Course Overview
Like it or not, the news media sits at the heart of democratic theory. Ancient political philosophers and America’s Founders alike believed that a free press was essential for a healthy public debate and effective policy. Today, however, it is clear that faith in the press is in decline. Many 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, the broad objective of this course is to understand the modern critiques of the media and to assess how well journalism lives up to its idealized role. This course 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.

In the end this course will be successful if it does three things: First, if it gives you a more sophisticated understanding of how the news media and marketplace of ideas function. Second, if it gives you an appreciation that the media are the site of a tremendous struggle for control between competing political actors. And third, if it convinces you that to understand fully any political issue you need to understand the role of the media.

Learning Objectives
In this course you will develop:

1. Knowledge of how political news and information are produced and disseminated
2. Knowledge of how news and information affect public opinion and political behavior
3. Familiarity with the major debates about the impact of the media on the quality of the American political system
4. Familiarity with the basics of using content analysis for political communication research
Course Materials
Most of the required readings, videos, etc., are available on the course Blackboard site, which should show up as “Politics and Media” on your Courses list in Blackboard.

One book is required for the course, available at the GMU Bookstore and via online bookstores:


Assessment
- Attendance and Participation 10%
- Online Discussion: “Hot Takes” 10%
- Midterm 20%
- Final Exam 20%
- Class Project > Exercises 20% (5% each)
- Class Project > Final Report 20%

Attendance and Participation
This will be a pretty small class, which is great because it will let me get to know everyone by name and give everyone a chance to contribute a lot to our discussions.

Online Discussion
This is Washington, D.C., folks; everyone needs to be ready with a hot take! Roughly each week I will post a provocation on the discussion board – usually in the form of a link to something and a related question – and you will post a sizzling response. We will then begin class with a discussion based on your hot takes.

Class Project
The Class Project folder on Blackboard contains the details, but in short we will be collaborating on a content analysis research project in which each student will be responsible for analyzing their own dataset and also for writing a final report that analyzes the data from the entire class.

Midterm and Final Exam
Exams will be based on both the readings and the lectures and include a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Format and Protocol
We will start each session with a quick round up of relevant news and events. I expect students to monitor at least one news media site throughout the term for politics and media related issues so that we can discuss and dissect them in class as part of our broader exploration of the course concepts.

As noted we will also have weekly hot takes discussions. Hot takes will require students to engage some news or other content before class and then respond with their “hot
We will then discuss your hot takes in class. These discussions will be great preparation for blogging, bloviating, and generally annoying people you know. It’s great preparation for a career in the D.C. area.

After we get warmed up I will typically provide some sort of lecture. I will also ask plenty of questions. Students should feel free to ask questions or make a comment at any point if anything is unclear or they are suddenly moved by an important insight or question.

Course Schedule

Section I: Frameworks and Debates

Jan 22 Welcome and Course Overview

- Print out course syllabus from Blackboard
- Complete the Getting Started survey on Blackboard

Jan 24 The Marketplace of Ideas: Classical Theory

- Strömback, “In Search of a Standard: Four Models of Democracy and Their Normative Implications for Journalism,” (16)

Jan 29 The Marketplace of Ideas: Critiques and Threats

- Ladd, Chs. 1 & 5, Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters (39)
- Inger, “The Marketplace of Ideas,” pp. 16-49 (33)

Jan 31 Fear in the Media: Class Project Overview

- Glassner, Ch. 1, Culture of Fear (20)

Class Project > Training Assignment Handed Out

Feb 5 The Evolution of the American News Media

- Ladd, Chs. 2-3, Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters (55)

Feb 7 Marketplace of Ideas or Arena of Conflict? News & the Struggle for Control

- Donovan and Scherer, “Police dogs, firehoses, and television cameras,” (19)
- McGuinness, Chs. 1-2, “The Selling of the President,” (30)

Class Project > Training Assignment Due
Section II: Where Do News and Information Come From?

