

Course Overview and Goals

This class focuses on the ongoing local news crisis in the United States. We will consider the importance of local media to American democracy; how the internet has reshaped the market for local political news; the current difficulties facing in local journalism; how the loss of local news affects civic engagement and political attitudes; and the future prospects for political accountability in local politics.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- examine and evaluate the role played by local news in American democracy.
- analyze the causes of the current crisis in local journalism and identify possible solutions.
- assess the extent to which local news affects how citizens engage with politics.
- write like a political scientist (but only the good ones!).
- apply research techniques used by social scientists to conduct your own research project.
- gain writing and research skills that will help you in your career beyond GW.

Readings

There is one required book.

- Hayes, Danny and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2021. *News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Over the course of the semester, you will also read sections of this overview of political science research papers.

- Minkoff, Scott L. 2018. [“A Guide to Developing and Writing Research Papers in Political Science.”](#) SUNY-New Paltz, August.

The rest of required readings are journal articles, book chapters, and podcasts or articles in the popular media. Some are freely available online, with links embedded in the course schedule. I will post the remaining readings on our course’s Blackboard page.

Although not required, you may be interested in [The Monkey Cage](#), a *Washington Post* site about politics and political science for which I have been an editor and contributor. It regularly features posts about media and politics. You might also want to subscribe to the [Pew Research Center’s Daily Briefing of Media News](#). It links to media-related headlines every weekday and often includes developments related to local news.

Evaluation

This is a “writing in the discipline” course. Thus, you will write a lot, and most of your grade will come from writing assignments. Here’s the breakdown.

Two Reaction Papers (15% each, 30% total)

Two times during the semester, you will write a paper that critically analyzes the week’s readings. These two-page papers should not be summaries. Instead, you will discuss the strengths and weakness of the readings and raise questions that they do not answer. At our first meeting, I will distribute a schedule assigning you to particular weeks and give you more details about the reaction paper assignment.

Research Paper (various components, 55% total)

A majority of your grade will come from a 15-20-page (not including references) research paper that you will work on over the course of the semester. It is broken down into several parts.

- October 1: Research paper topic memo (5%)
- October 22: Literature review (5%)
- November 5: Write-up of findings (5%)
- November 19: Research paper draft (not graded)
- December 1 or 8: Presentation (5%)
- December 3: Peer review (5%)
- December 10: Final paper (30%)

You will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit the topic memo, literature review, and findings write-up. I will average the two grades.

Participation (15%)

Your participation grade will be based on class attendance, demonstrating that you have thoroughly and thoughtfully done the assigned reading, and regularly and constructively contributing to discussion.

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

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. Thus, you may not use them 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*)

September 1: Introduction

September 8: Local Politics and Local News

- De Tocqueville, Alexis. 1840. *Democracy in America, Volume 2*. Project Gutenberg E-book. Section 2, Chapter 6. ([“Of the Relation Between Public Associations and Newspapers.”](#))
- Hamilton, James T. 2017. “Measuring Spillovers in Markets for Local Public Affairs Coverage.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*, Kate Kenski and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hayes and Lawless, Chapter 1

September 15: What Does Democracy Need from Local News?

- Schudson, Michael. 2017. "How to Think Normatively about News and Democracy." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*, Kate Kenski and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis. 2015. *Local Journalism: The Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media*. London: I.B. Tauris. Excerpt, pp. 32-47.
- Waldman, Steven. 2011. "The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age." Federal Communications Commission, pp. 5-30 ("Executive Summary" and "Overview").
- Starr, Paul. 2009. "[Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers \(Hello to a New Era of Corruption\).](#)" *The New Republic*, March 4.

September 22: The Origins and Evolution of the Local Journalism Crisis

- Hamilton, James T. 2005. "The Market and the Media." In Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Press*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 351-371.
- Hayes and Lawless, Chapter 2 (pp. 15-23)
- Fischer, Sean, Kokil Jaidka, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2020. "Auditing Local News Presence on Google News." *Nature Human Behavior* 4: 1236-1244.
- Listen to [Crazy/Genius: "Who Killed Local News?"](#) (The first 11:30.) June 14, 2018.
- Varian, Hal. 2013. "[The Economics of the Newspaper Business.](#)" Speech delivered at the awards ceremony for E Giornalismo.

