

# **POL 217 – Politics and the Mass Media**

Fall 2021

Kirby Hall 109 – W/F 9:00 – 10:15

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Office Hours: T 9:00 – 11:00 a.m., 12:00 –  
3:00 p.m.; By Appointment

## Course Description:

“Looking back we can see how indirectly we know the environment in which nevertheless we live. We can see that the news of it comes to us now fast, now slowly; but that whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself.” – Walter Lippmann in *Public Opinion* (1922)

For many of us, very little of what we come to know of politics is experienced directly. We generally do not bear in-person witness to the signing of legislation, attend every candidate’s campaign events, or sit in on tense diplomatic negotiations. Instead, we learn about politics through an indirect process. Much of that indirect process is overseen by the media. This class is dedicated to the in-depth study of how this media-oriented process works.

## Course Goals: By the end of the semester, students should...

- Understand the media’s place in America’s political system.
- Be able to articulate a nuanced evaluation and critique of the media’s performance in the maintenance of American democracy.
- Understand how the mass media has changed over time and be prepared to critically evaluate commentaries on how it will evolve in the future.
- Understand how political actors and media attempt to influence each other.
- Understand how the media affects mass opinion and political behavior.
- Have reflected on their own media diet and be an introspective, critical, and considerate news consumer.
- Developed a level of familiarity with the empirical study of mass media and political communication.
- Have improved as critical writers.
- Have improved as advocates for their logic-based, critical, respectful arguments.

These goals are ambitious but eminently achievable. Accomplishing these goals will require the professor and each student to buy in to a collective learning enterprise. You should expect me to come to class prepared to explain core concepts and ready to moderate a discussion of the most intellectually contentious and intriguing aspects of those concepts. Here is what I expect and need from you: I expect you to do the assigned readings before the associated class period. I expect you to keep up to date with the news and consider the connection between what we’re

discussing in class and the news you consume. I expect you to come to class ready to engage in a critical but respectful discussion. I expect you to take the assigned papers and projects seriously, give them your best effort, and turn in work you can be proud of.

I do *not* expect you to have mastered all of the materials and skills on Day 1. If it were that easy, there wouldn't be much of a point to having the class. If you find yourself struggling with a reading or assignment, please know that this is part of the educational journey. And it's a journey you do not undertake alone. Please seek out help from the resources available to you including your fellow students and the professor.

Reading Materials: There is one required textbook for this course: *Mass Media and American Politics* by Doris Graber and Johanna Dunaway, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition. Please get the 10<sup>th</sup> Edition as it is the most up-to-date with the rapidly evolving media ecosystem. All other readings will be posted on the course website.

Laptop Policy: The policy of the department of political science is that laptop computers only be used classrooms for note taking and other academic purposes as designated by the instructor. I will permit laptops on a contingency basis. I reserve the right to ban computer use in their courses should this policy be repeatedly violated.

Academic Integrity: Academic dishonesty constitutes attempting to pass off the work of others as your own without proper attribution. It is unacceptable in this course, just as it is unacceptable in life. If I find that you plagiarized, cheated, or were otherwise dishonest about your work on an assignment, you will automatically receive a 0. There will be no exceptions or excuses. Such situations not only go against my classroom policies but are also violations of the [Wake Forest Honor Code](#). As such, they will be referred to the Honors and Ethics Council. If you are unsure if you are providing proper attribution or have any other questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Accommodations: Wake Forest University provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you are in need of an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact me privately as early in the term as possible. Retroactive accommodations will not be provided. Students requiring accommodations must also consult the Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services (118 Reynolda Hall, 336-758-5929, lac.wfu.edu).

Assignments: Grades will be calculated as following:

- Response papers – 30%
- Media diaries – 20%
- Media and Politics Research Project – 40%
  - Research Question - 2%
  - Methodology – 8%
  - Preliminary Results Memo – 10%
  - Final Paper – 20%
- Participation – 10%

*Response Papers* – Students will turn in three response papers throughout the semester, each worth 10 percentage points of the final grade. Each paper will respond to a provided prompt. There are six total prompts from which to choose, each due on the listed date. Students can choose whichever three of the six prompts they would like. Papers should generally be 3-4 pages, double spaced. A primer with specific guidelines and a breakdown of grading procedures will be posted online.

