

POLS 374: Media and U.S. Politics

Instructor: Dr. Giovanni D. Pleites-Hernandez (he/him) Semester: Spring 2022
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Office Hours: MW 9 - 10:30 a.m. | Th 11-12:30 p.m. Class: Tu/Th 1:20 – 3:00 p.m.
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Course Description

This course will examine the role of the media in American politics through an exploration of its history and development over time. It will also engage with the rise of social media and its impact on the behavior of the American people, governmental actors, and political institutions. Topics covered include media ownership, framing, agenda-setting, polarization, political movements, and bias, amongst others.

Course Structure

This class is structured as a hybrid course [*not* in the Zoom/in-person sense], where both lecture-based and instructor-led learning will take place. Though either of the two methods can take dominance at any part of the semester, it is the first part of the course where the traditional lecture-based teaching will take place. Most of our class sessions will be seminar-based where you will be expected to take a larger role in the classroom. This increased role in the classroom means more work outside of the classroom for you as a student. This includes reading the assigned materials, preparing notes based on those readings, and engaging in thoughtful discussion in the classroom. Though I am in charge of leading the seminar in those class periods, we cannot have a productive discussion in class unless you all thoroughly read and engage with the assigned readings. You should look at our class meetings as opportunities to showcase your thoughts and insights in addition to presenting questions for further thought and/or clarification.

Course-Specific Learning Objectives

After this class, students should be able to:

1. Describe how the media influence American politics and the American people.
2. Describe different methodologies used in the study of the media and politics in the discipline.
3. Critically engage with peer-refereed publications.
4. Demonstrate an awareness of current events (and public policy) and how they relate to the study of American politics.

Political Science (POLS) Student Learning Outcomes

POLS Outcome No. 1: Knowledge of the Field – Concepts and Theories

- Students learn the defining concepts and theories political scientists use to study and explain political phenomena in the discipline.

POLS Outcome No. 2: Writing – Academic Writing and Information Literacy

- Students learn to effectively use argument to communicate claims to know in academic writing appropriate for the discipline.

Departmental and University Requirements Met

POLS 374 contributes to the requirement of at least 20 (of the 34 required for the political science major) that have to come from the 300 to 400 level range. This course also contributes to the required 120 semester hours of credit required for receiving a baccalaureate degree.

Materials*

1. **Required:** *Mass Media and American Politics*. 10th Edition. Doris A. Graber and Johanna Dunaway. 2018. CQ Press. ISBN: 978-1506340234.
2. **Recommended:** Wall Street Journal online subscription (can be accessed and purchased through <https://r.wsj.com/PROFwezj>) and New York Times online subscription (complimentary access through the university can be accessed by going to accessnytimes.com and typing "Asheville." In order to receive free access, an official unca.edu email needs to be used for registration).

* Additional materials will be distributed in class, via e-mail, or posted on Moodle (<https://learnonline.unca.edu/>).

Required Instructional Technology

Familiarity with the Moodle learning management system.

Student Assessment and Evaluation Methods

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to: attend all class meetings, complete the assigned readings before class, and participate in class discussions. Together, **attendance (15%) and participation (15%)** will make up 30% of your overall course grade. *Individuals with more than 5 absences, unless cleared by the instructor, will receive a zero for attendance. Any individual with 9 (or more) absences, unless cleared by the instructor, will receive an F for the course.*

In addition to the assigned class readings, students are expected to read the news (*WSJ* recommended) daily and be up to date on current events, as doing so will directly impact their course grade. Simply showing up to class will not suffice. Students are expected to critically engage with the material and share their insights and opinions with the class.

Readings

A large part of your success in this course is directly related to you actively reading and engaging with the assigned readings. Some of the assigned readings will be challenging, both theoretically and methodologically, which is why I recommend that you don't wait until the last minute to look at them, as quick scans will not adequately prepare you for the in-class discussions we will have throughout the course of the semester.

