

Class Syllabus Spring 2007

Class: PSC 228LH: Media and Politics
Meeting Time: Wednesdays, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Location: Hall of States

Instructor

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Course Description

This course focuses on the role of mass media in American politics and the influence of the media on Americans' political attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. We will examine the nature of the news and news making organizations, focusing on recognizing slant and angle as well as leveraging the media to move political and policy agendas.

The goal of this class is to help students better understand how all forms of media — print, broadcast and electronic — help shape the course of public policy. In addition to topical lectures, the class format will primarily consist of group discussion and student presentations.

Throughout this course, please be sure to read daily newspapers several times per week, view online and broadcast news programming as much as possible, and occasionally review news weeklies and other media. Think critically about the coverage you see and actively participate in class discussion.

Grading

You are responsible for four writing assignments, a mid-term project and a final project. Grading will be based on these assignments as well as class participation, weighted as follows:

- 25% --- Written assignments one through four, detailed below
- 25% --- Class participation, including presentation of news analysis
- 25% --- Poster Session and paper
- 25% --- Final Project

Grades will be assessed on a ten point scale:

90 –100	A
80 – 89	B
70- 79	C

Required Reading

The Media in American Politics, 2nd Edition by David L. Paletz (Longman Publishers)
Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Mass Media and Society, Eighth Edition by Alison Alexander and Jarice Hanson (McGraw-Hill/Dushkin)
Daily and weekly news media
Additional materials distributed in class

Writing Assignments:

Assignment #1: Write an Op/Ed (approximately 1500 words) expressing your views on whether the media shapes or reflects American society. Cite research to support your opinion and use examples to illustrate. While your piece may be longer, review op/eds in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* for style guidance.

Assignment #2: Select issue 11, 12 or 13 in Part 4 of *Taking Sides*. Evaluate the pro and con essays on that issue. Discuss any bias the author brings to the piece, highlight arguments that resonate with you and reveal any inaccuracies or missing information from each. Also examine the style of the writers. What impact does the language selection, sentence format and approach have on the reader?

Assignment #3: Select issue 8, 9 or 10 in Part 3 of *Taking Sides*. Evaluate the pro and con essays on that issue. Discuss any bias the author brings to the piece, highlight arguments that resonate with you and reveal any inaccuracies or missing information from each. Also examine the style of the writers. What impact does the language selection, sentence format and approach have on the reader?

Assignment #4: Select issue 17 or 18 in Part 6 of *Taking Sides*. Study and evaluate the pro and con essays on that issue. Then, write your own persuasive essay (approximately 3 pages) on your selected issue.

Poster Sessions

Working in groups of two, identify a Media and Politics topic of interest to you. Research the issue and write a five to seven page paper analyzing the topic. Present a poster session during your assigned class to educate your colleagues on the issue and your analysis. Then, lead a class discussion on the topic. The poster session, with discussion, should last approximately 30-45 minutes. Possible topics are listed at the end of this document, but you are encouraged to select a topic of particular interest to your team.

News Analysis

During one class, you will be required to make a brief presentation (approximately 10 -15 minutes) and lead class discussion (approximately 15-20 minutes) of recent news. Examine how the medium, format, angle and approach impact the messages and influence the audience's perspective. You can approach this in several ways:

- select a major news topic and analyze the coverage of that topic in three different media outlets;
- follow a single story over the course of several weeks;
- compare coverage of two stories over a defined period of time; or
- conduct a general analysis of news during the previous two weeks.

Final Project

The final project will be discussed in class. Deadline for final written project is the night of assigned student presentation.

Course Schedule

January 17

First class meeting

January 24

Writing Assignment #1 due
Sign up for Poster Session topics
Read chapters 1 –3 in Paletz

January 31

News Analysis 1 and 2
Read chapters 5-6 in Paletz

February 7

Poster Session Team A
News Analysis 3
Read chapter 4 in Paletz

February 14

Assignment #2 due
Poster Session Team B
News Analysis 4

February 21

Poster Session Team C
News Analysis 5 & 6

February 28

Assignment #3 due
Poster Session Team D
News Analysis 7 & 8

March 7

Poster Session Team E
News Analysis 9 & 10
Read chapters 7, 11-13 in Paletz

March 14

SPRING BREAK

March 21

Assignment # 4 due
Poster Session Team F
News Analysis 11 & 12
Read chapters 10, 14, &15 in Paletz

March 28

NO CLASS

April 4

Poster Session Team G
News Analysis 13 & 14

April 11

Student Presentations of Final Project

April 18

Student Presentations of Final Project

April 25

Student Presentations of Final Project

Poster Session Topics

Poster Session topics may include (but are not limited to):

- Are we experiencing a “generation gap” in news media?
- How is changing technology influencing the way we receive and perceive news?
- Are race and/or gender stereotypes prevalent in news? In entertainment media?
- Do male and female reporters cover political issues in the same way?
- Do newspapers slant their news coverage to favor the candidate endorsed by that paper?
- Are readers more influenced by hard facts about political and social issues or by personal stories and examples?
- What impact do political cartoons have on readers?
- Do programs such as Saturday Night Live, The Colbert Report and The Jon Stewart Show actually influence the opinions and perceptions of viewers?
- How does the bottom line affect news? Are media outlets more generous to their corporate partners, advertisers and/or parent companies?
- What role does radio play in today’s media mix?
- Does celebrity involvement in an issue influence the public?
- How do political candidates, elected officials and advocates influence news coverage?
- Are public opinion polls trustworthy and newsworthy?
- News media as a global communication tool.
- Analysis and comparison of news industry in other countries.
- Is there value to news media with an agenda?
- Successful manipulation of media for personal, political or social gain.
- What’s the impact of the blurring of news and entertainment media?