

**Mass Media in American Politics**  
**PSCI 3160.001**  
**Fall 2023**

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**Class:** MW 9:00-10:20am, BLB 065

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### *Course Overview*

This course focuses on media and their role in the American democracy. We will begin by underscoring the importance of media to American politics with a discussion of agenda setting, priming, and framing. Second, we shall highlight the historical rise of news media, how the media industry works, and how government regulates it. Next, we will examine hard news coverage, how the news works, and who listens, including an examination of media effects on institutions in government. The penultimate section will deal with media effects (particularly television) on political campaigns. The remainder of the course will look at new media, including cable television, the Internet, soft news, entertainment television, and social media. Throughout the course, we will discuss and analyze some findings of the scholarly community.

### *Course Goals*

- 1) To develop a critical understanding of media as a key element in the American political system.
- 2) To develop a critical understanding of political events, both current and past.
- 3) To explain and discuss critically the topics presented in this course.

### *Reading*

Iyengar, Shanto. 2023. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*, fifth edition. WW Norton & Co. **(optional)**

Hayes, Danny, and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2021. *News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement*. Cambridge University Press.

### *Course Assignments*

1. Exam 1	20 %
2. Exam 2	20 %
3. Research Slide	20 %
4. Research Paper	25 %
5. Critical Book Review	15 %
6. Class Participation	10 %

## *Course Policies and Procedures*

**Grading:** Grading will follow a standard scale: 90% is an A, 80% is a B, 70% is a C, and 60% is a D. *I do not change grades unless I make a computational error.* Moreover, I do not reveal grades via e-mail or telephone and *there are no opportunities for extra credit*, except those mentioned herein or announced by me in class. I will submit your final grades, which will be visible on my.unt.edu when UNT makes grades official.

If you do poorly on any of the assignments or exams, I advise you to see me as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to seek my help if you need it. Pleading for a higher grade after you complete all assignments will not avail you.

**Communications:** If you have questions about the class, please see me during my office hours or schedule an appointment to see me. Other than the most rudimentary topics, it is much easier to communicate about class in person. Because I do not reveal grades or schedule makeup exams via e-mail you should see me in my office about these issues. If you choose to e-mail me, please specify a class-related subject on the subject line of your e-mail to ensure that I receive the e-mail. If you choose to e-mail me, it is your responsibility to check frequently for my response. I respond to e-mails very quickly, so please e-mail me directly at [Matthew.Eshbaugh-Soha@unt.edu](mailto:Matthew.Eshbaugh-Soha@unt.edu). At times, I may use the announcement feature in Canvas to communicate with the entire class, but I do not check Canvas messages frequently.

**Exams:** The first and second exams will test your understanding of assigned readings and lecture material. Both exams will consist of a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. You must write answers in blue or black ink on the paper provided. As there is no comprehensive final exam for this class, the second exam will test your understanding of all material after the first exam and is scheduled for **December 14 at 8am**.

Make up exams will only be given in light of a university excused absence or at the discretion of the professor. Inform me of your absence before or within 48 hours after the examination date, either in person or by e-mail. I will need specific, written documentation to verify the nature and legitimacy of your absence. You must present this documentation to me, in person, during my office hours (or make an appointment) and before the makeup examination date. At that time, I will determine whether you are eligible to take a makeup exam and we will schedule a time for the exam. Except under unusual and equally verifiable circumstances, you must take the makeup exam before the next class period after the regularly scheduled exam. You will have one hour to complete the makeup exam, which consists of answering *one essay question*.

**Critical Book Review:** You will write a critical book review of *News Hole*. This book review should contain the following: a summary of the book, including the authors' question, the importance of the topic, the authors' findings, and primary conclusions. You should be able to summarize the main points of the book in a concise and clear style. You do not want to go through the book chapter by chapter, summarizing each, but rather offer a general overview, supplementing main points from the book as needed support. In addition, offer an insightful critique of the book, using logic and reason or data to back up your concerns. You might suggest if the authors accomplished what they set out to accomplish or discuss how the book supports or disagrees with class lectures and other readings. The book review should be four pages long (approximately 1,000 words) and follow the assignment

style guidelines listed at the end of the syllabus. It is due on **October 11 at the beginning of class**. We will also discuss this book at length on the review's due date, another opportunity to score class participation points.