Feb 12 How MSM News Organizations Produce News
- Bennett et al, Ch. 2, *When the Press Fails* (25)
- Kovach and Rosenstiel, “The elements of journalism,” (5)
- Tuchman, “Objectivity as Strategic Ritual,” (19)

Feb 14 Fake News? Objectivity and Political Bias in the MSM
- Wihbey et al, “Exploring the Ideological Nature of Journalists’ Social Networks ,” (8)
- Golbeck and Hansen, “A method for computing political preference among Twitter followers,” (8)
- Freakonomics Radio Podcast, “How Biased Is Your Media?” (37 min)

Feb 19 Other Biases in the News
- Bennett, Ch. 2, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (30)

Feb 21 PR, Protests, and Spin: How Political Actors Make News
- Bennett, Ch. 4, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (30)
- Jack Shafer, “How Trump Took Over the Media By Fighting It,” (3)

Class Project > Fear Coding Methods Assignment Due
Class Project > Annual Data Coding Assignment Handed Out

Feb 26 Really Fake News? The Rise of the Not-Even-Close-to-Objective “News” Media
- Ladd, Ch. 3, *Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters* (43)
- Benkler et al., “Study: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda,” (10)

Feb 28 Bear Market? Russian Hacking, Disinformation, and the 2016 Election
- Paul and Matthews, “The Russian ‘Firehose of Falsehood’ Propaganda Model,” (10)
- Valeriano et al., “5 things we can learn from the Russian hacking scandal,” (3)

Mar 5 Echo Chambers, Trolls, and Fake News
- Farrell and Drezner, “The Power and Politics of Blogs,” (17)
- Rojecki and Meraz, “Rumors and factitious blends,” (19)
Bakshy et al, “Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook,” (4)
Stephanie Busari, TED Talk, “How Fake News Does Real Harm,” (6 min)
Morgan, “Facebook and Google need to own their role in spreading misinformation – and fix it,” (2)

Mar 7 Citizens as Gatekeepers and Journalists: Blogs and Social Media

Akagi and Linning, “Crowdsourcing done right,” (3)
Capati, “5 Crowdsourced News Platforms Shaping the Future of Journalism and Reporting,” (5)
Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media,” (9)
Wang, “How much news makes it into people’s Facebook feeds?” (4)

Mar 12 and 14 Spring Break

Section III: News & the Public

Mar 19 The Public: Often Wrong, Increasingly Polarized, Rarely in Doubt

Ladd, Ch. 6, Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters (38)
Galef, TED Talk, “Why you think you’re right, even if you’re wrong,” (12 min)

Mar 21 How News Influences Public Opinion: A Model

Zaller, Chs. 2-3 from The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion (45)

Class Project > Annual Coding Assignment Due
Class Project > Additional Analysis Assignment Handed Out

Mar 26 MID TERM EXAM

Mar 28 The Public: Motivated, But Not by the Search for Truth

Sunstein and Vermeule, “Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures,” (26)
Iyengar and Hahn, “Red Media, Blue Media,” (24 but just skim the math)

Apr 2 Telling Us What to Think About: Agenda Setting & Priming

Iyengar and Kinder, Chs. 1, 3, 7 from News That Matters (30)
Eisensee and Strömberg, “News Droughts, News Floods, and U.S. Disaster Relief,” (35 but just skim the math)

Apr 4 The CNN Effect & the Power of Images
Livingston and Eachus, "Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy" (18)
Slovic, "If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act," (17)

Apr 9 Telling Us How to Think: Framing Effects

- Entman, “Framing U.S. Coverage of International News…” (22)
- Lakoff, ”Why It Matters How We Frame the Environment,” (13)

Class Project > Additional analysis assignment due
Class Project > Final report assignment handed out

Apr 11 Messages and Their Messengers

- Kuklinski and Hurley, "On Hearing and Interpreting Political Messages" (25)
- Vallone, Ross, and Lepper, "The Hostile Media Phenomenon," (9)

