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Time: MW 1:30-4:45
Place: HUM 240

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the study of mass media primarily in form of television and newspapers in contemporary American politics. As the major source of political information, mass media have an enormous potential for influencing American politics, policies, and public preferences. The course covers the three major elements associated with the political information flow, namely the media and the journalists, the audience, and the politicians. The specific topics range from general theoretical approaches to conceptualize the function and role of mass media in a democracy to the current state of empirical media effects' research. While political science is the major focus, the topics will touch related disciplines like communications, sociology, and psychology.

The course consists of three parts, with each of them taking a closer look at one of the three elements mentioned above. Part I starts with the role of mass media in politics in general, the process of news making, and the news coverage. Part II focuses on the media effects on citizens' political attitudes and behavior. This section draws heavily on psychological concepts and empirical studies. And in part III, the role of mass media in political campaigns and elections will be analyzed. While this course will be primarily held in lecture form, you are expected to participate and discuss the concepts and studies you prepare for each session.

Prerequisites

POL 101 or 102 or 103 or 105; POL 201 or any other course satisfying the major's methodology requirement.

Text Books and Course Reader

The books are available at the university bookstore and at Stony Books across 25A near the railroad station. It is recommended that you buy the books early even if a book is required only near the end of the session (e.g. Jamieson book) since the university bookstore tends to return unsold books to the publisher long before the end of the session. A course reader with additional journal articles and book chapters will be made available at the cost of copying in the first session and in the department office.

- Graber, Doris A. 1996. *Mass Media and American Politics*. 5th ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press. (abbreviated as "Graber")
- Ansolabehere, Stephen; Roy Behr, and Shanto Iyengar. 1993. *The Media Game: American Politics in the Television Age*. New York: MacMillan. (abbreviated as "Ansolabehere")
- Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. 1992. *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press. (abbreviated as "Jamieson")
- A course reader with copies of additional readings from academic journals and book chapters.

Examinations, Paper, Grading

The final grade is based on two exams, a written assignment, and class participation with the following weights:

- two exams: 30% each, 60% total;
- one written assignment: 25%;
- participation: 15%.

The exams will ask for short definitions and other short answers. They will cover material from *both* the lecture and the assigned readings. Note that there is not a perfect overlap between these two. There will be no makeup exams for missed exams; instead, the other exam, the paper, and participation will be weighted more heavily.

You are expected to read the assigned chapters and articles before each class meeting and to be prepared to summarize and evaluate them. If this is not the case, I will consider additional motivational incentives like pop quizzes to facilitate your active participation in class.

During the session, an opportunity to participate in Political Science Department research projects might arise. You will be informed about these experiments or surveys in advance and your (voluntary) participation will be counted as extra credit.

Written Assignment

The written assignment can basically take two different forms:

- a critical evaluation of an article related to political communication from an academic journal (theoretical or empirical) not covered by the syllabus;
- a critical evaluation (using theoretical approaches or frameworks discussed in the course) of the campaign strategies of the candidates running for president in 1996 and/or the media coverage of the 1996 presidential election campaign.

Note that a “critical evaluation” goes decidedly beyond a mere summary!

The paper should be 3 to 5 pages long, typed, and double-spaced. While the content of the paper is most important, you should also make sure that you give your paper an adequate structure. In particular, it should start with an introduction, followed by a descriptive and critical discussion in the main part, and end with a conclusion. You are also encouraged to make use of helpful features of modern word processors like spell checkers before you hand in the paper. A proposal of max. one page is due on **August 6**, the final paper is due on **August 18**. Failure to hand in the paper in time will automatically lead to a deduction of up to one full letter grade. Since these due dates tend to attract negative events like magic (from broken cars over computer harddrive and printer failures to sudden and severe illnesses), you should set yourself an earlier, self-imposed deadline to complete these assignments in time and to avoid any of these risks.

If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact on your ability to carry out assigned course work, I would urge that you contact the staff in the Disabled Student Services office (DSS), Room 133, Humanities (phone: 632-6748/TDD). DSS will review your concerns and determine, with you, what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation of disability is confidential.

Some guidelines for reading empirical articles from academic journals

Reading empirical studies from leading academic journals is considerably more challenging than the average textbook (and nearly impossible if you try to do it a few hours before the exam). You are assigned to read several articles of this kind. The following guidelines should help you to approach and understand these articles.

The most important point is to understand the substantive issues. Some articles use complicated mathematical formulas and advanced statistical methods which you can ignore for the most part. You should

focus instead on the substantive discussions by the author(s). The following questions should help you to understand the important points (not all apply to every article):

- 1) What is the general topic of the article, and what do the authors test? (the title and abstract usually do this)
 - 2) If authors give an overview of previous research, what shortcomings and criticism do they point out?
 - 3) What are the particular theories, hypothesis, and questions of the study?
 - 4) What kind of data do they use? (e.g. content analysis, surveys, experiments)
 - 5) What are the major findings?
 - 6) What are the general conclusions?
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COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note: Most sections begin with one or more guiding questions are intended to help you to focus on the important points and to prepare for the class discussions. They do *not* mean, however, that everything not mentioned by the question(s) is not important!

