GOVT 412: Politics and the Mass Media

Fall 2017
George Mason University

Monday/Wednesday: 3-4:15
Innovation Hall 206

Professor Andrew Armstrong
Email: aarmstr8@gmu.edu
Tel: (908) 612.7741
Office Hours: Monday 1-2:30, or by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.

– President Thomas Jefferson

The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @CNN, @NBCNews and many more) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American people. SICK!

– President Donald Trump

The news media is a cornerstone of democratic theory. Political philosophers and early presidents alike believed that a free press was essential for a healthy public debate and effective policy. Yet between the Enlightenment of the 18th century and today journalism has lost some of its luster. Many in the public are deeply suspicious of the media’s ability to faithfully convey truth, and worry about its outsized influence on society.

With this tension between theory and practice as a backdrop, this course has three broad objectives. The first is to understand the theoretical role of media in the Marketplace of Ideas. The second is to assess how well journalism in practice lives up to its idealized role. This debate will cover many of the most contentious issues of recent years: the tension between education and infotainment, partisan news, “fake” content and “alternate facts,” and the media as a tool of disinformation and manipulation.

The final objective is to have fun. And lots of it. We are living in a golden age for media studies. Our conversation will reach from John Stewart (philosopher) to John Stewart (comic), and many others both serious and satirical along the way.
READINGS

There are no texts assigned for the course. All readings are hosted on BB or available online.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Course grades are based on six components:

- Attendance and participation  15%
- Twitter scofftolig  10%
- Reading prompts  20%
- Midterm exam  25%
- Final exam  30%

Attendance and Participation
Attendance and active participation is critical for this course. Just coming to class won’t cut it; I expect you to actively engage with the material and the discussion. This reflects a firm expectation that you have done the readings before each class.

That said, life happens. Everyone is allowed to miss two classes without negatively impacting your final grade. If you miss or expect to miss more than two classes, please contact me.

Twitter Scofftolig
By Wednesday 9/6 everyone must create a Twitter account—a anonymous/bogus handle is both acceptable and encouraged—devoted to this course. In addition to following your classmates, I will provide an initial list of 15 actual handles to follow, with others added on a rolling basis.

In addition, we will vote on a Twitter handle for the class itself. Students must bring a suggested handle to class on 9/6. The student whose handle is ultimately selected to represent the class will win a yuge prize.

Every week you must do two things on your Twitter account. First, you must mention the class handle in at least one post you create. Secondly, you must respond to at least one post created by a classmate. Each week’s post must be entered by midnight on Sunday.

Critical Reaction
Over the course of the semester you will write five critical reactions to the week’s readings. All the week’s readings are fair game. Each reaction should be approximately 2-3 double-spaced pages. A strong reaction will not simply summarize the readings, but critically assess the broader implications for the marketplace of ideas and democracy.

Each reaction must be submitted electronically through Blackboard, and are due by noon on Monday. Tardy submissions will lose 5 points for every day late.
Midterm/Final Exams
The exams include multiple choice, short answer, and long-form responses. If circumstances require a
day change for the midterm, it can only be moved later in the semester, never earlier.

The final exam is cumulative, but will focus primarily on readings from the second half of the semester.
A number of question on the final exam will be pulled directly from the midterm, so preparing for the
midterm will pay double dividends.

POLICIES

Be Respectful
Active participation is a major part of the course. While debate is encouraged where appropriate, in the
spirit of productive discussion it is vital to remain thoughtful and respectful.

No Electronics
No electronics of any kind—laptops, cell phones, recorders, surveillance drones, etc.—will be allowed
during class. Please silence your phone before class starts. If your phone rings during class I reserve the
right to answer it and tell jokes to whomever is calling.

Students With Disabilities
If you are a student with a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources.
Accommodations will be arranged in accordance with their policies.

Blackboard
Take a moment to familiarize yourself with the course's Blackboard page. Your grades will be posted on
BB. In addition, I will post lecture slides after each week, additional readings as noted on the syllabus,
and general content on an ongoing basis.

Academic Honesty
Integrity is integral GMU's academic and social culture. Cheating and other forms of academic will not
be tolerated, and suspected violations will be referred to the Honor Committee. Please refer to
Blackboard for additional information about the Honor Code. But, seriously folks, you’re all adults. Just
don’t cheat.

Late Assignments
Barring documentation of an emergency or prior notification, assignments will lose 5 points for each day
late.

