

Course Overview and Goals

This course is about the media in American politics. We will work toward answers to several questions: What is the role of the media in a democracy? How is the changing media landscape altering the way citizens consume news and the way journalists report it? How do economic incentives and journalistic values influence the way the media cover politics? To what extent do the media shape public opinion? Are cable television the internet, and social media corroding American democracy? Our readings, lectures, and class discussions will draw on research in the fields of political science and communication, but we will also pay attention to the news as it happens during the semester.

In the end, the course has four goals:

- To help you analyze the development of the mass media and its role in American politics
- To help you assess how the interaction among journalists, politicians, and citizens shapes contemporary American politics
- To help you learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about media and politics
- To help you become a savvy consumer of political news, in this class and beyond

Course Prerequisites

I'm required to list the course prerequisites, which seems odd, since you couldn't have registered for the class if you hadn't met them. But rules are rules, so: PSC 1002 or equivalent.

Readings

Most of the required readings—primarily journal articles and book chapters—are available for download through our course's Blackboard page (<http://blackboard.gwu.edu>). The remaining readings (or podcasts or documentaries) are available online, with links in the course schedule below.

You are also expected to keep up with the news. Our discussions during lecture will regularly deal with current events – as will quiz questions from time to time – so it is critical that you keep apprised of major political goings-on. Reading a major newspaper web site is perhaps the best way to do this, although there are of course many other news sources with ample coverage of national politics. In addition, you may be interested in [The Monkey Cage](#), a *Washington Post* blog about politics and political science of which I have been an editor and contributor for the last several years.

Evaluation

Your grade will be based on in-class quizzes and a final exam.

Quizzes. On most days, there will be a quiz of 5 questions. The quizzes will cover material from that day's assigned reading, our previous meeting's lecture, and current events. There will be 24 quizzes over the course of the semester. At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest 4 scores and add up the rest. Your quiz average will constitute 75% of your grade.

Why have frequent quizzes? Good question. There is evidence that periodic quizzes improve students' learning significantly. For example, in [one recent study](#) in a large introductory psychology class, instituting quizzes appeared to improve students' performance. Students taking that class also did better in their other courses that semester, and in the classes they took the next semester. Regular assessment throughout the semester may help students develop study habits that are beneficial in other courses, not just the course that assigns quizzes. Frequent quizzes also help me ascertain how well certain concepts

are understood, so that I can adjust the content of lectures accordingly. (This is important, because sometimes poor quiz performance may be my fault, not yours.)

Because I'm giving you 4 get-out-of-jail-free cards, **there will be no makeups** (other than for religious observances or GW-sanctioned events that you are required to participate in). Also note that you must be in class to take the quiz.

Final Exam. At the end of the semester, I will assess whether you have acquired a basic knowledge of the role of the media in American politics. This is an overly complicated way of saying I'm going to give you a final exam. The exam will be a take-home and will consist of essay questions. It will be cumulative—that is, you will be asked to draw on material from the entire semester. The exam will be worth 25% of your grade.

The components of your final grade will be as follows:

- Quizzes: 75%
- Take-home final exam: 25%

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale:

A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), and F (0-59). There is no "curve" or extra credit.

Technology

You must bring a wi-fi-enabled device to every class session that we have a quiz. You will be taking the quizzes through Blackboard.

That, however, is the only time you are permitted to use it. As great as technology is (how else would we get the cat videos?), the fact is that laptops, smart phones, and other devices are a distraction to your classmates and to me. Not only that, but [research](#) has shown that we learn more when we take notes by hand. So other than for the quizzes, you may not use electronic devices in class. If you have a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please contact me.

COURSE SCHEDULE (Note: This is subject to change as we proceed through the semester.)

Date	Topic	Reading	Quiz?
1/15	Introduction	None	No quiz
1/17	What Is the Media’s Job in a Democracy?	Schudson, “How to Think Normatively about News and Democracy,” (2018)	No quiz
1/22	What Is the Media’s Job in a Democracy?	Baker, “Different Democracies and Their Media” (2002) First listen to (or read) the NPR interview: “Jason Kessler on His ‘Unite the Right’ Rally Move to D.C.” (2018). Then read Jensen, “Kessler Interview Puts Spotlight on How to Cover Racist Viewpoints” (2018)	Quiz 1
1/24	The Historical Evolution of the Media	Schudson, “Where News Came From: The History of Journalism” (2003)	Quiz 2
1/29	The Historical Evolution of the Media	Starr, “An Unexpected Crisis: The News Media in Post-industrial Democracies,” (2011)	Quiz 3
1/31	The Contemporary Media Landscape	Prior, “Audience Fragmentation and Political Inequality in the Post-Broadcast Media Environment” (2011) Mitchell et al., “The Modern News Consumer” [Click on “Complete Report PDF” and read pp. 1-25.] (2016)	Quiz 4
2/5	The Contemporary Media Landscape	Madrigal, “What Facebook Did to American Democracy” (2017) Benkler et al., “Study: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda” (2017)	Quiz 5
2/7	The Contemporary Media Landscape	Ladd, “The Era of Media Distrust and Its Consequences for Perceptions of Political Reality” (2014) Gottfried et al., “Partisans Remain Sharply Divided in Their Attitudes about the News Media” (2018) [Just the first page. You don’t need to read the full report.]	Quiz 6
2/12	Media Freedom	Sanford and Kirtley, “The First Amendment Tradition and Its Critics”	Quiz 7
2/14	Media Freedom	Watch Frontline, “News War: Part One” (2007)	No quiz
2/19	Media Freedom	Listen to the “Defamation” (January 13) episode from the podcast “What Trump Can Teach Us about Con Law” (2018) Risen, “If Donald Trump Targets Journalists, Thank Obama” (2016)	Quiz 8
2/21	Media Freedom	Fisher, “Fake News Is Bad. Attempts to Ban It Are Worse” (2017)	Quiz 9
2/26	Economics and the Media	Hamilton, “A Market for Press Independence”	Quiz 10