September 29: Research Paper Meetings

- Minkoff, pp. 1-5
- ✓ Research paper topic memo due Friday, October 1 at 5 pm

October 6: Guest Speaker: Scott Brodbeck, Founder, Editor, and Publisher of ARLnow.com (and other local news sites) – and a GW alum!

- Peruse [ARLnow.com](#) and read some recent stories to get a sense of what it publishes

October 13: The Decline of the Local News Environment

- Hayes and Lawless, Chapter 2 (pp. 23-40) and Chapter 3

- Abernathy, Penelope Muse. 2020. “News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive?” University of North Carolina Hussman School of Journalism and Media. (Read pp. 1-27).
- Peterson, Erik. 2021. “Paper Cuts: How Reporting Resources Affect Political News Coverage.” *American Journal of Political Science* 65(2): 443-459.

October 20: Civic Engagement

- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Chapter 13.
- Hayes and Lawless, Chapters 4-5
- Shaker, Lee. 2014. “Dead Newspapers and Citizens’ Civic Engagement.” *Political Communication* 31(1):131-48.
- Minkoff, pp. 5-12
- ✓ Literature review due Friday, October 22 at 5 pm

October 27: Polarization and Political Attitudes

- Darr, Joshua P., Matthew P. Hitt, and Johanna L. Dunaway. 2018. “Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior.” *Journal of Communication* 68(6):1007-28.
- Moskowitz, Daniel. J. 2021. “Local News, Information, and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 115(1): 114-129.
- Harris, Lauren. 2021. [“Local News Can Combat Polarization, if Only They Have the Margins.”](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 9.

November 3: Research Paper Meetings

- Minkoff, pp. 12-19
- ✓ Write-up of findings due Friday, November 5 at 5 pm

November 10: Is Local News Destined for More Partisanship?

- Martin, Gregory J. and Joshua McCrain. 2019. “Local News and National Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 113(2): 372-84.
- Listen to [Niskanen Center Podcast: “Can TV News Keep Politics Local?”](#) June 2, 2021.
- Listen to [The Daily: “A Partisan Future for Local News?”](#) October 28, 2020.

- Sands, John. 2019. [“Local News Is More Trusted Than National News — But That Could Change.”](#) Knight Foundation, October 29.

November 17: The Future of Local News

- Hayes and Lawless, Chapters 6-7
 - Hindman, Matthew. 2018. *The Internet Trap: How the Digital Economy Builds Monopolies and Undermines Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 7 (“Making News Stickier”).
 - Weber, Matthew, Peter Andringa, and Philip M. Napoli. 2019. [“Local News on Facebook: Assessing the Critical Information Needs Served through Facebook’s TodayIn Feature.”](#) Working paper, University of Minnesota and Duke University.
 - Freidlich, Jim. 2021. [“A Federal Lifeline for Local News.”](#) *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 22.
- ✓ Research paper draft due Friday, November 19 at 5 pm

November 24: No class, turkeys.

December 1: Paper presentations (schedule to be determined)

- ✓ Peer review of research paper draft due Friday, December 3 at 5 pm

December 8: Paper presentations (schedule to be determined)

- ✓ Final research paper due Friday, December 10 at 5 pm

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 integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. As the instructor of record for this course, my role is to provide clear expectations and uphold them in all assessments. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and otherwise violate the [Code of Academic Integrity](#). If you have any questions about whether particular academic practices or resources are permitted, you should ask me for clarification. If you are reported for an academic integrity violation, you should contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about your rights and options in the process. Consequences can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the university and may include a transcript notation. For more information, please refer to the SRR website (<https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity>), email rights@gwu.edu, or call 202-994-6757.

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.