As you read and prepare for the week, keep in mind that this course is partially structured as a reading seminar, which means that for any given chapter (or article) assigned, you are expected to be able to summarize and provide a critique for it. One way to help with doing so is by thinking of – and being able to provide a response for – each of the following questions:

1. What is the core question motivating this work?
2. What is the theory being developed in this piece?
3. What literature does this particular work speak to?

4. What are the theoretical expectations? Are they clearly linked to the theory?
5. How did the author(s) structure their study (i.e., research design, data collection, constructs used, etc.)?
6. What are the key findings? What kind of support do they provide for the theory?
7. How might this work be improved?

You may find it useful to write out responses for these questions and any others that arise when you are reading the material, as they can be very useful for our discussions in class.

Critical Review

You are responsible for writing one critical review this semester. The purpose of this assignment is for you to engage with one of the week's* readings and critically evaluate the merits of that work (theoretical and/or methodological). These papers should be approximately three double-spaced pages (3 - 4 pages) in length and are expected to be well-organized, proof-read, and properly cited. Summaries should be kept to a minimum; the objective is to evaluate the reading, not to solely demonstrate that you have read the work.

For an idea of what a critical review is supposed to look like you can look at one of the major political science journals as they usually have them at the end of issues (e.g., The Journal of Politics). I will also post several examples on the Moodle course page. The critical review must be **submitted (via Moodle) by 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday** of that chosen week. For example, if you choose to submit a critical review for week 6, then you must submit it by Wednesday, February 16th, irrespective of whether you're covering the reading from Tuesday or Thursday in your paper. This assignment will be worth 10% of your overall course grade.

*You can choose the week and reading(s) that you are writing about in your paper. The readings from week 5 and on are all fair game.

Media Consumption Journal Assignment

For this project, you will take detailed notes of all of the news you consume over a 48-hour period.

For each news piece, you will record the following information:

1. format (e.g., newspaper, television, YouTube, podcast, radio, social media, etc.);
2. source (e.g., the Wall Street Journal, Fox News, The Hill, "Political Gabfest" Podcast, "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," etc.);
3. time spent consuming news piece;
4. author(s) of the news piece;
5. topic(s) covered in the piece; and
6. perceived relevance for the study of politics.

In addition to this record-keeping, you must answer a series of questions about your news consumption during this 48-hour period. The questions to be answered are as follow:

1. What do you think about news consumption in the last 48 hours, and what – if anything – did you learn about your consumption habits?

2. Why did you choose the news sources/formats covered in your log?
3. To what extent do you think that your choices in news sources (and medium[s]) affected the depth and quality of your news consumption?
4. How did the news you consumed over the last 48 hours impact your political attitudes on the issues of the day and/or political actors involved in the news cycle?

This is worth 15% of your overall grade and is due by **Wednesday, January 26th at 11:59 p.m. via Moodle.**

Research Question & Literature Review

The final project that we're working toward in this course is a research proposal. In order to make this project more manageable, it is broken down into different components throughout the course. The first part of this project requires you to choose a topic that you're interested in to help you start the process of developing a research question and literature review. A topic must be chosen and submitted (via Moodle) in writing by the end of Week 5 (i.e., **Friday, February 11th at 11:59 p.m.**). Once a topic is chosen, and a basic level of familiarity with the available work on said topic is grasped, it is time to develop a research question. The research question is an important next step because it is a guiding point for the project moving forward, one that can make it significantly easier to navigate the vast literature available on a given subject. Your research question is due by **Thursday, March 3rd at 11:59 p.m. via Moodle.** The last part of this section is the literature review. The literature review is where you demonstrate that you are familiar with the published work on your chosen topic of study. In addition, and arguably more importantly, it is where you situate your work relative to that which has already been published (i.e., what does my project contribute to what we know about the chosen topic/subject area?). This is also where you lay out your theoretical framework and expectations for the project. This review should help guide the construction of a testable hypothesis (or hypotheses). The completed literature review is due by **Thursday, April 7th at 11:59 p.m.** Here is a breakdown of the different components, their weights, and their respective due dates:

Topic – 5%: Due by Friday, February 11th at 11:59 p.m.