- **Prompt 1** (Due Sept. 8): Most media outlets in America are for-profit enterprises. Increasingly, they are also corporately controlled. This is not necessarily the case in other countries. Elsewhere in the world, the government heavily subsidizes the cost of news production. Do you think American media would be better if shifted to such a publicly funded model?
- **Prompt 2** (Due Oct. 6): If the president requests a press event so as to speak to the American people, should the media be obligated to carry their message live and unfiltered? Is there any information or other concessions the media should demand before agreeing to carry an event? Are there any negative consequences of your answer? How significant are those consequences?
- **Prompt 3** (Due Oct. 15): Imagine that you are participating in the leadership of a college chapter of a social movement on an issue of your choosing. Produce a memo summarizing your recommendations, with specific examples where applicable, of how your movement can attract media attention to broaden support for your cause or achieve other goals. Be specific as to why these recommendations will work for your movement.
- **Prompt 4** (Due Oct. 22): Normative theories of democracy often posit a public that, if not “fully informed,” is at least rationally able to appraise their own interests, attitudes, and opinions and make political choices accordingly. Given what the agenda-setting and priming literatures say about how people respond to media coverage, do you think such assumptions are reasonable? Do you think that a public that has its agenda set/is primed by the media is capable of carrying out its democratic duty?
- **Prompt 5** (Due Nov. 5): How significant a problem do you think misinformation is to American politics? Who do you think is most responsible

for mitigating the harm of misinformation? What would you recommend they do?

- **Prompt 6** (Due Nov. 17): In the 1950s-1960s, a time that we now recognize as a nadir of party polarization in American history, political scientists bemoaned that it was hard for voters to identify what made the two parties different. The resurgence of partisan media makes it much easier for individuals to tell what the Democratic and Republican parties stand for. Do you think this has helped the performance of American democracy?

*Media Diaries* – At four points throughout the semester, students will record what media they consumed in a day, what the content of that media was, and how they learned from/reacted to/thought about that media content. More detailed explanations of each of the media diaries and templates are posted on the course site along with the assignments.

*Media and Politics Research Project* - Students, either by themselves or in a group of no larger than four, will identify a political topic on which they would like to study the role of the media. They will identify a research question about the intersection of media and their political topic. They will identify a methodological approach to answering this question. They will then apply this methodological approach to study their topic and answer this question. Students will then write a research paper (~6-8 pages) based on these results. A more detailed primer on this project is posted on the course site and I will discuss this at greater length in class. All students in a group will get equal grades on each element of the project unless an inequality in workload and contributions has been registered and verified.

*Participation* – Students are expected to be active participants in their learning. Participation will be holistically and subjectively assessed based on the frequency and quality of contributions to class discussion. Attendance is part of participation as if you are not there, you necessarily cannot participate.

Grades: Letter grades will be assigned based on the following:

<i>Letter grade</i>	<i>Percent grade</i>
A	93.5 or greater
A-	89.5 – 93.49
B+	86.5 – 89.49
B	83.5 – 86.49
B-	79.5 – 83.49
C+	76.5 – 79.49
C	73.5 – 76.49
C-	69.5 – 73.49
D+	66.5 – 69.49
D	59.5 – 66.49
F	59.49 or below

Course Schedule: I reserve the right to modify the course schedule and/or readings as needed. Modifications will be announced in class and via email.

