

POLS 4600: The Politics of Spin

Spring 2015

Time: 11-12:15

Room: Fretwell 406

Instructor: Dr. Mel Atkinson

Office: Fretwell 435E

Email: MAtkinson@uncc.edu

Office Hours: MW 3:15-4:15 & by appointment

Course Description

This class will focus on the process by which policies get framed, or defined in public discussion.¹ Framing is focusing attention on some elements of a complex public problem rather than others. Politicians constantly attempt to frame issues in ways that are advantageous to their side of the debate, and we often refer derisively to “spin” when we see this. But framing is inevitable. Furthermore, frames sometimes change over time. Smoking was once seen as glamorous and the tobacco industry was held up as one of the most powerful lobbies in American politics. Today you can’t smoke in most public places. So the course will focus on something you see around you every day, at least if you read the newspapers and pay attention to politics.

This course is both writing and oral communication intensive. These characteristics of the course determine a lot of the assignments. The class will, therefore, involve not just reading books and articles as you might in another course, but doing your own research project, handling statistical data, developing qualitative comparisons, drafting your final project in parts, getting feedback on them, presenting parts of them orally, and then incorporating feedback for the final project at the end of the semester. We will alternate between discussing reading assignments (on Mondays) and doing hands-on data-based assignments in the computer lab (on Wednesdays). You will also have important work to do outside of class throughout the semester. You can’t catch up in the last week of the semester if you get behind, so keep track of all the assignments and due dates listed in this syllabus and on moodle.

Over the course of the semester, I will help you design a research project where you trace the framing of a public policy in much the same way as some of the authors we read in class have done. Essentially this means that you: a) pick a topic of public policy that interests you; b) identify different ways that the issue can be framed; and c) use media sources to see how often the different frames associated with the issue have been mentioned over time. The minimum acceptable time period for study is 30 years, but longer is better. The *New York Times* is available as a searchable database back to the 1850s, so you are welcome to study historical periods if that interests you.

¹Portions of this syllabus come from Frank Baumgartner’s undergraduate syllabus on issue framing and have been reproduced here with his permission.

Assignments will include a number of short projects designed to push you along the way to completing an interesting and original research project. I will review and comment on your progress based on these papers. Your final paper should then incorporate my feedback. Your term paper will be more complete than these short assignments, will be double-spaced, will be 15-20 pages including the bibliography, will have 1-inch margins, and will use a 12 point font. You will also give two presentations based on your research, and one presentation based on outside reading. We will discuss the parameters for these presentations in class. I will give you some time to work on your presentations during a couple of lab sessions and will provide feedback to help you improve your presentation style over the course of the semester.

Course Reading

All assigned readings are journal articles and book chapters available from the library's online databases. See the course timeline for details.

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 by announcement in class or by written or email notice or by changes to this syllabus posted on Moodle.

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.

Attendance

This course is very demanding. For students to succeed, they will need to be present and to participate in the many in-class activities we will complete. For this reason, I will take roll in every class meeting. I will give you two absences for "free." After that, you will lose three points from your attendance grade for every class you miss. I also reserve the right to deduct points from the attendance grades of students who are disruptive, who come to class late or leave early, or who are present but do not complete the in-class activities.

Phones, Laptops, Recording Devices etc.

The use of laptops, cell phones, smart phones, or other mobile communication devices is disruptive, and is therefore prohibited during class. Please come to class prepared to take notes with a pencil or pen and paper. Recording devices of all kinds are also prohibited. You should not record our class meetings unless you have a documented disability that requires such an accommodation. See the “disabilities” section of the syllabus for more on that topic.

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 Services² 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. The Code is available from the Dean of Students Office and online.

Course Requirements

Presentations

Article Summary Presentation: 10%

Background Presentation: 10%

Final Paper Presentation: 15%

Elements of Final Paper

Keyword and Database Collection Memo: 5%

Topic Background Memo: 5%

Coding Procedures Section: 5%

Results Section: 5%

Final Paper: 25%

Attendance and Activities

Attendance and Activities: 10%

Pop Quizzes

Pop quizzes on assigned reading and student presentations: 10%

²Text that is underlined is hyperlinked. Mouse over the text and click to access the link.