Extra Credit
There will be several changes for extra credit throughout the semester. All opportunities will be
available to everyone. Details will be provided in class and on Blackboard. In fairness to fellow
students, absolutely no extra credit work will be assigned on an individual basis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Introduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 8/28</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 8/30</td>
<td>Kahneman &amp; Tversky 1973 - Prediction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julia Galef TED - Why You Think You're Right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NPR Hidden Brain Podcast, Episode 64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YouTube Art of the Problem: Conditional Probability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. The Marketplace of Ideas</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 9/4: No class. Wed 9/6</td>
<td>Inger 1984 - The Marketplace of Ideas</td>
<td>Create Twitter handle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mill 1859 - Liberty of Thought and Expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Portraying the Press</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reaction 1 due.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 9/11</td>
<td>Thrall 2005 - Competing Images of the Press</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 9/13</td>
<td>Herman &amp; Chomsky 1988 - A Propaganda Model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bennett 1990 - Theory of Press-State Relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Althaus et al. 1996 - Revisiting the Indexing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Agenda Setting &amp; Framing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reaction 2 due.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 9/18</td>
<td>McCombs &amp; Shaw 1972 - Agenda Setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 9/20</td>
<td>Scheufele1 &amp; Tewksbury 2007 - Framing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benett &amp; Iyengar 2008 - Minimal Effects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holbert et al. 2008 - Response to Minimal Effects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. The CNN Effect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 9/25</td>
<td>Eagleburger 2003 - CNN Effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 9/27</td>
<td>Robinson 1999 - CNN Effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slovic 2007 – Mass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brader 2005 - Responsive Chord</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Shoot the Messenger?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 10/2</td>
<td>Druckman 2001 - Who Can Frame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 10/4</td>
<td>Kuklinski &amp; Hurley 1994 - Hearing and Interpreting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vallone 1985 - Hostile Media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tormala &amp; Petty 2004 - Source Credibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Selective Exposure &amp; Bias</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAY CHANGE: TUES 10/10</td>
<td>Sears &amp; Freedman 1967 - Selective Exposure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 10/11</td>
<td>Stroud 2008 - Revisiting Selective Exposure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prior 2005 - News vs. Entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Redlawsk 2002 - Motivated Reasoning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. The Partisan Circus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reaction 3 due.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon 10/16</td>
<td>Arceneaux et al. 2012 - Polarized Political</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed 10/18</td>
<td>Prior 2013 - Political Polarization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iyengar &amp; Hahn 2009 - Red Media, Blue Media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 9. News In the Digital Age | Levendusky 2013 - Partisan Media Polarize  
                          | Stroud 2010 - Partisan Selective Exposure  
Mon 10/23 | None  
Wed 10/25 | Wihbey 2014 - News and Information  
               | Shirky 2010 - Social Media  
               | Bump 2017 – Resolved  
Wed 10/25 | Midterm exam |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
                        | Stecula 2015 - McCarthy or Inhofe  
                        | Groel & Baum 2008 - Crossing Water\'s Edge  
                        | Brulle et al 2012 - Shifting Public Opinion  
Mon 10/30 | None  
Wed 11/1 | None  
Wed 11/1 | None  
Mon 10/30 | None  
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
                          | Franz & Ridout 2007 - Political Advertising  
                          | Ansolabehere et al. 1994 - Attack Advertising  
Mon 11/6 | None  
Wed 11/8 | None  
Wed 11/8 | None  
Mon 11/6 | None  
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 12. The Bulliest of Pulpits | Domke et a. 2006 - Going Public  
                        | Baum & Groeling 2010 - Elasticity of Reality  
                        | Hart & Childers 2004 - Verbal Certainty  
                        | Barabas 2005 – Certitude  
Mon 11/13 | None  
Wed 11/15 | None  
Wed 11/15 | None  
Mon 11/13 | None  
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
                        | Sides 2016 - Media Bias  
                        | Shafer 2016 - Trump Took Over  
                        | Thanksgiving  
Mon 11/20 | None  
Wed 11/22 | None  
Wed 11/22 | None  
Mon 11/20 | None  
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 14. Weaponizing the News | Allcott & Gentzkow 2017 - Pages 211-236  
                        | Jin et al. 2014 - Misinformation Propagation  
                        | Timberg 2016 - Fake News  
                        | Sanovich 2017 - Computational Propoganda  
Mon 11/27 | None  
Wed 11/29 | None  
Wed 11/29 | None  
Mon 11/27 | None  
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 15. Political Humor | Warner 2010 - Daily Show  
                        | LaMarre et al 2009 - Irony of Satire  
                        | None  
Mon 12/4 | None  
Wed 12/6 | None  
Wed 12/6 | None  
Mon 12/4 | None  
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|

**Final Exam - Monday 12/18 @ 1:30**