

Course Overview and Goals

This class focuses on local news in the United States. We will consider the importance of local media to American democracy; the content of local news; the current economic crisis in local journalism and how the internet has reshaped the market for local political news; how the decline of local news affects civic engagement; 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 suggest possible solutions.
- assess the extent to which local news affects citizen engagement with local 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 are two required books.

- Hindman, Matthew. 2018. *The Internet Trap: How the Digital Economy Builds Monopolies and Undermines Democracy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hopkins, Daniel J. 2018. *The Increasingly United States: How and Why American Political Behavior Nationalized*. Chicago: University of Chicago 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* blog about politics and political science of which I have been an editor and contributor for the last few years. 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.

Three Reaction Papers (10% each, 30% total)

Three 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.

February 14: Research paper topic memo (5%)

March 7: Literature review (5%)

March 28: Write-up of findings (5%)

April 11: Research paper draft (not graded)

April 18: Peer review (5%)

April 16 or 23: Presentation (5%)

April 25: 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.

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.

Course Schedule (Note: This is subject to change as we proceed through the semester)

January 15: Introduction

January 22: What Do Citizens Need from Local Media?

- Schudson, Michael. 2018. "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. Introduction.
- 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").
- Waldman, Steven and Charles Sennott. 2018. ["The Crisis in Local Journalism Has Become a Crisis of Democracy."](#) *Washington Post*.

January 29: What Do Citizens Get from Local Media?

- Graber, Doris A. and Johanna Dunaway. 2018. *Mass Media and American Politics, 10th Edition*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. Chapter 9 ("State and Local News").
- Hamilton, James H. 2004. *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. Chapter 5 ("What Is News on Local Television Stations and in Local Newspapers").
- Fowler, Erika Franklin, Kenneth M. Goldstein, Matthew Hale, and Martin Kaplan. 2007. "Does Local News Measure Up?" *Stanford Law and Policy Review* 18: 410-431.
- Gilliam, Franklin D. Jr. and Shanto Iyengar. 2000. "Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(3): 560-573.

February 5: Troubles in Local Media Land: How We Got to Where We Are

- Starr, Paul. 2011. [“An Unexpected Crisis: The News Media in Post-industrial Democracies.”](#) In John Lloyd and Janice Winter (eds.), *Media, Politics and the Public*. Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation. pp. 21-29.
- [Crazy/Genius: Who Killed Local News?](#) Listen to the first 11:30 of this podcast. (We’ll listen to the rest later in the semester.)
- Varian, Hal. 2013. [“The Economics of the Newspaper Business.”](#) Speech delivered at the awards ceremony for E Giornalism.
- Barthel, Michael. 2017. [“Despite Subscription Surges for Largest U.S. Newspapers, Circulation and Revenue Fall for Industry Overall.”](#) Pew Research Center, June 1.
- Shafer, Jack. 2016. [“Don’t Blame Craigslist for the Decline of Newspapers.”](#) *Politico Magazine*, December 13.

February 12: Research Paper Meetings

- Minkoff, pp. 1-5
- ✓ Research paper topic memo due Thursday, February 14 at 5 pm

February 19: The Political Economy of the Internet and the Trouble with Local News

- Hindman, Chs. 1-6

February 26: The Erosion of the Local News Environment

- Stites, Tom. 2018. [“About 1,300 U.S. Communities Have Totally Lost News Coverage, UNC News Desert Study Finds.”](#) Poynter, October 15.
- Grieco, Elizabeth, Nami Sumida, and Sophia Fedeli. 2018. [“About a Third of Large U.S. Newspapers Have Suffered Layoffs since 2017.”](#) Pew Research Center, July 23.
- Hayes, Danny and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2018. “News Hole: Measuring the Erosion of Local Political News.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, April 5-8.
- Peterson, Erik. 2019. [“Paper Cuts: How Reporting Resources Affect Political News Coverage.”](#) Working paper.
- Martin, Gregory J. and Josh McCrain. 2018. [“Local News and National Politics.”](#) *American Political Science Review*, forthcoming.

March 5: Local News and Civic Engagement

- Mitchell, Amy, Michael Barthel, Jesse Holcomb, and Jessica Mahone. 2016. [“Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits.”](#) Pew Research Center, November 3.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Chapter 13.

- Shaker, Lee. 2014. "Dead Newspapers and Citizens' Civic Engagement." *Political Communication* 31(1):131-48.
- Hayes, Danny and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2015. ["As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in U.S. House Elections."](#) *Journal of Politics* 77(2): 447-462.
- Minkoff, pp. 5-12
- ✓ Literature review due Thursday, March 7 at 5 pm

March 12: Spring break. Woooooooooooooooooooo!

March 19: The Nationalization of American Politics and the Role of the Media

- Hopkins, Chs. 1-4, 6, 8-9

March 26: Research Paper Meetings

- Minkoff, pp. 12-19
- ✓ Write-up of findings due Thursday, March 28 at 5 pm

April 2: Local News and Political Accountability

- Hamilton, James T. 2018. "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.
- Snyder, James M. and David Stromberg. 2010. "Press Coverage and Political Accountability." *Journal of Political Economy* 118(2): 355-408.
- Prior, Markus. 2006. "The Incumbent in the Living Room: The Rise of Television and the Incumbency Advantage in U.S. House Elections." *Journal of Politics* 68(3): 657-673.
- Starr, Paul. 2009. ["Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers \(Hello to a New Era of Corruption\)."](#) *The New Republic*, March 4.
- Baron, Zach. 2018. ["The Fresno Bee and the War on Local News."](#) *GQ*, December 19.

April 9: Can Local News Be Saved?

- ["Crazy/Genius: Who Killed Local News?"](#) The key material begins at the 11:30 mark of the podcast. (We listened to the first half earlier in the semester, so you may want to go back and refresh your memory.)
- Hindman, Chs. 7-8
- Hayes, Danny and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2018. "Taste for Local Politics and Attention to Local News." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA, August 30-September 2.
- ✓ Paper draft due Thursday, April 11 at 5 pm

April 16: Paper presentations (schedule to be determined)

- ✓ Peer review of research paper draft due Thursday, April 18 at 5 pm

April 23: Paper presentations (schedule to be determined)

- ✓ Final research paper due Thursday, April 25 at 5 pm