Topic	Key Questions	Required Readings	Recommended Readings	Assignments
Aug. 25: Syllabus Day	*Why does the media matter?	1) The syllabus 2) Lippmann – <i>Public Opinion</i> , chapter 1 3) Bennett – <i>News: The Politics of Illusion</i> , pgs. 24-27		Politics and Media Survey
Aug. 27: A Brief History of America’s Mass Media	*How has the media changed over time?	1) Parkinson – “Print, the Press, and the American Revolution” 2) Belt – “The First Amendment in the Colonial Press” 3) Schudson – <i>The Sociology of News</i> , pgs. 64-82	1) Schudson – <i>Discovering the News</i> , chapters 1 and 3 2) <a href="#">Jefferson’s Evolution on the Press</a>	
Sept. 1: The Modern, Professional Journalist	*What is a modern journalist’s job like?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 282-286 2) Weaver, Willnat, & Wilhoit – “The American Journalist in the Digital Age” 3) ASNE Statement of Principles	1) Usher & Ng – “Shared Knowledge and ‘Microbubbles’” 2) <a href="#">Expanding News Deserts</a>	Brainstorm potential project topics
Sept. 3: Gatekeeping and Norms	*Whose decisions make the news? *What norms guide newsmaking?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 158-167 2) White – “The ‘Gate Keeper’” 3) Schudson – “The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism” 4) Usher – <i>Making News at The New York Times</i> , Introduction	1) Cook – “The News Media as a Political Institution” 2) Harcup & O’Neal – “What is News (Again)?” 3) Shoemaker et al. – “Individual and Routine Forces in Gatekeeping” 4) Scott – “Courting Coverage”	Media Diary #1 Due
Sept. 8: Journalism as a Moneymaker	*How does the profit incentive affect news production?	1) Hamilton – <i>All the News that’s Fit to Sell</i> , pgs. 7-24 & chapter 5	1) Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn – “Consumer Demand for Election News”	Prompt 1 Response Papers Due
Sept. 10: Digitalization and Nationalization	*How have changes in audience preferences affected news production?	1) Hopkins – <i>The Increasingly United States</i> , chapter 9 2) Hindman – <i>The Internet Trap</i> , chapter 6	1) Darr, Hitt, & Dunaway – <i>Home Style Opinion</i> , chapter 2 2) Hindman – <i>The Internet Trap</i> , chapter 7	Project Research Questions Due
Sept. 15: Media Ownership	*Do the owners of news outlets influence the news product?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 26-42 2) Gilens & Hertzman – “Corporate Ownership and News Bias”	1) Tift & Jones – <i>The Trust</i> , Introduction 2) Dunaway – “Markets, Ownership, and the Quality of Campaign News Coverage”	Media Diary #2 Due
Sept. 17: Media and the Law	*How does the First Amendment affect news production?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 60-97 & 478-483 2) FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 (Skim)	1) <i>Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo</i> 2) <i>New York Times Co. v. United States</i>	

	*How does public policy affect news production?			
Sept. 22: Partisan Media Bias	*Are the media biased against Republicans?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 440-445 2) Grossman – “Media Bias (Real and Perceived) and the Rise of Partisan Media” 3) Budak, Goel, & Rao – “Fair and Balanced?” 4) Perloff – “A Three-Decade Retrospective on the Hostile Media Effect”	1) Patterson & Donsbach – “News Decisions” 2) Niven – “A Fair Test of Media Bias” 3) Groseclose & Milyo – “A Measure of Media Bias” 4) Padgett, Dunaway, & Darr – “As Seen on TV”	Media Diary #3 Due
Sept. 24: Media Bias against Historically Marginalized Social Groups	*Are the media biased against historically marginalized social groups?	1) Gilens – <i>Why Americans Hate Welfare</i> , chapter 5 (Skim chapter 6) 2) Hayes & Lawless – <i>Women on the Run</i> , chapter 4	1) Capuzzo – “US News Coverage of Transgender Lives”	
Sept. 29 and Oct. 1	No Class Sessions; Meet with group members and work on methodology			
Oct. 6: Media and the Presidency	*How do the media use presidents? How do presidents use the media?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 225-252 2) Kernell – <i>Going Public</i> , chapter 3 3) Scacco & Coe – <i>The Ubiquitous Presidency</i> , pgs. 23-36	1) Baum & Kernell – “Has Cable Ended the Golden Age of Presidential Television” 2) Laracey – “The Presidential Newspaper” [in <i>Speaking to the People</i> ]	Project Methodologies Due  Prompt 2 Response Papers Due
Oct. 8	No Class Session. Fall Break			
Oct. 13: Media and Congress	*How do the media use Congress? *How does Congress use the media?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 257-268 2) Sellers & Schaffner – “Winning Coverage in the U.S. Senate” 3) Grimmer – <i>Representational Style in Congress</i> , chapter 8.3	1) Schaffner & Sellers – “The Structural Determinants of Local Congressional News Coverage”	
Oct. 15: Media and Social Movements	*How do the media use social movements? *How do social movements use the media?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 212-214 2) Kilgo & Harlow – “Protests, Media Coverage, and a Hierarchy of Social Struggle” 3) <a href="#">Politics in Question podcast with Omar Wasow</a>	1) Wasow – “Agenda Seeding” 2) Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong – “Adherence to the Protest Paradigm” 3) Edgerly, Toft, & Veden – “Social Movements, Political Goals, and the May 1 Marches”	Prompt 3 Response Papers Due
Oct. 20: Media Effects	*Do the media tell us what to think?	1) Arceneaux & Johnson – <i>Changing Minds or Changing Channels</i> , pgs. 16-25 2) Klapper – <i>The Effects of Mass Communication</i> , chapter 4	1) Schudson – <i>The Sociology of News</i> , pgs. 8-25	