Section IV: News, Politics, and Public Policy

Apr 16 From Watergate to the Mueller Investigation: Then

- Video: All the President’s Men (2 hrs 18 min)
- Feldstein, “Watergate Revisited,” (8)
- Watergate Wikipedia entry (12)

Apr 18 Lying, Leaking, and Whistleblowing

- Ellsberg, “Truths Worth Telling,” (2)
- Chokshi, “Behind the Race to Publish the Top-Secret Pentagon Papers,” (5)
- Cooper, “Exposing the Truth of Abu Ghraib,” (4)
- TBD

Apr 23 From Watergate to the Mueller Investigation: Now

- Video, “Why the Pentagon Papers Still Matter Today,”
- TBD

Apr 25 #MeToo and the Media

- Traister, “Our National Narratives Are Still Being Shaped by Lecherous, Powerful Men,” (2)
- TBD

Apr 28 War, Terrorism, and the Media
- Beckett, Executive Summary and Section 1 from “Fanning the Flames: Reporting Terror in a Networked World,” (15)
- Burgoon, et al, “From Media Attention to Negotiated Peace: Human Rights Reporting and Civil War Duration,” (32 but just skim the math)

Apr 30 NGOs, Human Rights, and the Media
- Bob, “Merchants of Morality,” (11)
- Thrall, Stecula, Moyer, “May We Have Your Attention Please,” (24)

May 2 The American Fear Index

Final Class Project report due in class today

May 4 Wrapping Up: How Bad Is It? Can We Do Better?
- Ladd, Ch. 8, Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters (27)
- Rosen, “Show your work: The new terms for trust in journalism,” (4)

May 14 FINAL EXAM (1:30 – 4:15 PM)
SYLLABUS APPENDIX: THE OTHER STUFF

Blackboard
Access to MyMason and GMU email are required to participate successfully in this course. Please make sure to update your computer and prepare yourself to begin using the online format BEFORE the first day of class. Check the IT Support Center website. Navigate to the Student Support page for help and information about Blackboard. In the menu bar to the left you will find all the tools you need to become familiar with Blackboard. Take time to learn each tool. Make sure you run a system check a few days before class. Become familiar with the attributes of Blackboard and online learning.

To login in to the course:
2. Login using your NETID and password.
3. Click on the ‘Courses” tab.
4. Click on GOVT 412 (Spring 2018)

Technical Help
If you have difficulty with accessing Blackboard, please contact the ITU Support Center at 703.993.8870 or support@gmu.edu. If you have trouble with using the features in Blackboard, email courses@gmu.edu

University Policies & Information

Academic Integrity
Students must be responsible for their own work, and students and faculty must take on the responsibility of dealing explicitly with violations. The tenet must be a foundation of our university culture. [See http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/distance].

Honor Code
Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode].
Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

MasonLive/Email
Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. [See https://thanatos.gmu.edu/masonlive/login].

Patriot Pass
Once you sign up for your Patriot Pass, your passwords will be synchronized, and you will use your Patriot Pass username and password to log in to the following systems:
Blackboard, University Libraries, MasonLive, myMason, Patriot Web, Virtual Computing Lab, and WEMS. [See https://thanatos.gmu.edu/passwordchange/index.jsp].

**Responsible Use of Computing**
Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. [See http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html].

**Students with Disabilities**
Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See http://ods.gmu.edu].

**University Libraries**
University Libraries provides resources for distance students. [See http://library.gmu.edu/distance].

**Writing Center**
The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu]. You can now sign up for an Online Writing Lab (OWL) session just like you sign up for a face-to-face session in the Writing Center, which means YOU set the date and time of the appointment! Learn more about the Online Writing Lab (OWL).

**Counseling and Psychological Services**
The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See http://caps.gmu.edu].

**Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. [See http://registrar.gmu.edu/privacy].

**Other Considerations**
If there are any issues related to religious holidays, please inform the instructor the first week of class.