

# MMC 3614: Media and Politics

Spring 2021

Wednesdays 1:55-4:55 p.m.

**Dr. Wayne Wanta**  
wwanta@ufl.edu

**Catalog Description:** Provide an understanding of the role of the media in the political system. Course topics include televised debates, political advertising, political journalism, Internet and alternative media.

**About the Course:** The mass media play an important role in U.S. society. This class will highlight current political trends as they are reported, analyzed and deliberated throughout our 24-7 news cycle. Class topics will range from the framing of political debate and legitimizing local, national, and international issues, to the media's coverage of the growing societal, economic and environmental challenges we face globally. The course will emphasize the ways in which politics are shaped by the news media, especially as it pertains to social media – perhaps the strongest factor influencing society today.

**Course Objectives:** The course examines the role of media in shaping American politics. By the end of the course, students will:

- Recognize the fundamental role of media in shaping the public's perception of politicians, the government, and the political structure.
- Understand the importance of the Internet and social media in the modern information age and the profound effect it has on media coverage, campaigns, and privacy.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of certain media sources and develop ways to ascertain the validity of information from media sources.
- Identify how political figures are affected by the media and ways in which political figures respond to, influence, or even manipulate news coverage.

## **Recommended Readings:**

1. Iyengar, S. (2011). *Media politics: A citizen's guide* (2nd ed.). New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
2. Additional required readings will be included each week.

## **Course Requirements:**

All assignments in this class will be turned in via canvas. If you experience technical difficulties, contact the UF HelpDesk at 392-HELP. If they cannot resolve your issue, please contact me regarding these issues.

**Assignments:**

1. *Media Bias:* Identify a recent political story from an online/print news source (published no longer than one month prior to the assignment deadline) and write a 4-6 page paper discussing the article and its impact on: you as a citizen, the political ramifications of the event and how it impacts the greater news context. Discuss the sourcing of the article, how polls or surveys were used, the partisanship of the article, and how the issue was framed, etc. You are required to utilize and cite **at least three different scholarly articles** as means to back up your arguments throughout the paper. Include a copy of the article as an appendix. Be prepared to discuss your paper in class.

2. *Discussion Posts:* Each student is required to post a 200-300 word paper discussing the reading and lecture content. These posts should have a clear thesis and correct grammar to receive credit. During the class for which your group leads the discussion, you will not need to post a discussion assignment. Post will be due on Tuesdays by 5 p.m.

3. *Midterm Exam:* Students will complete a midterm exam based on course material. The questions will be in an essay format and will be taken during class time.

4. *Group presentations:* Each student will be assigned to a team of 2 to 4 students based on their interests. Each group will lead class discussion during their assigned class. Students will need to do additional readings on their topics and prepare materials for the class to discuss. Creativity will be rewarded here. While the instructor will contribute to the discussion, students should be prepared to extend student interaction for much of the class period. After the presentation, students will turn in a 3-page paper outlining what they did in preparation of the class and what they tried to accomplish. Groups will be graded on: Effectiveness of generating class discussion, amount of work completed before the presentation, accuracy of topics discussed, quality of presentation materials, quality of accompanying paper.

5. *Analysis Paper:* For the final paper for the class, your assignment will be to identify a case in which a media organization either showed near perfect objectivity or serious bias, based on our readings and class discussions. Students will give a 10-15 minute presentation of their papers during the last two weeks of class. You are required to utilize and cite **at least five different scholarly articles** so as to supplement your views with academic theory, e.g., agenda-setting, priming, etc. You may critique and cite as many news articles as you feel are necessary to support your discussion points as well. Based on your research, you will identify and highlight how the various interest groups and stakeholders have impacted or been impacted upon in the debate – whether they are governmental, private, citizen, etc. – and how the media have covered their viewpoints. As some of these topics may well be sensitive to your classmates, be mindful of how you present your findings. The final paper should be 8-12 pages of text (not counting citations or appendices), double-spaced, with 12-point type. It will be due on the last day of class, April 21.

**Grading:**

Grades will be based on six factors:

Media bias .....	15%
Discussion posts .....	20%
Midterm exam .....	15%
Group presentation .....	20%
Final papers .....	30%

**Grading Scale:**

- A = 93-100
- A- = 90-92
- B+ = 87-89
- B = 83-86
- B- = 80-82
- C+ = 77-79
- C = 73-76
- C- = 70-72
- D+ = 67-69
- D = 63-66
- D- = 60-62
- Below 60 = E

**Makeup:** Make-up assignments and exams are not permitted. However, under an extreme circumstance, if you have an excused absence AND the professor was notified in advance, an exception may be made. Information about university’s policies on this issue can be found here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

**Discussion board policies:** We will be covering sensitive topics in this class and students may have strong feelings about particular issues discussed in class. Everyone deserves a safe environment in which to participate in class discussions. Therefore, be respectful in all of your discussion posts and student interactions.