Oct. 22: Agenda Setting and Priming	*Do the media tell us what to think about?	1) Iyengar – <i>Media Politics</i> , pgs. 251-266 2) McCombs & Shaw – “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media” 3) Iyengar & Kinder – <i>News The Matters</i> , chapters 7-8	1) King, Schneer, & White – “How the News Media Activate Public Expression and Influence National Agendas” 2) Feezell – “Agenda Setting through Social Media”	Prompt 4 Response Papers Due
Oct. 27: Framing	*Do the media tell us how to think about what we think about?	1) Iyengar – <i>Media Politics</i> , pgs. 267-273 2) Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley – “Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance” 3) Druckman – “The Implications of Framing Effects for Citizen Competence”	1) Chong & Druckman – “Framing Theory” 2) Druckman & Nelson – “Framing and Deliberation”	
Oct. 29: Motivated Reasoning	*Are we cognitively biased processors of the information we see?	1) Taber & Lodge – “Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs” 2) Arceneaux & Vander Wielen – <i>Taming Intuition</i> , chapter 5	1) Zaller – <i>The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion</i> , chapters 1-2 2) Soroka – <i>Negativity in Democratic Politics</i> , chapter 6	Preliminary Results Memo Due
Nov. 3: Selective Exposure	*Do we just want to hear that we were right all along?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 352-356 2) Stroud – “Media Use and Political Predispositions” 3) Garrett – “Echo Chambers Online?” 4) Krupnikov & Ryan – “ <a href="#">The Real Divide in America is Between Political Junkies and Everyone Else</a> ”	1) Garrett – “Politically Motivated Reinforcement Seeking” 2) Bennett & Iyengar – “A New Era of Minimal Effects?”	
Nov. 5: Misinformation I	*Why does misinformation spread?	1) Flynn, Nyhan, & Reifler – “The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions” 2) Uscinski & Parent – <i>American Conspiracy Theories</i> , chapter 5 3) Nyhan – “Why the ‘Death Panel’ Myth Wouldn’t Die”	1) Bode et al. – <i>Words That Matter</i> , chapter 8	Prompt 5 Response Papers Due
Nov. 10: Misinformation II	*What can we do to stop the spread of misinformation?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 199-200 2) Nyhan – “ <a href="#">Fact-Checking Can Change Views? We Rate That as Mostly True</a> ” 3) Nyhan & Reifler – “When Corrections Fail” 4) Guess et al. – “A Digital Media Literacy Intervention Increases Discernment between Mainstream and False News in the United States and India”	1) Lewandowsky et al. – “Misinformation and Its Correction” 2) Uscinski & Parent – <i>American Conspiracy Theories</i> , pgs. 36-53 & 159-162 3) Nyhan & Reifler – “Misinformation and Fact-checking” 4) Tenove – “Protecting Democracy from Disinformation” 5) Vrage et al. – “Theorizing News Literacy Behaviors”	

Nov. 12: The Rise of Cable News	*How has the proliferation of cable channels affected news consumers?	1) Prior – “News vs. Entertainment” 2) Baum – “Talking the Vote”	1) Young – “ <a href="#">Lighten Up</a> ” 2) Mutz – <i>In-Your-Face Politics</i> , chapter 4	
Nov. 17: Partisan News	*How has the return of a robust partisan media affected news consumers?	1) Levendusky – <i>How Partisan Media Polarize America</i> , chapter 4 2) Arceneaux & Johnson – <i>Changing Minds or Changing Channels</i> , chapter 4	1) Young – <i>Irony and Outrage</i> , chapter 6	Prompt 6 Response Papers Due
Nov. 19: The Internet and Mobile News	*How has the proliferation of the Internet affected news consumers?	1) Graber & Dunaway textbook, pgs. 113-117 & 467-478 2) Jungherr, Rivero, & Gayo-Avello – <i>Retooling Politics</i> , chapter 1 3) Dunaway et al. – “News Attention in a Mobile Era”	1) Todd & Kalogeropoulos – “All the News That’s Fit to Ignore”	
Nov. 24 and Nov. 26	No Class Sessions, Thanksgiving Break			
Dec. 1: Social Media	*How does social media affect news consumers?	1) Kraft et al. – “Social Media and the Changing Information Environment” 2) Li – “ <a href="#">Raised on the Internet: How News Conscious is Gen Z?</a> ” 3) Bond et al. – “A 61-million-person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization”	1) Settle – <i>Frenemies</i> , chapter 4 2) Coppock, Guess, & Ternovski – “When Treatments are Tweets”	Media Diary #4 Due
Dec. 3: Course Wrap-up	*What have we learned? *Where do we go from here?	No reading, come prepared to talk about your projects		Final Papers Due