

PS129: MASS MEDIA & POLITICS

PURPOSE OF COURSE

This course examines the ways in which news and popular media constitute a major American institution by influencing public attitudes and government outcomes. We will assess the relationship between the media and government actors, particularly in the context of the 2016 Presidential election. We will also explore how mass media shapes public knowledge, opinions and feelings about a wide range of social and political issues. Some key concepts to be defined and analyzed include:

- The role of news media in *agenda setting*
- The rise and consequences of *horse race* election coverage
- Various forms of *bias* and how they affect media coverage
- Implications of *media conglomeration* for quality of news coverage
- Rise of *new media* and *fake news* and the impact on public knowledge and attitudes

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will feature a mix of lecture, small and large group discussion, in-class written exercises, and viewing of media clips. Students are expected to be **active participants** in both small and large group discussions. Because this class depends on active attentiveness and participation from all, **no use of laptops will be permitted during class sessions.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and participation (15%)
In-class written exercises (10%)
Media Consumption Journaling Project (20%)
Making Fake News Project (25%)
Focus Group Project (30%)

All written assignments completed outside of class will be submitted to the course via Canvass. Further assignment details and scoring guides will be available on the course Canvass page

Attendance and participation

Full participation points will be awarded only to students who attend all classes AND are active participants in both small and large group discussion. You are allowed ONE unexcused absence that will not affect your score. BUT, you are NOT able to make up any in-class exercises on the day that you missed with an unexcused absence. In sum, attendance can be very important to your grade. Absences will only be excused if they're cleared with me BEFORE the class session you miss. Email me if you anticipate missing a class for a valid reason (*no later than* the morning of class, and *no earlier than* a week before the session), and I will respond to confirm whether or not the absence is excused. If you have an excused absence on a day during which an in-class exercise is assigned, you will have a chance to complete it for full credit.

Attendance will be taken via a sign-in sheet distributed at the beginning of each class session. You can sign the sheet if you arrive to class late. But it is **your sole responsibility** to track down the sheet and sign it before you leave the class that day. I will not respond to requests to be marked as present because you attended class but neglected to sign the sheet. Attendance will begin counting toward your grade during Week 3, after the add/drop period ends.

In-class written exercises

Regularly in class I will provide written exercises to be completed either individually or in groups. I will collect these assignments at the end of class, and points will be distributed for completion. I will not announce these assignments ahead of time. And again, there is no way to make up an in-class exercise if you have an unexcused absence on the day it is given.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION JOURNALING PROJECT

For this project, you will take detailed note of all of the news you consume over a 48 hour period. For each news piece, you will record information such as: *format* (i.e. TV, web, podcast, etc.), *source* (i.e. CNN, Wall Street Journal, "Daily Show," etc.), *length of time* spent viewing/reading/listening to the piece, *author(s)* of the piece, and *topic(s)* covered in the piece.

In addition to this record-keeping, you must answer a series of questions about your news consumption during this 48 hour time period. The questions cover elements such as the reasons behind your consumption choices, and the effects of your news consumption on your knowledge and attitudes.

DUE DATE: FRIDAY OCT 26 (WEEK 4), BY 6:00 PM

CREATING FAKE NEWS PROJECT

For this project, you must conduct some research on how "fake news" is created and disseminated. Based on this research, you will create your own fake news story. You will create every element, from the headline and author(s) to the purported news source, to the content and accompanying imagery of the article itself.

In addition to the story, you will answer a series of questions about the insights you've gained into the phenomenon of fake news. Such questions address why and how fake news has proliferated so rapidly in recent months, and whether you feel more equipped to identify and discard fake news as a result of this project.

DUE DATE: WEDNESDAY NOV 14 (WEEK 7), BY 6:00 PM

FOCUS GROUP PROJECT

For this final project, you must organize and conduct a focus group with 2-4 people in which you explore their exposure to various types of media, their political views and level of political knowledge, and their beliefs about the trustworthiness, accuracy and influence of mass media. This project will be carried out across multiple stages:

- **Stage 1:** Identifying 2-4 people who can all be present with you at the same time for about a 90-minute session.
- **Stage 2:** Creating and distributing to your focus group participants a survey gauging their media exposure, political knowledge, political views, etc. (participants must complete and return this survey to you *before* the focus group session)
- **Stage 3:** Conducting the focus group session, during which you present to the 2-4 participants a piece of news media (audio, print/internet, video, etc.) related to the 2018 midterm elections, and then interview them about their reactions to the piece, and their broader thoughts on the coverage of the election.

After conducting the session, you will submit a 6-8 page paper discussing what you learned about your focus group participants' perceptions on media and politics, and how this exercise illuminated key concepts from the course.

DUE DATE (PART 1—Identifying participants and draft of questionnaire): MONDAY NOV 5 (WEEK 6), BY 6:00 PM.

DUE DATE (PART 2—Final paper): FRIDAY DEC 7 (WEEK 10), BY 6:00 PM

GRADING SCALE

I use the following grading scale for assignments and final course scores. I will not accommodate any grading related requests after the deadline to send grades to the registrar, which is **Thursday Dec 20**.

A+ ≥	97.00	> A ≥	92.50	> A- ≥	90.00	
B+ ≥	87.00	> B ≥	82.50	> B- ≥	80.00	
C+ ≥	77.00	> C ≥	72.50	> C- ≥	70.00	
D+ ≥	67.00	> D ≥	62.50	> D- ≥	60.00	> F

READINGS

There is one required text for the course:

Doris Graber and Johanna Dunaway, *Mass Media and Politics*, 10th Ed.

