Course Description

This course is an introduction to the mass media’s role in American politics. Over the next sixteen weeks, we will examine the production, consumption, and effects of political media in the 21st century. We will address how the relationship between the media and politics has changed and is changing, as well as how such transitions benefit or hinder politicians, journalists, and the American people.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to address the following topics: 1) the evolution of political journalism, 2) how the media affect agendas and opinions, 3) how media choices shape policy development, 4) the role the media play in the electoral system, 5) how elites react to the media, and 6) where the political media are headed in the future.

Required Texts

The following texts are available at local bookstores (as well as through online sources).


Assignments and Grading

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

- Participation 9%
- Talking Points 16%
- Exam One 20%
- Exam Two 20%
- Exam Three 20%
- Research Paper 15%
Attendance is not mandatory, but it is strongly advised. Ideal answers to questions on the examinations will express clear knowledge of both the assigned reading materials and the content of the lectures. In addition, class will be where I deliver important information on exams and the research paper.

Monday class periods will be a mix of lecture and professor-driven discussion. Wednesday class periods will be devoted entirely to student-driven discussion dealing with the week’s readings and lectures. The participation portion of your course grade will be based on your level of involvement in these discussions. Students who regularly attend class and take part in the debate can expect to receive full participation credit.

The foundation for Wednesday discussions will be talking points. Talking points should be the most interesting questions, thoughts, arguments, or comments you have about the week’s material. Talking points are NOT moments for you to expound on your political views, your philosophy on the world, and so forth. They should refer to a specific section or sections of the readings and should be submitted in the form of a short paragraph (complete with author/page number when necessary). Examples of what constitute good talking points will be shared with the class during the introductory session so students will have a better idea of what the assignment entails. To receive the maximum amount of credit for talking points, you must submit a talking point via e-mail by the deadline (2 PM on Tuesday) for eight of the eleven Wednesday discussions. Obviously, since there are approximately forty students in the class, we will not cover all talking points every week; most weeks we will cover approximately 5-10 points, depending on the nature of the discussion. However, submitting a talking point by the deadline is sufficient to receive credit, regardless of whether or not your talking point is used.

There will be three examinations in this class. Exams will contain short answer and essay questions about topics from the preceding lectures and readings. The first exam, scheduled for October 4, will cover the first six weeks of lecture content and readings. The second exam, scheduled for November 8, will cover weeks seven through eleven of lecture content and readings. The final exam, scheduled for December 16, will cover weeks twelve through sixteen of lecture content and readings. During the last class period prior to each exam, I will hold a short review session to answer questions and highlight what topics will be covered. Note that you are eligible to take a makeup exam only if the following conditions are met: 1) you must have a documented emergency condition or University recognized excused absence, and 2) you must make arrangements for the makeup prior to the exam or within two days of the exam (depending on your situation).

Students will also write a ten page research paper on a topic of their choosing. Papers are due in class on Monday, December 6 at 3:00 PM. I will only accept papers via e-mail in cases where the student has a University excused absence. Despite the fact that students will pick their own paper topics, a short description of the topic must be submitted to me by November 1 so I can advise students concerning the direction of their paper; I am only looking for one short paragraph of information on what the paper will examine. Students who fail to submit a paper topic by this deadline will immediately be penalized one letter grade on their paper. Also, note that even though paper topics are due at the beginning of November, if a student wants to write about a topic that will not be discussed in class until after topics are due, I will allow it. I will read rough drafts of papers until 48 hours before papers are due. Research papers not handed in on the due date will lose one letter grade for each twenty-four hour period they are late.

Final class grades will be assigned as follows:

A = 89.5-100  B = 79.5-89.4  C = 69.5-79.4  D = 59.5-69.4  F = Less Than 59.5

Questions concerning grades should be dealt with during office hours. I will not discuss grades via e-mail.

Possibilities for extra credit may occur, but are not guaranteed.
Statement about Students with Disabilities

The University of Oklahoma is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact the instructor personally as soon as possible to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services prior to receiving accommodations in this course. The Office of Disability Services is located in Goddard Health Center, Suite 166, phone 405-325-3852 or TDD only 405-325-4173.

Statement about Religious Holidays

It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays. Please see the instructor immediately if you will need to miss class any time during this semester.

Statement about Course Materials/Copyright and Plagiarism

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all products generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, web pages, multimedia files, presentations, quizzes, exams, written assignments, and in-class material review sheets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating on exams, improper collaboration, and fraud (such as submitting the same assignment for different classes or fabricating sources). See http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity for academic misconduct policies and http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity-rights for information on student rights with regards to misconduct.

As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated.

Plagiarized assignments will automatically be given a zero.

Course Calendar

Please note that I reserve the right to change the following calendar in order to ensure that we spend adequate time on each topic. Of course, if such changes become necessary, I will make an announcement in class. Also, note that I reserve the right to add and subtract readings as I see fit.

Students are expected to have read the assigned readings before class.

Week 1 August 23, 25: Media Power and Government Control

- Graber, ch. 1
- Reader, ch. 1, 8
Week 2  August 30, September 1: Ownership, Regulation, and Guidance of Media

- Graber, ch. 2
- Reader, ch. 4, 12, 24

Week 3  September 8 (no class September 6): First Class Discussion

- Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday

Week 4  September 13, 15: Press Freedom and the Law

- Graber, ch. 3
- Reader, ch. 31, 32, 33, 34
- Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday

Week 5  September 20, 22: News Making and News Reporting Routines

- Graber, ch. 4
- Reader, ch. 3
- Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday

Week 6  September 27, 29: Reporting Extraordinary Events

- Graber, ch. 5
- Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday
- Exam Review September 29

Week 7  October 4, 6: Exam; Media Influence on Attitudes and Behavior

- First Exam October 4
- Graber, ch. 7

Week 8  October 11, 13: Shaping The Political Agenda And Public Opinion

- Reader, ch. 2, 7, 9, 10
- Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday

Week 9  October 18, 20: Media As Policy Makers

- Graber, ch. 6
- Reader, ch. 25, 26, 28, 29
- Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday
Week 10  October 25, 27: Elections in the Internet Age

• Graber, ch. 8
• Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday

Week 11  November 1, 3: Influencing Election Outcomes

• Paper Topics Due November 1
• Reader, ch. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
• Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday
• Exam Review November 3

Week 12  November 8, 10: Exam; The Struggle For Control: News From the Presidency and Congress

• Second Exam November 8
• Graber, ch. 9

Week 13  November 15, 17: Political Actors Versus The Press

• Reader, ch. 19, 20, 21, 22, 35
• Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday

Week 14  November 22 (no class November 24): Popular Depictions Of The Press/Politician Relationship

Week 15  November 29, December 1: Foreign Affairs Coverage

• Graber, ch. 11
• Reader, ch. 11, 23, 27, 30
• Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday

Week 16  December 6, 8: Current Trends and Future Directions

• Papers Due By December 6, 3 PM
• Graber, ch. 12
• Reader, ch. 5, 6, 36
• Talking Points Due 2:00 Tuesday
• Exam Review December 8

Final Exam: Thursday, December 16, 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM