. This should include sufficient information about the method used to obtain those findings that a reader can contextualize and evaluate the quality of evidence presented.

And the assessment of the revision (4%) is mainly about the substantial improvement you make compared to the original submission (based on my comments and feedback)

## ***Annotated Bibliography***

Please refer to the separate document of annotated bibliography requirement and rubrics.

## ***Rough Draft of Final Paper***

This assignment represents a very rough draft of your final paper. This assignment gives you a chance to advance your paper as much as possible and be able to receive some feedback on it. That way, your paper is not solely evaluated on one last reading. Although I expect a paper that complies with the sections of your final paper, I do understand that certain pieces may be rough, or even missing.

You will select a specific theory relevant to political communication that you will explore in your final paper. Many theories may apply to contexts beyond political communication, but you will want to be sure you are able to comfortably focus on the political and civic applications of this theory. Please note that “**theory**” means a coherent explanation of how multiple variables, some of which relate to media, are connected. Theory is not the same thing as topic. You should not be focusing on a particular type of media content or a specific outcome or political issue. Rather, you should be looking at a broad theory that relates media and other variables across a variety of contexts. The list below includes a number of viable theories. You are free to explore a different theory on your own, but obviously you will want to be sure it meets the required definition.

## ***Research Presentation***

These presentations will be structured like conference paper presentations. You each will have 8 - 10 minutes (time will be controlled so you need to practice) to present your study to your classmates. We'll talk about effective presentation strategies prior to this assignment, but the basics are that these should be engaging and highly visual and you should have practiced it enough to not be totally dependent on your notes. These presentations will offer you one last chance to get feedback on your projects from your peers (and me, too) prior to the final paper submission deadline.

Presentation will be assessed by its:

- Theoretical value
- Methodological development
- Overall rigor, accuracy, thoughtfulness
- Public engaging levels, and entertaining capabilities (i.e., didactic, engaging, etc.)

## ***Final Paper***

Please refer to the separate document of final paper directions and rubrics.

## Course Schedule

### Week 1: Overview

- Jan 10th Introduction and class overview
- Jan 12th Warm up: How to read academic papers
- Jan 14th Warm up: How to interpret stats tables  
*Example: Kaye & Johnson (2002)*

### Week 2: (The shifting?)Foundation

- Jan 17th Martin Luther King Jr. Day (no class)
- Jan 19th (The shifting?)Foundation of political communication
- Jan 21st Revisiting communication mediation model  
*Reading: Shah et al. (2017))*

### Week 3: Media coverage of politics

- Jan 24th Journalistic practices and media coverage of politics
- Jan 26th Media polarization and the 2020 election  
*Reading: Pew Research Center report (2020)*
- Jan 28th Media bias and media trust  
*Reading: Markov & Min (2019))*

### Week 4: How does media shape us?

- Jan 31st Framing & Priming
- Feb 2nd Agenda setting  
*Reading: Lee & Xu (2018)*
- Feb 4th Media influence through the lens of game (Guest speaker: Ryan Tan)

**Reaction Essay 1 due Feb 6th**

### Week 5: Opinion leaders and online influencers

- Feb 7th
- Feb 9th  
*Reading: Winter & Neubaum (2018)*
- Feb 11th **Quiz 1**

### Week 6: A better informed public?

- Feb 14th Media literacy and digital literacy
- Feb 16th Internet usage and media consumption (Guest speaker: Dr. Margaret Ng)  
*Reading: Ng & Taneja (2019)*
- Feb 18th Knowledge gap  
*Reading: Bourkes & Vliegenthart (2019))*

**Reaction Essay 1 revision due Feb 20th**

**Week 7: Misinformation and fact-checking**

Feb 21st

Feb 23rd

Feb 25th

*Reading:* Chung & Kim (2020))**One paragraph description of your final project due Feb 27th****Week 8: Hostile media perception and online incivility**

Feb 28th

Mar 2nd

*Reading:* Masullo et al (2020)

Mar 4th Online incivility and news quality (Guest speaker: Dr. Shuning Lu)

**Reaction Essay 2 due Mar 6th****Week 9: Spring break****Week 10: Active/Passive information seeking**

Mar 14th

Mar 16th

Mar 18th

*Reading:* Oeldorf-Hirsch (2018)**Annotated Bibliography due Mar 20th****Week 11: (Social) Media & persuasion**

Mar 21st

Mar 23rd

Mar 25th **Quiz 2***Reading:* Diehl, Weeks & Gil de Zúñiga (2016)**Week 12: Selective exposure**

Mar 28th

Mar 30th

Apr 1st

*Reading:* Van der Meer et al. (2020)**Reaction Essay 2 revision due Apr 3rd****Week 13: Political polarization**

Apr 4th

Apr 6th

Apr 8th

*Reading:* Yarchi et al. (2021)**Rough Draft due Apr 10th**

**Week 14: Collective action**

Apr 11th

Apr 13th

Apr 15th **Quiz 3***Reading:* Chan (2017)**Week 15: Presentation week**

Apr 18th Presentation (Group 1)

Apr 20th Presentation (Group 2)

Apr 22nd Presentation (Group 3)

**Week 16: Final week****Final paper due Apr 28th**



## University & Course Policies

### Attendance Policy

This class will meet in a hybrid mode. We will meet face to face, and on every Friday, we will transition onto a virtual synchronous class setting on Zoom. Attendance is critical and participation will be part of your assessment. I know there is a lot going on with your lives, so please just keep the communication channel open and inform me about your plans at all times.

### Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.

Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

### Educational Equity/Reporting Bias

All students are entitled to an equal opportunity for an education. As stated in college policy: "Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the Report Bias webpage.

### Disability Accommodations

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus. For further information, please visit Student Disability Resources website.

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: see documentation guidelines. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

## **Counseling and Psychological Services**

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

- Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS): 814-863-0395
- Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses
- Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400
- Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

## **Masking policy (Spring 2022)**

Penn State University requires everyone to wear a face mask in all university buildings, including classrooms, regardless of vaccination status. ALL STUDENTS MUST wear a mask appropriately (i.e., covering both your mouth and nose) while you are indoors on campus. This is to protect your health and safety as well as the health and safety of your classmates, instructor, and the university community. Anyone attending class without a mask will be asked to put one on or leave. Instructors may end class if anyone present refuses to appropriately wear a mask for the duration of class. Students who refuse to wear masks appropriately may face disciplinary action for Code of Conduct violations. If you feel you cannot wear a mask during class, please speak with your adviser immediately about your options for altering your schedule.