

**MMC 3614 – Media and Politics**  
**Spring Semester 2013**  
**Syllabus**

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**Introduction:**

Welcome to Media and Politics. Above all, news media has a profound influence on American society and politics. The study of American politics as it exists in the 21st century, thus, requires an examination of the role of media in framing political debate and legitimizing local, national, and international issues. Essentially, this media-focused course emphasizes the ways in which news media shape everything we know about politics. Like all journalism disciplines today, political journalism is rapidly changing with the Internet. A significant portion of the course will be dedicated to new media and how online reporting and social networking has altered the current political landscape.

**Required Readings:**

There are three required textbooks for this course. However, there may be a number of selected readings that will be provided to you by the instructor throughout the semester. You are expected to read all the selections before the assigned class.

Bennett, W. L., Lawrence, R. G., & Livingston, S. (2007). *When the press fails: Political power and the news media from Iraq to Katrina*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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

Matthews, C. (1999). *Hardball: How politics is played--told by one who knows the game*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

**Student Objectives:**

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- 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 new media in the modern information age and the profound effect it has on media coverage, campaigns, and privacy.
- Recognize 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.
- Critique the ways in which films and television programs establish political identity and establish a framework for societal interaction and discussion.
- Understand the differences in media coverage of the three branches of government.

- Apply different mass media theories to describe how important media issues are developed or framed.
- Understand media ownership and media regulation, as well as the diminishing freedoms of the press in our capitalist, democratic society.

**Attendance:**

Attendance is mandatory, and an attendance sheet will be passed around class at unannounced times throughout the semester. Students who miss class will receive reductions to their attendance grade. Please be in class on time. If you have an emergency, please contact the instructor before class and provide documentation when you return. Excused absences include illness, having primary care duty for family members, professional conferences, military service, jury duty and university sanctioned trips.

Additionally, class participation is important and expected from all students. This is a discussion-based media course, so please share your thoughts throughout the semester. For your benefit and mine, come prepared with questions and opinions about class topics.

**Class Procedures:**

- Please keep your cell phones on silent and put away during class.
- Laptops are allowed in class, and but will typically not be needed. If you are using a laptop in class, please be alert and on task.
- Please check your UF email account once a week for class updates.
- All assigned readings should be read before the next scheduled class.

**Short Assignment:**

Find a recent political article (written no more than one month before the due date) and write a 3 - 4 page paper (double-spaced) discussing your take on the article and the issue being discussed. This assignment is designed to get you thinking about how media plays a role in the political process, so find an appropriate article and explain how it fits in the greater context of news media. For example, you can find an article about the fiscal cliff or new gun control legislation, and discuss article sourcing, how polls or surveys were used, the partisanship of the article, how the issue was framed, etc. Please attach the article to the back of your assignment.

**Group Presentation and Paper:**

In groups of three or four, students will choose a contemporary topic in politics, thinking about the ways in which this issue has been covered and will be covered by the media. Groups will conduct research on the issue and write a 12 – 15 page paper (double-spaced) that illustrates how this issue has been portrayed by the media, how accurately the issue has been presented, and perceptions of this issue by the public. Based on their research, groups will develop 15-minute presentations that discuss their chosen topic and findings to the class.

**Grading:**

- 10% - Class attendance and participation
- 5% - Short Assignment
- 30% - Midterm Exam
- 30% - Final Exam

25% - Group Presentation and Group Paper

**Grading Scale:**

A – 92 - 100	B- – 80 – 81	D+ – 67 - 69
A- – 90 – 91	C+ – 77 – 79	D – 62 - 66
B+ – 87 - 89	C – 72 – 76	D- – 60 - 61
B – 82 – 86	C- – 70 – 71	E – 59 and below

**Academic Honesty:**

As a student at the University of Florida, you have agreed to comply with the University Honor Code. The guidelines for the department state: “It is expected that you will exhibit ethical behavior in your classes. Students are expected to do their own work, use their own words in papers and to reference outside sources appropriately.”

You are encouraged to read the online materials that explain what academic honesty violations are and the associated penalties. If you are found to commit an academic honesty violation in this course, you will receive a zero on the assignment and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs. <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

**Disability Requests:**

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor. <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/getstarted.php>

**Class Schedule:**

Week 1 – Jan. 7 & 9

Introduction to course

The major principles of political communication

The role of the media in the American political system

Week 2 – Jan. 14 & 16

Political power and power over the media

Media independence, ownership and regulation

Read: Matthews - Introduction, Chapters 1 – 4

Read: Iyengar – Chapter 1

Week 3 – Jan. 23

Jan. 21 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day – No Class

The presidency and the news media

Presidential elections

Read: Matthews – Chapters 5 – 7

Read: Iyengar – Chapter 2

Week 4 – Jan. 28 & 30

The presidency and the news media (cont.)

Presidential elections (cont.)

The influence of advertising and campaigning  
Read: Iyengar - Chapters 3 - 4

Week 5 – Feb. 4 & 6  
Press coverage of Congress and the Supreme Court  
Read: Matthews – Chapters 8 – 9

Week 6 – Feb. 11 & 13  
**Feb. 11 – Short Assignment Due**  
The role of the Internet  
How new media has changed the game  
Social networking  
Read: Iyengar – Chapters 5 – 6

Week 7 – Feb. 18 & 20  
Media effects on the public  
Read: Matthews – Chapters 10 – 14

Week 8 – Feb. 25 & 27  
Candidate Debates  
**Feb. 27 – Midterm Exam**

Week 9 – Mar. 4 & 6 – Spring Break – No Class

Week 10 – Mar. 11 & 13  
When the press fails  
Read: Bennett – Introduction, Chapters 1 - 2

Week 11 – Mar. 18 & 20  
Global Media  
Coverage of international events and foreign policy  
Read: Bennett – Chapter 3  
Read: Iyengar – Chapter 7

Week 12 – Mar. 25 & 27  
The media and public opinion  
Reporting on polling numbers and how polls become news  
Read: Bennett – Chapters 4 – 5  
Read: Iyengar – Chapter 8

Week 13 – Apr. 1 & 3  
**April 1 – Group Papers Due**  
Media ethics in political communication  
Group Presentations  
Read: Iyengar: Chapters 9 - 10

Week 14 – Apr. 8 & 10

The rise of politics in popular culture

Group presentations

Read Bennett – Chapter 6

Read: Iyengar: Chapter 11

Week 15 – Apr. 15 & 17

The future of political media

Group Presentations

Week 16 - Apr. 22 & 24

Course wrap-up

Review

**Apr. 24 (the last day of class) – Final Exam**