**Research Paper:** You write an 8–10-page research paper (approximately 2,000-2,500 words) in which you will analyze the political content of a particular television program through content analysis and other relevant research materials as a baseline for developing and answering a question. You can choose any program (or programs if you wish to write a paper that compares or contrasts different programs) as long as you can tell a story about why it might be politically relevant if it is not an obvious political news program. There are many options to explore. Be creative. Ask if you are unsure what might work for this assignment. **The final draft is due on December 4.**

In your paper, you will need to do the following:

- **Watch a television program and collect evidence:** Since you will have to collect this evidence over the course of the semester, make sure that your research strategy is feasible. Your evidence should come from at least a four-hour sample of a show: For example, eight NBC evening news broadcasts, four episodes of *Hannity*, or two episodes of *Hannity* and four episodes of *The Simpsons*. You must content analyze your program, from which you will collect evidence, and provide support for your argument. **Note:** Analyzing other types of media is encouraged. Consult with me to determine an appropriate and comparable amount of media.
- **Present a question about the show and briefly explain why we should care about the answer to this question:** Your question should center on a research question that can be refuted. Make sure that your question is specific enough to answer effectively.
- **Build evidence to answer your research question:** Make sure that you provide the background information necessary to understand your question and its importance. To do so, draw upon the course readings and refer to other sources (both media stories and scholarly research) that may help you construct an informed and persuasive argument. Class readings may provide a baseline for making your argument, but you will need additional research from scholarly sources to enrich it.
- **Present your conclusion and consider its limitations and implications.** Tell readers why they should care about your conclusion and address potential objections.

In addition to data collection, you will need to develop your research paper within scholarly literature. Thus, you will need to incorporate scholarly articles and books into paper. If you do not know how to conduct an effective search for scholarly materials, you should consult a reference librarian or me. I also require that you include additional secondary data from at least one of the following resources. These do not count as “scholarly sources,” nevertheless.

#### **Online Resources:**

- *Roper Public Opinion Database* ([ropercenter.cornell.edu](http://ropercenter.cornell.edu)). Provides public opinion data. **I strongly encourage you to use this data source in your paper.**
- *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press* ([people-press.org](http://people-press.org)). Survey data about media use and public opinion.
- *Center for Media and Public Affairs* ([www.cmpa.com](http://www.cmpa.com)). Conducts studies of the news and entertainment media. Web page includes press releases and research reports.

- *Project for Excellence in Journalism* ([www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org)). Conducts studies of news and news coverage.
- *Annenberg Public Policy Center* (<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/>)
- *Nexis Uni*. Includes an archive of television news transcripts.
- *Fair* ([www.fair.org](http://www.fair.org)). Website that explores and catalogues evidence of media bias.
- *PolitiFact* ([politiFact.org](http://politiFact.org)). Factual evaluation of political statements and claims.
- *Mediaite* ([mediaite.com](http://mediaite.com)). A daily summary of news and other media matters.

**Content Analysis:** Content analysis is the process of observing and cataloguing information from a form of communication into quantifiable terms. Some examples of content analysis of television programs include: counting the number of political skits on *Saturday Night Live* across three decades to see if *SNL* relies more on political humor now than it used to; defining then counting the number of conservative or liberal comments made by characters on *The Simpsons* to test whether or not the show has a political slant; or timing the top stories on local versus national news as a basis for arguing that national news is more thematic than local news.