All other assigned course readings will be available on the course MyEEE site. The three writing projects will all require you to draw heavily on the readings, so it is in your best interests to keep up.

CLASS POLICIES

I will always be available to you during my office hours. If, however, you cannot visit me during this time, do not hesitate to contact me to set up an appointment to meet me at a time that fits your schedule. I want to emphasize my availability to assist you in whatever way I can.

E-mail is a good way to contact me with quick questions. Please allow me 24 hours to respond to your e-mails. To ensure the message does not get lost in the sea of spam, begin the subject of your e-mail messages with “PS129.”

Students with disabilities who need accommodations are encouraged to contact me. The UCI Disability Services Center is available to accommodate students. You can learn more about programs and support by visiting the UCI Disability Services Center website at www.disability.uci.edu, by phone: 949-824-7494 and by TDD: 949-824-6272.

Policy on Plagiarism and Grade Grievances

There is a strictly enforced, zero-tolerance policy regarding both cheating and plagiarism. An overview and resources for UC Irvine’s policies related to academic honesty is located at: <http://honesty.uci.edu>

In the event that you disagree with a grade handed down on an assignment, you must follow a specific procedure to contest the grade. Within one week after the assignment is returned to you, you must provide me with a written explanation of why you believe your grade is incorrect. This explanation must cite relevant sources from the texts or lecture in support of your grievance. I will review your complaint and re-grade your assignment. Please be aware that the new grade may be lower than your original grade.

Expectations of Students	Expectations of Instructor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Arrive on time ● Be prepared to participate ● Respect others ● Give best effort on assignments ● Adhere to rules of academic integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Arrive on time ● Be prepared to facilitate ● Respect all students ● Make every effort to facilitate student’s learning ● Grade assignments objectively

If warranted, this syllabus is subject to change.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Oct 1-5) Setting the agenda: Introduction & overview of media functions

Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 1 & 5

Week 2 (Oct 8-12) Power to the press or the people? On rights and regulations of media, and the potency of information

Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 3

Derek Thompson (2/23/2018) “The Most Expensive Comment in Internet History?” *The Atlantic*

Week 3 (Oct 15-19) Watching the watchers: Structure, conflicts & biases of news making institutions

Graber & Dunaway Ch. 2

Ashley Lutz (6/14/2012) “These 6 Corporations Control 90% of the Media in America” *Business Insider*

Paul Farhi (4/27/2012) “How biased are the media, really?” *The Washington Post*

Week 4 (Oct 22-26) Media and meaning-making: Influence on public knowledge & attitudes

Graber & Dunaway, Chs. 11 & 13

Markus Prior (2005) “News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout” *American Journal of Political Science*

Denise Robbins (9/18/2015) “This New Study Shows How the Media Makes People Climate Change Cynics—And What They Can Do Differently” *Media Matters*

Week 5 (Oct 29-Nov 2) Brave new world: Implications of the “new media” landscape

Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 4 & 12 (*Consequences of Media Coverage*)

Lee Rainie, Aaron Smith, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry Brady, & Sidney Verba (10/19/2012). “Social Media and Political Engagement” *Pew Research Center*

Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow (2017) “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*

Carole Cadwalladr and Emma Graham-Harrison (March 17, 2018) “Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach” *The Guardian*

Matthew Jordan (Feb 1, 2018) “A century ago, progressives were the ones shouting ‘fake news’” *The Conversation*

(OPTIONAL) Nicholas Carr (9/2/2015) “How Social Media is Ruining Politics” *Politico*

(OPTIONAL) Jonathan S. Morris (2008). “*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and Audience Attitude Change During the 2004 Party Conventions” *Political Behavior*

Week 6 (Nov 5-9) Swinging the race: Impact of news election coverage

Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 12

NPR (6/24/2012) “Putting a Positive Spin on Negative Campaigning” *All Things Considered* [Transcript]

Michael W. Traugott (1992) "The Impact of Media Polls on the Public" *Media Polls in American Politics*, Eds. Thomas E. Mann & Gary R. Orren

David A. Graham (10/8/2015) "Political Polling's Unfavorables Are on the Rise" *The Atlantic*

Week 7 (Nov 12-16) Newsmakers or policymakers? Relations between media and government actors

Graber & Dunaway Ch. 6

Jackie Smith, John D. McCarthy, Clark McPhail, & Boguslaw Augustyn (2001) "From Protest to Agenda Building: Description Bias in Media Coverage of Protest Events in Washington D.C." *Social Forces*

Week 8 (Nov 19-21) News team assemble: Examining local news

Graber & Dunaway Ch. 9

Travis L. Dixon (2015). "Good Guys Are Still Always in White? Positive Change and Continued Misrepresentation of Race and Crime on Local Television News" *Communication Research*

Danny Hayes & Jennifer L. Lawless (2015) "As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections" *Journal of Politics*

NO CLASS NOV 23 DUE TO THANKSGIVING

Week 9 (Nov 26-30): Window into the world: News coverage of international affairs

Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 10

Richard Profozich, "Foreign News Coverage. How American Journalists Report the World and How They Report Us." *Global Media Journal*.

Week 10 (Dec 3-7) For your entertainment: The social & political influence of popular media

Erin Kearns & Joseph Young (12/12/2014) "Dramatic depictions of torture increase support for it" *The Washington Post*

AP (7/31/2017) "Diversity in Movies Largely Unchanged Despite Increased Awareness, Study Finds" *The Hollywood Reporter*

Sam Levin (Feb 9, 2018) "Gary Oldman, the Grammys and doubts over Hollywood's #MeToo commitment" *The Guardian*