Research Question – 5%: Due by Thursday, March 3rd at 11:59 p.m.

Literature Review – 15%: Due by Thursday, April 7th at 11:59 p.m.

Research Proposal

In lieu of a final exam, you are tasked with writing a term paper. The expectation is that this paper sets the foundation for a future research project and/or for your senior thesis.

In order to receive full credit, your paper should have: 1) an introduction, 2) a literature review/theory section, 3) a hypothesis (or hypotheses), 4) a research design, and 5) a conclusion. The introduction should clearly state your research question and provide an overview of your paper. This first part is where you address the question of why your work is important. As with any other kind of writing, you want to engage with the reader and make your case as to why they should spend their time reading the rest of your work. The next section is the literature review (see section above), which is followed by the statement of a formal hypothesis. For this paper, you are not expected to actually conduct the analysis, but you are expected to describe how you would answer your research question (and test your hypothesis) and what you would expect to find based

on your review of the literature and hypothesis (or hypotheses). Finally, you are expected to discuss the implications of your work – why does this work matter.

Part of your grade (25% of the total 20%) for the term paper will come from an in class presentation given on either **Thursday, April 21st or Tuesday, April 26th in class**. This will be a short (7-10 minute) presentation where you give us an idea of what your paper is about, how it fits into prior scholarship, and what you would expect to find given your exploration of the literature.

This paper should be anywhere from 7 to 9 double-spaced pages in length (not including references or cover page) and include at least 10 scholarly sources. It is due by **Thursday, April 28th at 2:00 p.m. via Moodle**.

Examinations

There will be no exams in this course.

Extra Credit

One extra credit opportunity will be made available before the end of the semester. More information will be presented in class and/or Moodle.

Grading and Course Requirements

Your final grade will be determined by your performance on the abovementioned assignments. See the following grading scale and assignment breakdown:

Grading Scale				Grading Formula	
A	92 – 100	C	72 – 77	Attendance & Participation	30%
A-	90 – 91	C-	70 – 71	Critical Review	10%
B+	88 – 89	D+	68 – 69	Media Consumption Journal	15%
B	82 – 87	D	60 – 67	Research Question & Lit. Review	25%
B-	80 – 81	F	Below 60	Research Proposal (& Presentation)	20%
C+	78 - 79			Total	100%

Key Dates

Media Consumption Journal Write-Up: Wednesday, January 26th at 11:59 p.m.

Term Paper Topic: Friday, February 11th at 11:59 p.m.

Research Question: Thursday, March 3rd at 11:59 p.m.

Literature Review: Thursday, April 7th at 11:59 p.m.

Critical Review: Wednesday, April 13th at 11:59 p.m.

Research Proposal Presentations: Thursday, April 21st and Tuesday, April 26th

Research Proposal: Thursday, April 28th at 2:00 p.m.

Office Hours

You must make an appointment to meet with me by email. I have office hours Monday and Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and Thursdays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. In addition to these set hours, I am willing to work around your schedule whenever possible.

Technology

Computers and tablets are allowed in the classroom for note-taking and other class-related purposes. You are not allowed to use these devices for browsing the internet, social media, or checking email. Cell phones must be silenced and cannot be used in class at all. Failure to comply with these rules may result in a zero for both attendance and participation for the day. In addition, you may be asked to leave for the day.

Communication of Announcements

Announcements will be sent via e-mail to your official UNCA e-mail address and/or posted on Moodle. You are responsible for monitoring your school e-mail account and the course Moodle site (<https://learnonline.unca.edu/>) daily.

