

Media and Politics – MMC 3414
Online Course Syllabus
Spring 2016

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Course Description and Student Objectives:

The purpose of this course is to provide an understanding of the role of the media in the political system. Both historical and current political trends will be highlighted as they are deliberated and analyzed by the media as well as the advantages and challenges that come with digital media and the 24/7 news cycle.

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Recognize the fundamental role of the media in shaping the public's perceptions 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.

Required Readings:

Iyengar, S. (2011). *Media politics: A citizen's guide* (2nd ed.). New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

You will be expected to read the assigned chapters/pages and be prepared to apply them to online discussions and assessments. These readings are crucial to understanding what you will be doing in this course. So do NOT neglect to do the readings.

Course Structure:

This is a web-only course. A learning module will be set up for each section containing a lecture, readings and a discussion topic. You will be required to read the assigned chapters/pages, go through the lecture slides and respond to the discussion topic each week. It is your responsibility to follow and adhere to the schedule. Two exams and a short

paper/discussion leader assignment will also evaluate your knowledge and understanding of the material. Here are descriptions of each of the assessments in this course:

- **Discussion Tweets:** All discussions this semester will take place on Twitter. Each student is required to post tweets discussing the reading and lecture content as well as responding to tweets from your classmates. Specifically, this will include responding to the specific discussion questions and thoughts I put forth within each learning module, and you are required to respond to at least four other students' discussion tweets. This means you will be required to post a minimum of five tweets each week. You can use a Twitter account you already have, or create one for the purpose of this course.

Your discussion tweets will receive a completion grade, meaning if you respond to the discussion thoughtfully, seriously and on time, you will receive full credit. All discussion tweets need to be posted by Sunday at 11:59 p.m. each week there is a new module. Please include the course hashtag #mmc3614 in all of your posts.

- **Short Paper/Discussion Leader Assignment:** Each of you will be assigned to complete a short paper and serve as a discussion leader one week during the course. A few students at a time will be doing this each week, but the assignment is to be completed individually. The week your paper is due will be randomly assigned, but please let me know if there is a particular week that does not work well for your schedule. I will take that into consideration when assigning the dates.

To successfully fulfill both parts of this assignment, first you need to identify a recent political story from a reputable online/print news source (such as The New York Times, Guardian, Politico, etc.) published no longer than one month prior to the assignment deadline. Then, write a four- to five-page paper discussing the article and its impact on citizens, the political ramifications of the event, and how it impacts the greater news context. Also, discuss the pros and cons of how the article reports the information, e.g. highlight the sourcing of the article, how polls or surveys were used, the partisanship of the article, how the issue was framed, etc. You are required to use and cite at least three different scholarly articles as well as material from the course as a means to back up your arguments throughout the paper.

Finally, take a point of interest from your paper and form a question (that you think would be a good topic of discussion for the class) and tweet it with the course hashtag and a link to the original news story. (I recommend shortening the link with tinyurl or bitly.) This tweet is in addition to the five tweets you have to post for discussion credit. The paper will be due on Canvas by Sunday at 11:59 p.m. the week of your paper assignment, but your discussion leader tweet must be posted by Thursday at 11:59 p.m. in order to give the rest of the class ample time to respond to your question.

Your paper must also meet the following requirements:

- Use proper grammar, spelling and 12-point Times New Roman font.
- Double space your paper with one-inch margins all around.

- Have your name and date on the first pages as well as an appropriate title.
- Follow APA academic style with both in-text citations and a reference page.
- **Exams:** There will be two exams in this course, a midterm and a final, each one covering approximately half of the course. These exams usually consist of 20 multiple-choice questions and a short essay. They will be timed and set up to be completed in Canvas. More specific details about the exams will be provided closer to the test dates.

Final Grade Breakdown:

Your final grade in the course will be arrived at through the following combination:

• Discussion Tweets:	25 points
• Short Paper/Discussion Leader Assignment:	25 points
• Midterm Exam:	25 points
• <u>Final Exam:</u>	<u>25 points</u>
Total Possible:	100 points

Grading Scale:

A = 94-100	B- = 80-83	D+ = 67-69
A- = 90-93	C+ = 77-79	D = 64-66
B+ = 87-89	C = 74-76	D- = 60-63
B = 84-86	C- = 70-73	E = 59 and below

Class Policies:

1. **Deadlines:** All of the deadlines are strict in this course. But if, for any reason, you do think you will miss a deadline or exam, please discuss it with me at least 24 hours in advance. Under legitimate extenuating circumstances, such as a documented/known illness, family emergency or if you have some other situation you think may constitute a reason for an extended deadline, like a legal or military obligation, athletic participation or religious holiday, I may agree to let you schedule a make-up exam or turn in an assignment late. However, if I have not agreed to an extension or make-up exam before the deadlines, your assignment or exam grade will be a zero.