**Research Slide:** Create a one-slide PowerPoint that communicates your research project and includes the following:

- The **title** of your paper
- Your **research question**
- A description of your **data** collection
- A **graphical display** (e.g., pie charts, bar charts, graphs, etc.) of some of your analysis. Excel can help you to make fantastic graphs and charts!
- A summary of your **findings and conclusion**

**The research slide is due on November 29 at the beginning of class.**

**Class Participation:** An important component to your intellectual development is being able to discuss intelligently matters pertinent to the presidency and American politics. Therefore, we will incorporate a discussion of current events into most classes. I encourage you to read a quality newspaper, e.g., *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or *Washington Post* or their web counterparts on a regular basis. You may also learn from radio news sources, such as *National Public Radio*, and television news, e.g., *The News Hour*. I will also ask questions periodically throughout each class session. Keep in mind that class participation is worth one-tenth of your grade and it may be the difference between an A and a B or between a B and a C.

**Attendance:** Attendance is expected, but not required for this class. Keep in mind that you must attend class to participate in class, just as *you are responsible for all materials covered in class*. If you miss a lecture, see a classmate for notes. I do not give out my PowerPoint slides. Please do not be late to class, as it is disruptive to not only me, but also your classmates.

## *Course Schedule*

August 21                      Course Introduction

### **NEWS, POLITICS, AND MEDIA EFFECTS**

August 23                      An Introduction to News and Politics  
Read: Iyengar, Chapter 1

August 28-  
September 6                      Media Effects  
Read: Agenda-setting and priming (on Canvas)  
Read: Iyengar, Chapter 8

**September 4                      No Class: Labor Day Holiday**

### **NEWS PRODUCTION AND ITS REGULATION**

September 11                      Television: its Beginnings, Evolution, and Regulation  
Read: Iyengar, Chapter 2

September 13                      The Political Economy of News  
Read: Martin, Gregory J, and Joshua McCrain. 2019. "Local News and National Politics." *American Political Science Review* 113: 372-384.

### **NEWS REPORTING, BIAS, AND CONTENT**

September 18-20                      How Media Cover Politics  
Read: Zaller, John. 2003. "A New Standard of News Quality." *Political Communication* 20: 109-130.  
Bennett, W. Lance 2003. "The Burglar Alarm that just Keeps Ringing." *Political Communication* 20: 131-138,

September 25-27                      News Biases  
Read: Groeling, Tim. 2013. "Media Bias by the Numbers." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 129-151.

October 2-9                      The Audience for News  
Read: Iyengar, Chapter 3

October 11                      Local News Effects and Content  
Read: Hayes and Lawless

**October 11                      Critical Book Review Due**

October 16                      Political Institutions and News Coverage  
Read: Iyengar, Chapter 9

October 18                      The Future of Political News and Exam Review  
Read: Iyengar, Chapter 10

**October 23                      EXAM 1, IN CLASS**

**NEWS MEDIA AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS**

October 25 Media Coverage of Campaigns and Elections  
Read: Iyengar, Chapter 6

**October 30 Paper Work Day**

November 1-6 Advertising and Campaigning through Media  
Read: Fridkin and Kenney. 2011. "Variability in Citizens' Reactions to Different Types of Negative Campaigns." *American Journal of Political Science* 55: 307-325.

November 8-13 Conventions, Debates, and Other Campaign Effects  
Read: Baumgartner and Morris. 2006. "The Daily Show Effect." *American Politics Research* 34: 341-67.

**POST-BROADCAST DEMOCRACY**

November 15 Soft News, the Internet, and Social Media  
Read: Iyengar, Chapter 5  
Read: Feezell, Jessica T. 2018. "Agenda Setting through Social Media The Importance of Incidental News Exposure and Social Filtering in the Digital Age." *Political Research Quarterly* 71: 482 - 494.

**November 20-22 No Class: Thanksgiving Week**

November 27 Media and Polarization  
Read: Prior, Markus. 2013. "Media and Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 101-127.

November 29-  
December 4 Post-Broadcast Democracy  
Read: Prior, Markus. 2005. "News v. Entertainment." *American Journal of Political Science* 49: 577-592.

