

**MMC 6618: Survey of Political Communication**  
**Spring 2014**

**Mondays Period 8 (3-3:50 p.m.) and Wednesdays Periods 8-9 (3 to 4:55 p.m.)**

Dr. Wayne Wanta

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2070 Weimer Hall, 392-0500

Office hours: Wednesday 8:30-10:30 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 classroom exercises/student discussion.

**Required texts:**

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:

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|----------------------------------|------------|
| • 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 Tuesdays at 5 p.m. They should be emailed to me as a document attachment. 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 one class 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. The discussion leader sessions will be on Wednesdays.

**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 one of our main conferences: the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (deadline April 1) or the International Communication Association (deadline Nov. 1). 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.

**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](http://www.readership.org)

Excellent research on newspapers and the media environment

[www.scholar.google.com](http://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.

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](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. 6, 8**

Course introduction

### **Week 2, Jan. 13, 15**

How to write research papers.

The State of the Media Today. Basis for this discussion is the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism's "The State of the News Media 2012: An Annual Report on American Journalism."

<http://stateofthemedias.org/>

### **Week 3, Jan. 22**

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. 27, 29**

Theories of media effects, part I

Agenda-setting, framing, priming

Readings: To come.

**Discussion leader I**

### **Week 5, Feb. 3, 5**

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. 10, 12**

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. 17, 21**

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. 24, 26**

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 3, 5**

No Class: Spring break

**Week 10, March 10, 12**

Midterm paper presentations

**Week 11, March 17, 19**

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

**Week 12, March 24, 26**

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, March 31, April 2**

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

**Week 14, April 7, 9**

Mass Communication theories revisited  
Readings: *To come*

**Discussion leader IX**

**Week 15, April 14, 16**

Media Issues in the Digital Age

Readings: To come

**Discussion leader X**

**Week 16, April 21, 23**

Final presentations

**Final papers due**