

POLS 3103: Mass Media
Fall 2020
TTh 11:30-12:45
Online Format

Instructor: Dr. Mel Atkinson
Email: MAtkinson@uncc.edu
Office Hours: TTh 2:00-3:00 pm & By Appointment
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Course Description

This course examines the role of the news media in the democratic system, the changing nature of that role over time, biases in news coverage, and the influence of media effects on public opinion. There is also a heavy emphasis on current events in this course. Students are expected to monitor the national political news throughout the semester and to find connections between the news and the course reading.

The course has four learning objectives:

- Students will understand the incentives and journalistic norms that shape public affairs reporting, including the influence of the profit motive and norms of newsworthiness on the selection of issues for coverage.
- Students will be able to articulate the role the news media play in a democratic system.
- Students will understand how the rise of new media has influenced mainstream news reporting. They will be able to reflect on the implications of these changes in the news media on citizen knowledge and public polarization.
- Students will be able to discuss different ways to define and measure news slant and media bias.
- Students will know the definition of issue framing and will be able to discuss how news frames influence mass public opinion.

Course Materials

Personal computer with camera and internet connection.

Rent *All The President's Men* (feature film) on Amazon or iTunes.

Buy a virtual cinema ticket for *A Thousand Cuts* (Documentary).

https://watch.eventive.org/athousandcuts?utm_content=athousandcutslaunch

Additional readings as assigned (posted on Canvas).

Expectations And Procedures

This syllabus contains the policies and expectations I have established for this course. Please read the entire syllabus carefully before continuing in this course. These policies and expectations are intended to create a productive learning atmosphere for all students. Unless you are prepared to abide by these policies and expectations, you risk losing the opportunity to participate further in the course.

The standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be announcement in class or by written or email notice or by changes to this syllabus posted on Canvas.

If I am late in arriving to class, you must wait a full 15 minutes after the start of class before you may leave without being counted absent, or you must follow any written instructions I may give you about my anticipated tardiness.

If you notice an error or problem with the syllabus it is your responsibility to bring it to my attention prior to the due date in question. Otherwise, I will expect you to meet all deadlines listed on the syllabus.

Getting in Touch

Because this course is 100% online, **I expect students to regularly check their uncc email and the course canvas page** for updates about the course.

Please email me rather than contacting me via canvas. I can reply to email messages from my phone, but I have to be on my computer to reply to canvas messages. Therefore, I'm much faster at responding to email. You can expect a response to an email within 24 hours if you email me during the work week. I am slower on weekends and holidays.

My office hours are a period of time when you can expect a rapid response. If you email during my office hours, you can expect to hear back during my office hours. If you'd like to chat during my office hours, just shoot me an email saying you need to talk or send me a zoom invitation. If I'm already chatting with another student, I'll let you know when I expect to be available to talk. And as always, if my office hours are not convenient for you, we can schedule another time to talk via email.

Ownership of Course Materials

My lectures and course materials, including presentations, tests, exams, quizzes, slides, and similar materials, are protected by copyright. I am the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials I

create. I encourage you to take notes and make copies of course materials for your own educational use. However, you may not, nor may you knowingly allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes, lecture recordings, quizzes or other course materials publicly without my express written consent. This includes providing materials to commercial course material suppliers such as CourseHero and other similar services. Students who publicly distribute or display or help others publicly distribute or display copies or modified copies of an instructor's course materials may be in violation of University Policy 406, The Code of Student Responsibility. Similarly, you own copyright in your original papers and exam essays. If I am interested in posting your answers or papers on the course web site, I will request your written permission.

Electronic video, image capture, and/or audio recording is not permitted during class, whether conducted in person or online, unless the student obtains permission from the instructor. If permission is granted, any distribution of the recording is prohibited. Students with specific electronic recording accommodations authorized by the Office of Disability Services do not require instructor permission; however, the instructor must be notified of any such accommodation prior to recording. Any distribution of such recordings is prohibited.

Disabilities

I am happy to make accommodations for students with disabilities who require them. Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should, 1) contact the UNCC Office of Disability Services and 2) follow the instructions of that office for obtaining accommodations. This should be done during the first week of school. Even if you aren't sure whether you will require any accommodation, contact the department of disability services and talk with me about your disability at the start of the semester. If the need for accommodation arises and your disability has not been documented, I might not be able help due to university policies regarding the exam schedule, etc.

Academic Honesty

All students are required to read and abide by the Code of Student Academic Integrity. Violations of the Code of Student Academic Integrity, including plagiarism, will result in disciplinary action as provided in the Code. Definitions and examples of plagiarism are set forth in the Code. The Code is available from the Dean of Students Office and online.