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Date	Topic	Reading	Quiz?
2/28	Economics and the Media	Stroud and Muddiman, "Political Coverage on Facebook" (2018) Hamilton, "The Market and the Media" (2015) Varian, "The Economics of the Newspaper Business" (2013)	Quiz 11
3/5	Media Values: Bias, Objectivity, and Balance	Wolsfeld, "No Such Thing as Objective News" (2011) Niven, "An Interesting Bias" (2012)	Quiz 12
3/7	Media Values: Bias, Objectivity, and Balance	Boykoff, "Lost in Translation? United States Television News Coverage of Anthropogenic Climate Change" (2008) Hayes and Guardino, "Us versus Them" (2013)	Quiz 13
3/12	Spring break	A good novel! (Some ideas: Fourth of July Creek ; The Orphan Master's Son ; All the Light We Cannot See ; The Narrow Road to the Deep North ; TransAtlantic ; The Great Believers)	No quiz
3/14	Spring break	Another one!	No quiz
3/19	Media Values: Novelty and Conflict	Bosso, "Setting the Agenda" (1989) Hayes and Lawless, "Sex is No Story" (2016)	Quiz 14
3/21	Media Values: Novelty and Conflict	Patterson, "The Miscast Institution" (1994) Sides and Leetaru, "A Deep Dive into the News Media's Role in the Rise of Donald J. Trump" (2016)	Quiz 15
3/26	Media Effects on Public Opinion	Zaller, "Information, Predispositions, and Opinion" (1992)	No quiz
3/28	Media Effects on Public Opinion	Zaller, "Information, Predispositions, and Opinion" (1992) [relive the experience again and again!]	Quiz 16
4/2	Media Effects on Public Opinion	Iyengar, "A Typology of Media Effects" (2018)	Quiz 17
4/4	Is Partisan News Ruining Democracy?	Mutz and Reeves, "The New Videomalaise" (2005)	Quiz 18
4/9	Is Partisan News Ruining Democracy?	Levendusky, "Can Partisan Media Polarize?" (2013) Arceneaux and Johnson, "Partisan News and Mass Polarization" (2013)	Quiz 19
4/11	Is Partisan News Ruining Democracy?	Sayre, "The Influence of News Media on Political Elites" (2018) Fowler, "The Colbert Bump in Campaign Donations" (2008)	Quiz 20
4/16	Fake News, Social Media, and the 2016 Election	Timberg, "This Analysis Shows How Viral Fake Election News Stories Outperformed Real News on Facebook" (2016)	Quiz 21

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Date	Topic	Reading	Quiz?
4/18	Fake News, Social Media, and the 2016 Election	Guess et al. “Selective Exposure to Misinformation” (2018) Guess et al. “Who Shared Fake News during the 2016 Election Campaign?” (2019)	Quiz 22
4/23	Can Fact-Checking Help?	Nyhan and Reifler, “The Effect of Fact-Checking on Elites” (2015) Nyhan, “Fact Checking Can Change Views? We Rate That as Mostly True” (2016)	Quiz 23
4/25	Spillover and Wrapping Up	*Take-home final exam handed out*	Quiz 24

Other Course and University Information

Credit Hour Policy

According to the University, in a 15-week semester, students in a 3-credit course like this one are expected to engage in a total of 112.5 hours of work. We will spend about 38 hours in class together, which means you should expect to spend at least 75 hours (or an average of 5 hours per week) on outside work related to the course. That will include reading, writing, preparing for quizzes and an exam, and thinking deep thoughts.

University Policy on Religious Holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays.

Support for Students outside the Classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information see: disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/

Mental Health Services

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For additional information see: counselingcenter.gwu.edu/

Academic Integrity Code

Thinking of cheating? Don't do it. Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For details and complete code, see: studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity

Safety and security

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.