**November 29 Research Slide Due**

**December 4 Final Paper Due, hardcopy to me before 2p**

December 6 Course Conclusion and Review

**December 14 EXAM 2, 8:00am**

## ***Research Paper Guidelines***

In addition to the aforementioned guidelines, this assignment is an 8 to 10 page paper. Please see “paper guidelines” for spacing and format issues. You must use at least **SIX** scholarly sources to complete this paper. (This means you must cite and incorporate them within the paper.) Scholarly sources are academic works, such as peer-reviewed books or journal articles. Your paper **MUST** include at least **TWO** journal articles from *The American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Political Behavior*, *Communications Research*, or *Political Communication*. Although quality periodicals such as the *National Journal* or *The New York Times* (and the foregoing webpages) may be useful to supplement your research, they do not count toward the six-source minimum. Most other sources, including Wikipedia, are *not* scholarly sources. If you are unsure as to what counts as a scholarly source, ask.

Please use APSA citation style: <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPSA.html>

The first step to writing a good paper is organization. Use an outline. If you know how information fits into your paper before you write, you will find writing to be much easier. Use headings. Headings will allow you to break up a lengthy paper into several smaller papers. This will also make writing easier, especially if you have not yet written an 8 to 10 page paper in your college career.

### **Paper Guidelines:**

1. You are required to submit two version of your book review and research paper. First, upload your paper in Canvas so that we may produce an AI and plagiarism score through Turnitin. Second, bring a hardcopy to class.
2. The paper must be typed and double-spaced in 12-point font (e.g., Times New Roman). Margins must be around 1.25 inches.
3. All papers must include a title page. A title page contains the following information: The title of the assignment, your name, the class, and the date.
4. The title page, references, or notes do not count toward the paper’s page total.
5. Staple each paper in the upper left-hand corner, and number all pages except the title page.
6. ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE AS ASSIGNED AND LATE WORK WILL ONLY BE ACCEPTED WITH PENALTY. If I do not have your paper by the deadline, it is late.

### ***Paper Grading***

I will grade your research paper on the following criteria:

1. Adherence to “paper guidelines,” or paper’s overall presentation (10 points)
2. Paper organization and writing: a well-organized and written paper is a good paper (20 points)
3. References: using **SIX** scholarly sources in your research paper (15 points)
4. Secondary data source: provide data from one of the data sources listed above (5 points)

5. Research: ask a thoughtful question, integrate your sources into your research paper, discuss them accurately, and raise interesting questions (50 points)

An A paper, for example, will follow the paper guidelines almost perfectly; will be well-organized with a clear introduction (tell me what you are going to discuss) and thesis (your research question or topic), body (tell me), and conclusion (tell me again); will be well-written with minimal grammatical and spelling mistakes; and will be researched well, integrating six sources and your data into a coherent, interesting, and clear argument that stays focused on your thesis. You will not receive an A if you rely too heavily on one source, cite less than the minimum sources, do not organize your paper well, or do not write well.

## University Policies and Procedures

**Dropping Courses:** Please link <http://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-registration-guide> for information concerning drops, withdraws, and other administrative information.

**Course Evaluation:** Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) is the student evaluation system for UNT and allows students the ability to confidentially provide constructive feedback to their instructor and department to improve the quality of student experiences in the course. If over 75 percent of the class completes the SPOT, each student will receive one percentage point of extra credit.

**Americans with Disabilities Act Statement:** UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the [ODA website \(https://disability.unt.edu/\)](https://disability.unt.edu/).

**Academic Misconduct:** According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, please visit: <http://abacus.bates.edu/cbb/>

**Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004):** The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.



**Acceptable Student Behavior:** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at [www.unt.edu/csrr](http://www.unt.edu/csrr).

**Emergency Notification & Procedures:** UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

**Retention of Student Records:** Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for the course. It is important that you communicate with the professor and the instructional team prior to being absent, so you, the professor, and the instructional team can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals. Please inform the professor and instructional team if you are unable to attend class meetings because you are ill, in mindfulness of the health and safety of everyone in our community.

**Course Materials and Copyright Statement:** The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By "handouts," I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.