You may not give or receive any assistance while taking examinations or quizzes. Students should not work together on assignments unless group work is expressly permitted by the instructor. *All work handed in is expected to be your own.* Ideas and statements from reference materials (including, but not limited to books, articles, and web content) may not be included in student assignments unless they are properly cited. Violations of this policy will be taken very seriously and may result in the student receiving an "F" on the assignment, an "F" in the course, and/or the submission of a report to the Academic Integrity Board.

You can find a short, helpful tutorial on citations, plagiarism, and related topics here. Please make use of these resources and if you have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism, ask me BEFORE handing in the assignment. Information included by students in written course work that is based on a source such as a web site, news article, textbook, or any other material must be clearly and completely attributed to the original author. This applies whether or not the student quotes from the source material directly. Failure to do so is a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity.

Zoom Etiquette

Having a successful and productive experience in a synchronous online class requires all of us working together toward that goal. These basic points of etiquette are designed to help us do so. First, please mute yourself when not talking so that we don't hear each other's background noises. Second, try not to talk over others (which can be challenging). Physically raise your hand if you have your video on or use the chat feature to signal a comment or question. Third, I ask that the default setting for your camera be "on." I know this request can be controversial. Here's the reasoning behind it. When we meet, the goal is to have dialogue and discussion, not a one-way flow of information from me to you. To get the most out of this class, you and I need to interact with one another and you need to interact with your classmates as well. This is much harder to do when I can only see myself and you can't see your classmates. Taking a class in a void is simply not productive. So I'm asking that we all work toward the goal of having a productive experience by turning our cameras on.

I understand that not everyone has a dedicated workspace at home. I don't have one, myself. You might see laundry, my cat, or my three-year-old in the background on days that I am not in the office. If you would rather the class not see your work space, I encourage you to use a digital background. I've provided several on the canvas page, as well as instructions on how to use them. (And don't worry, you don't really need a green screen or amazing lighting for them to work.) But I also ask that we, as a class, form a "no judgement" zone. If you need to attend class from your bed, I'm glad to have you. No judgement. If you're having a bad hair day, it's nice to see your face. No judgement. As long as you are clothed and conscious, you're winning. Let's all welcome each other as we are, accepting that we are all doing our best, and work together to have a productive semester.

Technical Problems

All students enrolled in this course are expected to have access to a computer and an internet connection. Canvas does not always work well on phones and other mobile devices. I strongly caution you against completing graded assignments, quizzes, and exams on a mobile device.

Canvas has a build-in "help" feature that allows you to message with a technician, should you need tech support. This is a wonderful feature—please use it if you experience problems with canvas! If you experience a problem with canvas that their technicians cannot resolve for you in a timely manner, please contact me ASAP.

If you experience a technical problem in the middle of a timed assignment, please take a screenshot (if you are able) and send it to me along with a note explaining the technical problem and the assignment affected.

Please be aware that canvas creates a log of your activity on the site. It allows me to see what files and activities you have accessed and how you have progressed through them. If you report to me that you were unable to access an assignment or a portion of an assignment, it is easy for me to verify this information.

Late Work

If you are having difficulty completing an assignment, please talk to me before you miss a due date. It's always best to ask for an extension *before* your work is late. If you do not arrange an extension in advance and you do not have documentation of an unforeseeable emergency (such as emergency

caregiving responsibilities, housing or food insecurity, or a serious illness), you will lose half a letter grade for each day you are late handing in an assignment. This starts as soon as you miss the deadline, so make sure you hand things in on time.

Written Assignments

All written assignments should be typed and submitted as either a word doc or a PDF. It is the responsibility of each student to make sure they meet this requirement. If a file is submitted in another file format and the instructor is unable to open the document, the submission will be counted as late.

Course Requirements

Attendance 10%
Quizzes and Activities 10%
News Comparison Blog 20%
News Comparison Presentation 10%
Midterm Exam 25%
Final Exam 25%

Attendance

This course relies heavily on class discussion and in-class activities, which makes attendance vital to student success. For this reason, I will take attendance at the start of each class period. Students get two excused absences for the semester, after which I will deduct 5 points from your attendance grade for each class missed. (I will excuse additional absences in the case of emergencies or serious illness as long as documentation is provided). Students who come late, leave early, or do not participate in activities during the class period will lose partial credit for the day. The attendance category is worth 10% of your grade for the course.

In cases of absence due to pregnancy or parenting (pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from any of these conditions), students should contact the Title IX Office to obtain absence verification by completing the form at <http://bit.ly/332eaGd>.

Mental health concerns or stressful events may reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities or diminish academic performance. Services are available to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) website at <https://caps.uncc.edu/>.