For the assessments to be completed on Canvas, please be mindful of technical difficulties and plan accordingly, as it is your responsibility to complete assessments by the deadlines. If you experience any technical difficulties, your first line of defense will be to contact the UF HelpDesk at (352) 392-HELP. If they cannot resolve the problem, then please contact me directly.

2. **Discussion Demeanor:** I want this class to be fun and energetic with great discussions, but we will be covering sensitive topics in this class and ones about which some students may have strong feelings. Therefore, I expect you to be courteous and respectful to your fellow classmates. Please be polite to others while both expressing opinions and responding to them.
3. **Academic Integrity:** University of Florida students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty such as (but not limited to) cheating, plagiarism,

fabrication of sources or information from sources, reusing a paper from another class, writing a similar paper for two classes, drawing too heavily on another's work for your own and having someone else complete your work for you. If you're unsure of whether something constitutes a violation of academic integrity, ask me before turning in an assignment. Also, please refer to the University of Florida's guidelines regarding academic honesty at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>. Ignorance is not an excuse.

My default practice for an academic integrity violation is a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the entire course, and the instance will be reported to the university's office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

- 4. Disability Assistance:** Students with disabilities who seek reasonable accommodations in the classroom or other aspects of performing their coursework must first register with the University of Florida's Disability Resource Center. The center will provide documentation, and then you must meet with me, so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, and you can contact them by calling (352) 392-8565. For more information, visit <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>.
- 5. Student Success and Seeking Help:** All of your instructors have high expectations of you, including myself. We are responsible for conveying those expectations to you. You are responsible for ensuring you meet your course obligations. Sometimes it will be draining and frustrating like it is in the communications field. But ultimately, it should also be enjoyable and purposeful. You are always encouraged to come to me both inside and outside of class with questions or concerns about this class and your assignments or the communications field in general.

Also, the UF Counseling and Wellness Center is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call (352) 392-1575. For more information, visit <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>.

- 6. Online Course Evaluation Process:** Just as I give feedback on your work throughout the semester, I would also like to get feedback from you on the quality of instruction in this course. Because of this, students are expected to complete online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.

Course Schedule:

Here is the tentative schedule for this semester. The schedule is subject to change depending on the needs of the class.

May 9-15	Module 1 <u>Media and American Politics: What are we doing here?</u> <i>Read Iyengar, Chapter 2 (pp. 18-49)</i>
May 16-22	Module 2 <u>Media, Elections and Debates: What are the rules?</u> <i>Read Iyengar, Chapter 9 (pp. 272-305), Chapter 6 (pp. 181-190), Chapter 3 (pp. 50-89)</i>
May 23-29	Module 3 <u>Media and the Three Branches of Government: How does it work?</u> <i>Read Iyengar, Chapter 7 (pp. 195-222), Chapter 9 (pp. 306-333)</i>
May 30-June 5	<u>Review for midterm exam</u>
June 6-12	<u>MIDTERM EXAM</u> (Opens Monday at 9 a.m./Closes Sunday at 11:59 p.m.)
June 13-19	Module 4 <u>Media and Public Opinion: More polling required?</u> <i>Read Iyengar, Chapter 8 (pp. 229-271)</i>
June 20-26	Break Week – No Class
June 27-July 3	Module 5 <u>Politics and the Internet: Interactivity and Social Media</u> <i>Read Iyengar, Chapter 5 (pp. 113-148)</i>
July 4-10	Module 6 <u>Selling and Spinning: Political Advertising</u> <i>Read Iyengar, Chapter 6 (pp. 149-181), Chapter 7 (pp. 222-225)</i>
July 11-17	Module 7 <u>Media Pundits and Ethics in Politics: Blurring the Lines</u> <i>Read Iyengar, Chapter 4 (pp. 92-112)</i>
July 18-24	<u>Review for final exam</u>
July 25-31	<u>FINAL EXAM</u> (Opens Monday at 9 a.m./Closes Sunday at 11:59 p.m.)