Late Assignments

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Any late papers or assignments will be accepted but graded down by 10 points after the class when they are due, then 10 more points each 24 hours including weekends. If you are late with the assignment, email me the paper. If you know ahead of time you will miss an assignment for some good reason, contact me *before* the assignment is due, by email or in my office hours, and we may agree on an alternative, without any penalty. Similarly, if you have an illness or a university supported excuse then, make sure you provide me with documentation to support the excuse and you may be able to avoid a penalty. Just stay in touch.

Tentative Course Timeline

Readings and assignments are due on the dates listed

1/7

Using Lexis Nexis, Key Word Searches, I
Choosing a topic.

1/12

Chong, Dennis and James N. Druckman. 2007. "Framing Theory." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10: 103-26.

1/14

Computer Lab: Lexis Nexis and Key Words, II
Atkinson, Mary Layton, John Lovett and Frank R. Baumgartner. (2014) "Measuring The Media Agenda," *Political Communication* 31(2): 355-380.

1/19

MLK Day—No Class

Changing Frames Over Time

1/21

Computer Lab: Creating an Access Dataset, I
Rose, Max, and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2013. "Framing the Poor: Media Coverage and US Poverty Policy, 1960-2008." *Policy Studies Journal*, 41(1): 22-53.

Max Rose started this paper as an undergraduate student for a class like this one.

1/26

Kellstedt, Paul M. 2000. "Media Framing and the Dynamics of Racial Policy Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 44(2):245-260.

1/28

Creating an Access Dataset, II

Data collection must be complete today. Bring the dataset to class (no exceptions). Turn in a memo discussing: the keywords you generated, the database you created, and the amount of attention your issue has received over time.

2/2

Baumgartner, DeBoef and Boydston. 2008. *The Decline of the Death Penalty and the Discovery of Innocence*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 4 & 8. (ebook link on Moodle)

2/4

Computer Lab: Applying the codebook, I
Read the Codebook (on moodle) *before* coming to class.

Frames and Causal Attribution

2/9

Stone, Deborah A. 1989. "Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas." *Political Science Quarterly* 104(2): 281-300.

2/11

Computer Lab: Applying the codebook, II

2/16

Background Presentations **Background and Lit Review Section Due.**

2/18 Coding Your Own Data, I

2/23

Haider-Markel, D. P. a. M. R. J. (2001). "Gun policy, tragedy, and blame attribution: the conditional influence of issue frames." *Journal of Politics* 63: 520-543.

2/25

Coding Your Own Data, II

3/2 & 3/4

Spring Break–No Class

Measuring and Understanding Framing Effects

3/9

Nelson, T. E., Z. M. O. and R. A. C. (1997). "Toward a psychology of framing effects." *Political Behavior* 19: 221-246.

3/11

Coding Your Own Data, III
Coding and Methods Section Due.

3/16

Zaller, J. a. S. F. (1992). "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579-616.

3/18

Coding Your Own Data, IV

3/23

Kinder, D. R. and L. M. S. (1990). "Mimicking political debate with survey questions: the case of white opinion on affirmative action for blacks." *Social Cognition* 8: 73-103.

3/25

Analyzing Your Data, I

3/30

Druckman, James N. 2001. "On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who Can Frame?" *Journal of Politics* 63(4): 104166.

4/1

Analyzing Your Data, II

Frames in the News

4/6

Entman, R. M. (2007). "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power." *Journal of Communication* 57: 163-173.

4/8

Computer Lab: Final Presentation Prep

Findings Section Due

4/13

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.

4/15

Computer Lab: Open Swim

4/20

Miller, J. M. and J. A. K. (2000). "News media impact on the ingredients of presidential evaluations: Politically knowledgeable citizens are guided by trusted sources." *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (2): 295-309.

4/22

Final Presentations

4/27

Final Presentations

Final Papers Due Monday, May 4 at 11 am