Reading Quizzes and Homework Assignments

Throughout the semester, I will assign activities and quizzes designed to make sure you are keeping up with and understanding the assigned reading. These activities will include quizzes (both announced and unannounced), in-class activities, and short homework assignments designed to get you to apply concepts from the reading to the real world. Together, these quizzes and activities will make up 10% of your grade for the course.

News Comparison Blog and Presentation¹

Due Dates: Oct 16 and Nov 24. For this assignment, you will follow two contrasting news sources (from a list I will provide) over the course of the semester and create a blog that compares them. The goal is to provide insights into the characteristics of both sources AND to compare and contrast the news coverage provide by the different sources on the same days. The project requires you to draft an executive summary and to draft six blog posts—one for each day that you compare the two sources. At the end of the semester, you will give a five minute presentation that summarizes your findings. The blog is worth 20% of your grade in the course and the presentation is worth 10%.

Complete instructions for this activity are provided in a separate document.

Midterm and Final Exams

This course includes a midterm exam and a final exam. Each test is worth 25% of your grade in the course. The midterm exam will be held on Thurs, Oct 22 and the final exam will be given on the date assigned by the university.

Tentative Course Timeline

Students will be divided in to two sections and will typically meet for a zoom session once per week (on Tuesday or Thursday) to discuss all of the readings assigned for the week. However, on a few occasions we will meet as a whole class. The dates we will meet as a whole class are indicated on the schedule below.

Sept 8 & 10: Introduction (Entire class meets both days)

Graber and Dunaway, Ch 5: News-Making and News-Reporting Routines (read for Thursday)

In Class: Lippmann, Walter. 1965. [1922] *Public Opinion*. “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads.”

Sept 15 & 17: The Watergate Scandal (No zoom meeting this week)

Watch “All the President’s Men”

Read James Campbell, *Getting it Wrong*, Ch. 7, Watergate, pp. 119-129

Take *Getting it wrong* quiz

Take “All the president’s men” quiz

Sept 22 & 24: The role of the media in a democracy

Schudson, Michael. 2007. “The Concept of Politics in Contemporary U.S. Journalism”

Thomas Patterson, “The News Media: An Effective Political Actor?” *Political Communication*, Vol.14, No. 4, (October-December 1997)

¹Adapted from Travis Ridout’s Media and Politics Syllabus

Sept 29 & Oct 1: Fake News (No zoom meeting this week)

Ubarti, David. 2016. "The Real History of Fake News."

Herrman, John. 2016. "Inside Facebook's (Totally Insane, Unintentionally Gigantic, Hyperpartisan) Political-Media Machine." *New York Times*, August 24.

"Deep fake" video

Online content verification training.

Oct 6 & 8: The Changing Media Landscape

News Grazers (NG), Chs 1 & 2.

Oct 13 & 15

NG, Ch 3 & 4

News comparison project sites created and memo drafted by the end of this week (Friday Oct 16 at 5 pm).

Oct 20 & 22: Midterm (All students attend Tues review)

Midterm review session on Tues.

Midterm Exam administered on Thurs.

Oct 27 & 29: Partisan Media

Baum and Groeling, "New Media and the Polarization of American Political Discourse."

Reece Peck. 2019. *Fox Populism*. Pgs 55-99.

Nov 3 & 5: Media Bias. (Entire class meets Tues)

All student meet on Tuesday this week. No class meeting on Nov 5

Tim Groeling. 2013. "Media Bias by the Numbers: Challenges and Opportunities in the Empirical Study of Partisan News."

Entman, 2007. "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power."

Nov 10 & 12: Framing Civil Liberties

Nelson, Thomas E., Rosalee A. Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review* 91, 3 (Sept.): 567-583.

Danielle Kilgo, May 2020. "Riot or resistance? The way the media frames the unrest in Minneapolis will shape the public's view of protest."

Nov 17 & 19: Race, Class, Gender and the News

Travis Dixon and Daniel Linz "The Overrepresentation and Underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as Lawbreakers on Television News," *Journal of Communication*.

"Power Sources: On party, gender, race, and class, TV news looks to the most powerful groups."

<https://fair.org/extra/power-sources/>

Carlin and Winfrey. 2009. "Have you come a long way, baby?" *Communication Studies Journal*.

Nov 24: Blogs Due (No zoom meeting this week)

Blogs are due by 11:59 pm on Nov. 24

We will not meet on zoom, but you should watch “A Thousand Cuts” this week.

Dec 1 & 3 Presentations

Dec 8 & 10 Presentations

Dec 15: Wrap up and review (All students meet on Tues)