E-Mail

All emails sent to me must include the following: the student's name, course section number (i.e., POLS 374), a proper and formal greeting, a clear subject line about the purpose of the e-mail, and the actual request or question that prompted the email. You should expect a response within 72 hours. If you have not received a response within 72 hours, then please send me another email or talk to me in class.

The Writing Center

You are encouraged to visit the University Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.unca.edu/>) on campus for help with assignments for this and other courses. The center supports writers in one-on-one sessions lasting 10 to 45 minutes. Consultants can help writers organize ideas, document sources, and revise prose. If you visit the UWC, bring a copy of your assignment, any writing or notes you may have, and the sources you are working with. Make an appointment by visiting writingcenter.unca.edu and clicking on "Schedule an Appointment."

Academic Integrity

All rules concerning academic honesty as set out in the current edition of the university's academic catalog (<http://catalog.unca.edu/>) will be enforced. Particular attention should be paid to the policies regarding cheating and plagiarism.

Academic Alerts

Faculty at UNC Asheville are encouraged to use the university's [Academic Alert](#) (AA) system. The purpose of this system is to communicate with students about their progress in courses. Academic Alerts can reflect that a student's performance is satisfactory at the time the alert is submitted or they can indicate concerns (e.g., academic difficulty, attendance problems, or other concerns). Professors use the AA system because they are invested in student success and want to encourage open conversations about how students can improve their performance. When a faculty member submits an alert that expresses a concern, the student receives an email from Academic Advising notifying them of the alert and subsequent registration hold on their account. To clear the hold, the student must complete an online Response Form included in the alert e-mail. The student's responses will be shared with the instructor and advising staff. If a student receives three or more alerts, they will need to meet with an advisor by scheduling an appointment using the online appointment service at advising.unca.edu and select 'Academic Alert Appointment' as the type of appointment. The professor may also request to meet with the student to discuss the alert. It is in the student's best interest to complete the alert process

quickly, as students who do so are more likely to earn credit for the course. Failure to complete the alert process means the student won't be able to register for the next semester's classes until they have submitted the required form and completed any requested meeting requirements. Questions about the alert system can be directed to Anne Marie Roberts (amrober1@unca.edu) in the [Academic Success Center](#).

Student Accommodations

UNCA values the diversity of our student body as a strength and a critical component of our dynamic community. Students with disabilities or temporary injuries/conditions may require accommodations due to barriers in the structure of facilities, course design, technology used for curricular purposes, or other campus resources.

Students who experience a barrier to full access to this class should let the professor know, and/or make an appointment to meet with the Office of Academic Accessibility as soon as possible. To make an appointment, call 828.232.5050; email academicaccess@unca.edu; use this link <https://uncaoaaintake.youcanbook.me/>; or drop by the Academic Accessibility Office, room 005 in the One Stop suite (lower level of Ramsey Library). Learn more about the process of registering, and the services available through the Office of Academic Accessibility here: <https://oaa.unca.edu/>.

While students may disclose disability at any point in the semester, students who receive Letters of Accommodation are strongly encouraged to request, obtain and present these to their professors as early in the semester as possible so that accommodations can be made in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to follow this process each semester.

Sexual Harassment and Misconduct

All members of the University community are expected to engage in conduct that contributes to the culture of integrity and honor upon which the University of North Carolina at Asheville is grounded. Acts of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking jeopardize the health and welfare of our campus community and the larger community as a whole and will not be tolerated. The University has established procedures for preventing and investigating allegations of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking that are compliant with Title IX federal regulations. To learn more about these procedures or to report an incident of sexual misconduct, go to <https://titleix.unca.edu/>. Students may also report incidents to an instructor, faculty or staff member, who are required by law to notify the Title IX Office.

Health and Wellness

UNCA offers resources for students who are coping with both physical and mental health issues. If you would benefit from assistance, please contact the Health and Counseling Center. Contact information can be found at <https://healthandcounseling.unca.edu/>.

