

MMC 6618: Survey of Political Communication Spring 2018

Tuesdays Period 3-5 (9:35 a.m.-12:35 p.m.)

Dr. Wayne Wanta
wwanta@ufl.edu
3061 Weimer Hall

Office hours: Mondays 10 a.m. to noon, Tuesdays 8:30-9:30 a.m. and by appointment

Course Description: Role of communication in political process, including study of news coverage of political events, political advertising, political debates, international political communication, and politics and new technologies.

Course Goals:

- To critically examine theoretical frameworks that have traditionally been employed in political communication research
- To learn the methods utilized by political communication researchers
- To build upon research that has examined the cognitive, attitudinal and behavior effects of political communication, especially messages transmitted through the mass media
- To apply previous research to the new landscape that is changing the nature of mass communication.

Course structure: Most classes will consist of a split between lecture material and student discussion.

Recommended text:

Maxwell McCombs, Lance Holbert, Spiro Kioussis & Wayne Wanta, *The News & Public Opinion: Media effects on civic life.* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, (2011).

Grading:

Grading for the course will be based on five factors:

- Midterm paper 20 percent
- Assignments 20 percent
- Discussion leader presentation 10 percent
- Class participation/attendance 10 percent
- Final research paper 40 percent
-

Note: There is no final exam.

Midterm paper: A 5-7 page paper will be a critical analysis of some aspect of political communication. The paper should be a combination of and analysis. The paper should be fully footnoted. More information on the paper will be provided later in the term.

Assignments: Reaction papers dealing with topics of the week will be due on Mondays

by 5 p.m. They should be posted to our class canvas page under the discussions tab. Most of the assignments involve critiquing published articles on topics of that week. The assignments will be 2 to 3 pages. Late assignments will be docked severely.

Discussion leader presentations: Each student will serve as a discussion leader for two classes during the semester. Discussion leaders 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 period.

Class participation/attendance: Since this is a graduate seminar, students are expected to attend every class and to participate in class discussions. Excuses for absences must be legitimate. DO NOT tell me that you have to go to Wrestlemania (unless you have an extra ticket for me). More than one absence will affect your final grade. Students will receive a failing grade for missing 3 or more classes.

Final papers: Your final paper will be a 15-page paper on an issue surrounding political communication and the news. This paper is intended to be of high enough quality as to serve as a submission to a national or international conference: the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (deadline April 1) or the International Communication Association (deadline Nov. 1) or other conferences in outside fields. Papers will be graded on the quality of the conceptualization of variables and the soundness of key points. Because the paper should be of professional quality, grammar also matters. The paper should have a minimum of 15 citations from academic journals and additional citations from other media sources. The final papers will be presented in class on the last class meeting.

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.

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 class on time. Turn off your cellphone, or better yet, don't bring it to class. Complete all of the readings before class. Laugh at my jokes.

Good sources for additional material:

www.readership.org

Excellent research on newspapers and the media environment

www.scholar.google.com

A good source for finding research studies

<http://www.mediachannel.org/>

A collection of original news, opinions and reports, providing information from media watch

groups, university journalism departments, professional organizations, anti-censorship monitors,

and trade publications.

<http://people-press.org/>

A foundation devoted to improving the performance of the press, with some great surveys of journalists and the public

<http://www.naa.org/>

The Newspaper Association of America, a nonprofit organization representing the \$46 billion

newspaper industry and over 1,500 member newspapers in the United States and Canada.

<http://www.freedomforum.org/>

The Freedom Forum. a nonpartisan international foundation dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people.

<http://www.journalism.org/>

Includes the Project for Excellence in Journalism, aimed at creating initiatives that can clarify what journalism's essential role is. It also identifies examples of good journalism around the country. The project is part of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

<http://www.asne.org/>

American Society of Newspaper Editors. Contains reports on journalistic practices, including a compilation of newspaper codes of ethics.

4

Some leading journalism publications on the Web:

American Journalism Review: <http://ajr.newslink.org/>

Columbia Journalism Review: <http://cjr.org>

Nieman Reports: <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/Reports.aspx>

Noteworthy blogs:

Ken Doctor: http://www.contentbridges.com/dow_jones/index.html

Alan Mutter: <http://newsosaur.blogspot.com/>

Tim McGuire: <http://cronkite.asu.edu/mcguireblog/>

Tentative Schedule

Week 1, Jan. 9

Course introduction

Week 2, Jan. 16

How to write research papers.

The State of the Media Today. Basis for this discussion is the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism:

<http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/>

Week 3, Jan. 23

The Foundation of Political Communication: The 1940 Erie County Study

Readings: The News & Public Opinion

Chapter 1. What Is Public Opinion?

Chapter 2. A Changing Media Landscape

Week 4, Jan. 30

Theories of media effects, part I

Agenda-setting, framing, priming

Readings: To come.

Discussion leader I

Week 5, Feb. 6

Gatekeepers of the News: Who determines what is news?

Readings: The News & Public Opinion

Chapter 3. Reporting the News

Chapter 4. Trust in the News

Discussion leader II

Week 6, Feb. 13

The Press and the Public: Why do people hate us?

Readings: The News & Public Opinion

Chapter 5. The Audiences for News

Discussion leader III

Week 7, Feb. 20

Mass Communication and Cognition

Readings: News & Public Opinion

Chapter 6. Focusing Public Attention

Chapter 7. Learning from the News
Discussion leader IV

Week 8, Feb. 27

Mass Communication and attitudes
Readings: The News & Public Opinion
Chapter 8. Forming Opinions
Chapter 9. The Tone of the News
Discussion leader V

Week 9, March 6

No Class: Spring break

Week 10, March 13

Midterm paper presentations

Week 11, March 20

Uses of mass communications
Readings: The News & Public Opinion
Chapter 10. What Citizens Bring to the News
Discussion leader VI

Week 12, March 27

Mass communication and behavior
Readings: The News & Public Opinion
Chapter 11. News Influence on Civic Life
Chapter 12. News Influence on Civic Life
Chapter 13. Assessing the Role of News in Civic Life
Discussion leader VII

Week 13, April 3

The Economics of Journalism and Media
Readings: To come
Discussion leader VIII

Week 14, April 10

Mass Communication theories revisited
Readings: To come

Week 15, April 17

Media Issues in the Digital Age

Readings: To come

Week 16, April 24

Final presentations

Final papers due