- Posts should include a clear thesis statement and correct grammar within each post and cite any material (in lecture or readings) as appropriate.
- Proper grammar and word usage is expected.
- No derogatory language will be tolerated. If you have questions about the use of specific words or language that may be deemed derogatory, obscene, or biased in some way, you should speak with the instructor before including this language in your post.
- ONLY thoughtful posts that adhere to these policies (including due dates and times) will receive full credit.

**Discussion Post Due Dates:** To receive credit, all posts will be due on Tuesday nights by 5 p.m. **Any posts received after that time will be penalized.**

**Plagiarism;** Cheating or other Academic Misconduct: The Academic Integrity Statement for the College of Journalism and Communications can be found here:

<http://www.jou.ufl.edu/grad/forms/Plagiarism-Guideline.pdf>

In addition, all students are bound by the university's Honor Code Policy at

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>. Anyone who violates these policies in this course will receive a failing grade in this course and face further sanctions from the college and university.

If you find yourself wondering whether you have crossed the line of plagiarism, you almost assuredly have. When in doubt, ask the professor.

It is true that students sometimes plagiarize unintentionally or by accident. That is neither a defense nor an excuse. To avoid accidental plagiarism, it is extremely important to keep careful notes about what came from where, especially when doing online research. If you are cutting and pasting paragraphs from Web sites to your notes, you are in very risky territory; save the citations along with the material.

Your work will be checked for plagiarism, so just don't do it. Failure to uphold the standards of academic honesty will result in a failing grade for the course and, potentially, other serious disciplinary action up to and including expulsion.

*Turnitin.com:* Your media analysis project will be submitted to the Turnitin.com web site, which tests for plagiarism. Your instructor may also test other work through the same site, if he suspects that plagiarism has occurred.

Remember, when you completed the registration form at the University of Florida, you signed the following statement:

*"I understand that the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University."*

Furthermore, on work submitted for credit, the following pledge is either required or implied:

*"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."*

If you are aware of a climate that promotes academic dishonesty, please notify the instructor or contact the Student Honor Court (392-1631) or Cheating Hotline (392-6999).

**Special needs:** Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting an accommodation. This course conforms to all requirements of the ADA and handles with sensitivity all matters related to gender, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability. Please alert the instructor if any issues arise.

**Syllabus Changes:** The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus or course schedule as the need arises. This includes the possibility of guest speakers and special presentations, some of which may be scheduled outside of classtime. Note: Some of the content for this syllabus was taken from syllabi from previous classes.

**Tips for getting good grades:** Come to the Zoom room on time. Turn off your cellphone. Complete all of the readings before class. Laugh at my jokes.

### **Tentative schedule**

#### **Week 1 – Jan. 13**

Introduction to course  
The major principles of political communication  
The role of the media in the American political system

#### **Week 2 – Jan. 20**

Political power and power over the media  
Media independence, ownership and regulation  
The presidency and the news media  
Presidential elections

#### **Week 3 – Jan. 27**

The influence of advertising and campaigning  
**Discussion posts, Group 1 presentation**

#### **Week 4 – Feb. 3**

The state of the media  
**Discussion posts, Group 2 presentation**

#### **Week 5 – Feb. 10**

Press coverage of Congress and the Supreme Court  
**Discussion posts, Group 3 presentation**

#### **Week 6 – Feb. 17**

**Media Analysis Due**  
The role of the Internet  
**No group presentation or discussion posts**

#### **Week 7 – Feb. 24**

Media effects on the public  
**Discussion posts, Group 4 presentation**

**Week 8 – March 3**

Agenda-setting function of the media

**Discussion posts, Group 5 presentation**

**Week 9 – March 10**

Other media effects

**Discussion posts, Group 6 presentation**

**Week 10 – March 17**

When the press fails

**Discussion posts, Group 7 presentation**

**Week 11 – March 24**

**Midterm Exam**

**Week 12 – March 31**

Global Media

Coverage of international events and foreign policy

**Discussion posts, Group 8 presentation**

**Week 13 – April 7**

Media coverage of protests

**Discussion posts, Group 9 presentation**

**Week 14 – April 14**

The media and public opinion

Reporting on polling numbers and how polls become news

**No presentation or discussion post**

**Week 15 – April 21**

**Final paper presentations**

**Last day of classes**