Mask Policy and Social Distancing

The university has been very clear about how all individuals in our community at UNC Asheville are expected to behave during the semester (see here: <https://coronavirus.unca.edu/return-to-campus/community-expectations/>). I will not belabor those points made by the school here but

know that students (and faculty/staff) are expected to wear a face mask and maintain social distancing in our class meetings and other settings on campus. Failure to adhere to these guidelines may result in a student's grade being negatively affected and/or a referral for discipline from the university.

Alteration of this Syllabus

The instructor reserves the right to revise, alter, and/or amend this syllabus as necessary. Students will be notified by email and/or Moodle of any such revisions, alterations, and/or amendments.

Key Resources for Students

Coronavirus Information: <https://coronavirus.unca.edu/>

Political Science Department Website: <https://politicalscience.unca.edu/>

Academic Planning: <https://advising.unca.edu/>

Student Affairs: <https://studentaffairs.unca.edu/>

University Catalog: <http://catalog.unca.edu/>

Ramsey Library: <https://library.unca.edu/>

Career Center: <https://career.unca.edu/>

Schedule and Topics**

Week 1: Introduction to Course and Media Roles

January 11th (T): Course Introduction

January 13th (Th): The Role of the Media in American Politics

Assigned Reading: Chapters 1 and 3 in Graber and Dunaway

Week 2: Media Ownership and the Changing Media Landscape

January 18th (T):

Assigned Reading: Chapter 2 in Graber and Dunaway

January 20th (Th):

Assigned Reading: Chapters 4 and 5 in Graber and Dunaway

Week 3: Government and the Media

January 25th (T): The Presidency

Assigned Reading: Chapters 7 and 10 in Graber and Dunaway

January 27th (Th): Congress

Assigned Reading: Ch 8 (pp. 375-389) in Graber and Dunaway and

Barbera, Pablo, Andreu Casas, Jonathan Nagler, Patrick Egan, Richard Bonneau, John Jost, and Joshua Tucker. 2019. "Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting by Legislators and the Mass Public Using Social Media Data" *American Political Science Review* 113(4): 883 – 901.

Week 4: Government and the Media (cont.)

February 1st (T): Congress (cont.)

Assigned Reading: Dancey, Logan and Jasmine Masand. 2017. "Race and Representation on Twitter: Members of Congress' Responses to the Deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner" *Politics, Groups, and Identities*.

February 3rd (Th): The Supreme Court

Assigned Reading: Ch. 8 (pp. 390-399) and

Sill, Kaitlyn L., Emily T. Metzgar, and Stella M. Rouse. 2013. "Media Coverage of the U.S. Supreme Court: How Do Journalists Assess the Importance of Court Decisions?" *Political Communication* 30(1): 58-80.

Week 5: Agenda Setting and Priming

February 8th (T):

Assigned Reading: Iyengar, Shanto and Donald R. Kinder. 1987. Chapters 3 and 7 in *News That Matters*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL.

February 10th (Th):

Assigned Reading: Feezell, Jessica T. 2018. "Agenda Setting through Social Media: The Importance of Incidental News Exposure and Social Filtering in the Digital Era" *Political Research Quarterly* 71(2): 482-494.

Week 6: Framing

February 15th (T):

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

February 17th (Th):

Assigned Reading: Collingwood, Loren and Benjamin Gonzalez O'Brien. 2019. Chapters 2 and 3 in *Sanctuary Cities: The Politics of Refuge*. Oxford University Press. New York, NY. Note: Skim Chapter 2.

Week 7: Media Bias

February 22nd (T): Chapter 13 in Graber and Dunaway and

Hassell, Hans J.G., John B. Holbein, and Matthew R. Miles. 2020. "There is No Liberal Bias in Which News Stories Political Journalists Choose to Cover" *Science Advances* 6(14): 1-8.

February 24th (Th):

Assigned Reading: Hassell, Hans J.G., Matthew R. Miles, and Kevin Reuning. 2021. "Does the Ideology of the Newsroom Affect the Provision of Media Slant?" *Political Communication*.

