Media in Politics
PSC 321
Winter 2012

Professor Richard Davis
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3-5 pm or by appointment
754 SWKT, 2-7503

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.

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

Course Requirements

1. A term research paper of at least **15 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 January 26 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 March 23 by 5 p.m.** in the Political Science Office (745 SWKT)

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 March 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:

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

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.

Make sure that you begin the paper with a brief introduction, an empirical thesis statement or question, a definition of terms used in the thesis or question, and an overview of the organization of the paper. End with a conclusion that sums up the findings of the paper and linking them back to the thesis. You should use sectional subheadings to divide the sections of the paper.

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 citing non-academic Internet sites, particularly wikipedia. If in doubt about the reliability of an Internet cite, ask.

2. Two midterm examinations - (20 percent each)

3. A final examination (20 percent)

4. Debate (10 percent)
   Topics:
   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 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

Graber, Mass Media and American Politics, 8th ed, CQ Press, 2009
Jones, Losing the News, Oxford University Press, 2011

I also urge you to read on a regular basis a national newspaper, such as the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, or the Washington Post.

Readings and Discussion Topics

January 5 – Introduction
January 10 – The State of the Media – Jones, entire
January 12, 17 – Historical Development – Online Readings, pp. 25-63, 64-86
January 19 – Global Perspective/Regulating the Press – Online Readings, pp. 87-96; Graber, ch. 2,3
January 24 - The Media Culture – Online Readings, pp. 111-120
January 26, 31 – NO CLASS (Workshop at Law School)
February 2 - New Media – Rozell, ch 13
February 7 – First Midterm Exam
February 9 - Newsgathering – Graber, ch. 4
February 14 - Newsmaking – Graber, ch. 5
February 16 – Effects on the Media Audience – Graber, ch. 7; Rozell, ch. 12
February 23 - Media and Electoral Roles – Rozell, ch. 10
February 28 – Debate: The Private Lives of Public Officials or Candidates Should Not Be Reported by the Press Unless that Behavior is Illegal
March 1 – Media and Political Campaigns – Graber, ch. 8; Rozell, chs 7 and 8
March 6 - Second Midterm Exam
March 8 - The Presidency and the Press - Graber, ch. 9; Rozell, ch. 1
March 13 - Covering Congress – Graber, ch. 9; Rozell, ch. 2
March 15 - The Supreme Court in the News – Graber, ch. 10; Rozell, chs 3 and 4
March 20 - Bureaucratic News - Rozell chp. 5
March 22 – Debate: News Media Organizations Should be Prohibited from Publicizing Classified Government Documents
March 27 - Getting Publicity: Interest Groups - Rozell, chp. 9
March 29 - The Policy Role of the Press – Graber, ch. 6
April 3 - Foreign Affairs Coverage/National Security Policy Coverage – Graber, ch. 11; Rozell, ch 11
April 5 – Debate: During Wartime, News Media Coverage of U.S. Military or Foreign Policy Decisions or Actions Should Be Subject to Government Censorship
April 10 - Conclusion
April 18 – **11 AM – Final Exam**