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 by September 15 in class. 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 as one of your 15 relevant academic sources. They must be scholarly books or journal articles.

The final paper will be due November 16 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:

Social media have caused greater inactivity between candidates and voters during electoral campaigns.

Exposure to a political talk radio program causes individual attitude change in the direction of the host’s ideological views.

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 November 1. 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. There is no excuse for these mistakes. 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, particularly wikipedia.

2. Two midterm examinations - (20 percent each)

3. A final examination (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
News Media Organizations Should be Prohibited from Broadcasting Election Night Results Before Polls are Closed in the Continental United States
News Media Organizations Should be Prohibited from Publicizing Classified Government Documents 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


Readings and Discussion Topics

August 30 – Introduction; The Communications Revolution
September 1 – Historical Development – Online Readings, pp. 25-63, 64-86
September 6 – Global Perspective – Online Readings, pp. 87-96
September 8 - Regulating the Press – Graber, ch. 2,3
September 13 - The Media Culture – Online Readings, pp. 111-120
September 15 - New Media – Rozell, ch 13
September 20 - Debate: Online Political Discussion Degrades Political Discourse in the United States
September 22, 27 – Newsgathering – Graber, ch. 4
September 29 – Newsmaking – Graber, ch. 5
October 4 - First Midterm Exam
October 6 – Effects on the Media Audience – Graber, ch. 7; Rozell, ch. 12
October 11 - Media and Electoral Roles – Rozell, ch. 10
October 13 – *Debate: The Private Lives of Public Officials or Candidates Should Not Be Reported by the Press Unless that Behavior is Illegal*

October 18 – Media and Political Campaigns – Graber, ch. 8; Rozell, chs 7 and 8

October 20 – *Debate: News Media Organizations Should be Prohibited from Broadcasting Election Night Results Before Polls are Closed in the Continental United States*

October 25 – The Presidency and the Press - Graber, ch. 9; Rozell, ch. 1

October 27 – **Second Midterm Exam**

November 1 – Covering Congress – Graber, ch. 9; Rozell, ch. 2

November 3 - The Supreme Court in the News – Graber, ch. 10; Rozell, chs 3 and 4

November 8 - Bureaucratic News - Rozell chp. 5

November 10 – *Debate: News Media Organizations Should be Prohibited from Publicizing Classified Government Documents*

November 15 - Getting Publicity: Interest Groups - Rozell, chp. 9

November 17 - The Policy Role of the Press – Graber, ch. 6

November 29 - Foreign Affairs Coverage – Graber, ch. 11; Rozell, ch 11

December 1 – National Security Policy Coverage – Graber, ch. 11; Rozell, ch 11

December 6 – *Debate: During Wartime, News Media Coverage of U.S. Military or Foreign Policy Decisions or Actions Should Be Subject to Government Censorship*

December 8 - Conclusion

December 13 – **8 AM – Final Exam**

**Learning Outcomes**

Understand how the media's role in American politics has evolved over time.

Know what criteria the press uses for newsworthiness and how others attempt to use that criteria for their political ends.

Appreciate how the media/political system in the United States compares and contrasts with media/political systems in other nations.

Understand the legal structure of media regulation of the press.

Know how news media affect electoral campaigns.

Understand media role in shaping individual’s political attitudes and behavior.

See how the news media’s interact with institutions in order to shape public policy.

Appreciate the varying sides of current debates over the role of the news media.
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 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office. Information about that office is available at honorcode.byu.edu.

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 University Accessibility Center. They are located at 2170 WSC and their phone number is 422-2767. 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 422-5895, D-240C ASB.