

Media in Politics
PSC 321
Spring 2009

Professor Richard Davis

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Office Hours: Tuesdays/Thursdays – 12:30-2 pm
754 SWKT, x2-7503

Description of Course

The mass media's power in American politics has been one of the most debated topics in political discussion. This course is an effort to systematically analyze the media's relationship with political institutions and organizations, policies, and the public.

In this course, we will analyze the basis for the media's power. We will discuss the historical relationship between the press and political institutions and processes, the news gathering process, the role of the news media in electoral campaigns, the legislative process, presidential decision making, and judicial behavior.

By the conclusion of this course, you should understand how the media's role in politics has evolved historically, what criteria the press uses for newsworthiness and how others attempt to use that criteria for their political ends, how the media in the United States compare with other nations, and to what extent the news media intersect with various aspects of American politics - campaigns and elections, the policymaking process, formation of political attitudes.

Instructor Expectations

1. Enrollment in this class implies a willingness to invest the effort needed to learn the subject and do well in the course.
2. Frequent usage will be made of the opportunity to interact with the professor in order to discuss research paper subjects, assignments, or the class topics generally.
3. Assignments must be completed on time. One letter grade is subtracted from the grade **for each day late**. No work will be accepted after the beginning of the final exam period.
4. Students will be expected to participate fully in the class discussion. That requires prior study of the assigned readings for the day.

Course Requirements

1. A term research paper of **15-20 pages** on a topic of your choosing, but approved by the professor in advance.(20 percent)

A three-page prospectus with a bibliography (at least 15 relevant academic sources) is due on May 6 by 5 p.m. One page should be a description of the paper. The second page should be an outline for the paper. The third page should include the bibliography. Do not count Internet sources or popular sources in your 15 relevant academic sources. They must

be scholarly books or journal articles.

The final paper will be due June 15 by 5 p.m.

The research paper should be an exhaustive undergraduate treatment of a topic related to the role of the media in American politics. The paper should prove a thesis or answer an empirical question. The thesis or question will be of your choosing and the process of choosing is critical to the development of analytical skills. Make sure the thesis or question is narrow enough to address in a paper of this length.

Some examples of theses:

Exposure to newspaper content increases the level of an individual's political knowledge more than does exposure to television news content.

Listening to a political talk radio program causes an individual's opinions to change in the direction of the talk radio host's opinions.

Empirical Questions:

How did journalists gain independence from politicians in the early 1800s?

How do the political attitudes of news media professionals differ from those of the general public?

If you decide to change the topic, alert me no later than May 14. Following that date, your chosen topic will be the topic of your paper. Do your research early in order to assure that you are not caught at the end with an unmanageable paper. This paper must be unique to this class, unless approved by the instructor in advance.

Some hints about grading:

1. The minimum page length is mandatory. I will not even read a paper of less than 15 pages. It will be returned with a grade of zero.

2. Please thoroughly proofread your written work. Spell checkers and grammatical programs make this task easy. If there are more than three mistakes of this character on a page, I will reduce the grade by one half letter grade (for example, A to A-) for each page.

3. Any information used from other sources must be fully cited, not just direct quotations. The paper should draw on at least 20 relevant academic sources. Again, these must be scholarly journal articles and books. In addition to that number, you may include other sources such as interviews, public opinion surveys, speeches, Congressional reports, etc. Popular sources such as newsmagazines and newspapers should be used only when no better source is available (for example to cite some very recent event). Avoid Internet sites.

2. Two midterm examinations in Testing Center - (20 percent each)

3. Final examination in Testing Center (20 percent)

4. Debate (10 percent)

Topics:

Online Political Discussion Degrades Political Discourse in the United States

The Private Lives of Public Officials or Candidates Should Not Be Reported by the Press Unless That Behavior is Illegal

During Wartime, News Media Coverage of U.S. Military or Foreign Policy Decisions or Actions Should Be Subject to Government Censorship

5. Class participation (10 percent)

Required Texts

Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 7th ed., CQ Press, 2006

Rozell, ed., *Media Power Media Politics*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2008

Subscription to New York Times or Washington Post

Readings and Discussion Topics

April 28 – Introduction; The Communications Revolution

April 30 - Historical Development: The 1700 and 1800s – Online readings, pp. 25-63; Historical Development: The 1900s – Online readings, pp. 64-86

May 5 - Global Perspective – Online readings, pp. 87-96; Regulating the Press – Graber, ch. 2, 3; The Media Culture – online readings, pp. 111-120.

May 6 - PROSPECTUS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

May 7 – New Media - Rozell, ch. 13; Debate: *Online Political Discussion Degrades Political Discourse in the United States*

May 12 – First Midterm Exam

May 14 – Newsgathering and Newsmaking – Graber, ch. 4,5

May 19 - Effects on the Media Audience – Graber, ch. 7; Rozell, ch. 12; Media and Electoral Roles - Rozell, chp. 10

May 21 - Media and Political Campaigns – Graber, ch. 8; Rozell, chs 7 and 8; Debate: *The Private Lives of Public Officials or Candidates Should Not Be Reported by the Press Unless That Behavior is Illegal*

May 26 - The Presidency and the Press – Graber, ch. 9; Rozell, ch. 1; Covering Congress – Graber, ch. 9; Rozell, ch. 2

May 28 - Second Midterm Exam

June 2 -The Supreme Court in the News – Graber, ch. 10; Rozell, chs 3 and 4; Bureaucratic News - Rozell chp. 5

June 4 - Getting Publicity: Interest Groups - Rozell, chp. 9; The Policy Role of the Press – Graber, ch. 6

June 9 - Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy Coverage –Graber, ch. 11; Rozell, chp. 11; Debate: *During Wartime, News Media Coverage of U.S. Military or Foreign Policy Decisions or Actions Should Be Subject to Government Censorship*

June 11 – Final Exam

Plagiarism/Other Work

While all students sign the honor code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. See <http://www.byu.edu/honorcode> for specific examples of intentional, inadvertent plagiarism, and fabrication, falsification. Work for other courses will not be accepted for assignments in this course.

Sexual Harassment

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended

to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU's policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 378-2847.

People with Disabilities

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (378-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895, D-282 ASB.