Week 8: Political Polarization

March 1st (T):

Assigned Reading: Levendusky, Matthew and Neil Malhorta. 2016. "Does Media Coverage of Partisan Polarization Affect Political Attitudes?" *Political Communication* 33(2): 283-301.

March 3rd (Th):

Assigned Reading: Darr, Joshua P., Matthew P. Hitt, and Johanna L. Dunaway. 2018. "Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior" *Journal of Communication* 68(1): 1007-1028.

Week 9: Spring Break

March 7th – 11th: No Class

Week 10: Political Networks & Conversation

March 15th (T):

Assigned Reading: Druckman, James N., Matthew S. Levendusky, and Audrey McLain. 2018. "No Need to Watch: How the Effects of Partisan Media Can Spread via Interpersonal Discussions." *American Journal of Political Science* 62(1): 99-112.

March 17th (Th):

Assigned Reading: Bøggild, Troels, Lene Aarøe, and Michael Bang Petersen. 2021. "Citizens as Complicits: Distrust in Politicians and Biased Social Dissemination of Political Information." *American Political Science Review* 115(1): 269-285

Week 11: Misinformation & Fact-Checking

March 22nd (T):

Assigned Reading: Loomba, Sahil, Alexandre de Figueiredo, Simon J. Piatek, Kristen de Graaf, and Heidi J. Larson. 2021. "Measuring the Impact of COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation on Vaccination Intent in the UK and USA" *Nature Human Behaviour* 5(1): 337-348.

March 24th (Th):

Assigned Reading: Berlinski, Nicolas, Margaret Doyle, Andrew M. Guess, Gabrielle Levy, Benjamin Lyons, Jacob M. Montgomery, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2021. "The Effects of Unsubstantiated Claims of Voter Fraud on Confidence in Elections" *Journal of Experimental Political Science*: 1-16.

Week 12: Social Movements

March 29th (T):

Assigned Reading: Kim, Harris Hyun-soo and Chaeyoon Lim. 2020. "From Virtual Space to Public Space: The Role of Online Political Activism in Protest Participation During the Arab Spring" *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 60(6): 409 – 434.

March 31st (Th):

Assigned Reading: Tillery Jr., Alvin B. 2019. "What Kind of Movement is Black Lives Matter? The View from Twitter" *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 4(1): 297-323. and

Giorgi, Salvatore, Sharath Guntku, Muhammad Rahman, McKenzie Himelein-Wachowiak, Amy Kwarteng, and Brenda Curtis. 2020. "Twitter Corpus of the #BLACKLIVESMATTER Movement and Counter Protests: 2013 to 2020" 1-4.

Week 13: Scandals

April 5th (T):

Assigned Reading: Newmark, Adam J., Shannon K Vaughan, and Giovanny D. Pleites-Hernandez. 2019. "Surviving Political Scandals: Why Some Political Transgressions End Political Careers and Others Do Not" *Social Science Quarterly* 100(4): 1268 – 1283.

April 7th (Th): **Dr. Giovanny at Midwest Political Science Association Conference (No Class)**

Week 14: Elections and Campaigns

April 12th (T):

Assigned Reading: Chapter 12 in Graber and Dunaway

April 14th (Th):

Assigned Reading: T.B.D.

Week 15: Paper Presentations

April 19th (T): **Undergraduate Research Symposium (No Class)**

April 21st (Th): **Presentations (Day 1)**

Week 16: Paper Presentations

April 26th (T): **Presentations (Day 2)**

April 28th (Th): **Final Exam Period from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

*Reading(s) available online

**The topics, as displayed on this syllabus, serve as a general plan for the course. However, since not all classes move at the same pace, the instructor will adjust as is necessary. Irrespective of the changes in the material covered, the dates of exams and any other assignments will remain as they appear on this syllabus.