7/14 Introduction

PART I - THE MASS MEDIA: FUNCTION AND ROLE, NEWSMAKING, AND NEWS COVERAGE

7/16 **1a. Mass Media in Theory: Function and Role**

- ⇒ What are the functions of the mass media in a modern democracy?
- 📖 Graber: ch. 1, “Media Power and Government Control.” (pp. 1-32)
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 1, “American Politics in the Age of Television.” (pp. 1-8)

1b. Mass Media in Practice: Institutions and Rules

- ⇒ Are the “fair access” rules for the electronic media successful?
- ⇒ Do the media/journalists have special and protected rights of access to information and to shield their sources?
- ⇒ Can the individual “right to privacy” and the public’s “right to know” reconciled?
- 📖 Graber: ch. 3, “Press Freedom and the Law.” (pp. 58-92)
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 2, “The Rise of Broadcasting.” (pp. 9-37)

7/21 **2a. News Making: Journalists and the Coverage of Political News**

- ⇒ What does Lippmann mean by “news” and “truth”?
- ⇒ How can “objectivity” be defined and applied to news coverage?
- ⇒ What are the major approaches/models of news-making?
- ⇒ What are the factors - internal (e.g. “news values”) and external (e.g. organizational factors) - that influence the news-making process?
- 📖 Lippmann, Walter. 1922. “The Nature of News.” and “News, Truth, and a Conclusion.” (ch. 23/24, *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, pp. 338-365)
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 3, “Getting the News.” (pp. 39-66)
- 📖 Graber: ch. 4, “News Making and News Reporting Routines.” (pp. 93-134)

2b. The Media as Policy Makers: Shaping the Policy Agenda:

- ⇒ What is the difference between “muckraking” and the more recent concept of “public journalism”?
- 📖 Graber: ch. 6, “The Media as Policy Makers.” (pp. 156-187) [skim]

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3a. News from National Institutions: The President and Congress

- ⇒ What are the usual forms for the president and Congress to communicate with or through the media?
- ⇒ Politicians and the media, an “adversarial relationship” or “official journalism”?
- 📖 Graber: ch. 9, “The Struggle for Control: News from the Presidency and Congress” (pp. 269-305)
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 5, “New Styles of Governing.” (pp. 103-126)
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 9, “Public Opinion and the Power to Govern.” (pp. 189-206)
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 10, “The Media as Educator.” and ch. 11, “The Media as Monitor.”(pp. 209-232)

3b. Foreign Affairs Coverage

- ⇒ What are the major characteristics of foreign affairs coverage?
- 📖 Graber: ch. 11, “Foreign Affairs Coverage.” (pp. 339-379)

PART II - THE AUDIENCE: MEDIA INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

7/28

4a. Media Effects’ Research: Historical Overview and Research Methods

- ⇒ What are the two major research methods to study media effects, and what are their respective advantages and shortcomings?
- ⇒ What are the assumptions behind the two classic models of a “one-step flow” and a “two-step flow” of information?
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 6, “The Evolution of ‘Media Effects’ Research.” (pp. 129-138)
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 7, “The Multiple Effects of Television on Public Opinion.” (pp. 139-156) [Note: this chapter provides a concise summary of most topics of the following sessions]

4b. Socialization and Learning (Political Knowledge)

- ⇒ Unequal access to modern technologies of the information society is often feared to create rising information disparities (“knowledge gaps”) in the population. Is this a real problem or overstated?
- 📖 Graber: ch. 7, “Media Impact on Attitudes and Behavior.” (pp. 188-227)

4c. Agenda-Setting (Part I - Aggregate Level)

- ⇒ What are the major problems of early agenda-setting research?
- ⇒ What are the steps of Downs’ issue-attention cycle, and does it make sense?
- ⇒ What is the idea behind the “logistic” curve?
- 📖 Neuman, W. Russell. 1990. "The Threshold of Public Attention." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 54:159-176.

7/30

5. MIDTERM EXAM

8/4

6a. The Cognitive Information Processing Paradigm: Associative Networks, Accessibility, and Considerations**6b. Agenda-Setting (Part II - Individual Level)**

- ⇒ How does the mechanism of agenda-setting work?
- 📖 Iyengar, Shanto; Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. 1982. "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs." *American Political Science Review* 76:848-858.

6c. Priming

- ⇒ What does priming exactly mean? Is it a type of persuasion?
- ⇒ What is “pocketbook” voting, and what is “sociotropic” voting? And how comes the media in?
- 📖 Krosnick, Jon A., and Donald R. Kinder. 1990. "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming." *American Political Science Review* 84:467-512.
- 📖 Mutz, Diana C. 1992. "Mass Media and the Depoliticization of Personal Experience." *American Journal of Political Science* 36:483-508.

8/6

PROPOSAL FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE**7a. Framing**

- ⇒ What does “episodic” and “thematic” news mean? And what are their consequences?
- 📖 Iyengar, Shanto. 1990. “Framing Responsibility for Political Issues: The Case of Poverty.” *Political Behavior* 12:19-40.

7b. Biased Perception: Social Judgment Theory and the “Hostile Media Phenomenon”

- ⇒ What causes biased perceptions?
- ⇒ Who is to blame for the bias: the media or the audience?
- 📖 Vallone, Robert P.; Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper. 1985. "The Hostile Media Phenomenon: Biased Perception and Perceptions of Media Bias in Coverage of the Beirut Massacre." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 49:577-585.

7c. Persuasion: The McGuire-Zaller Model of Attitude Change

- ⇒ What does “political sophistication” (or “political awareness”) mean and why is it important?
- ⇒ What is the logic behind the “reception-acceptance function”?
- 📖 Zaller, John. 1993. “The Converse-McGuire Model of Attitude Change and the Gulf War Opinion Rally.” *Political Communication* 10:369-388.
- 📖 Zaller, John. 1994. “Elite Leadership of Mass Opinion: New Evidence from the Gulf War.” In *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, ed. W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 186-209).

PART III - THE POLITICIANS: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

8/11

8a. Case Study I: The 1992 Clinton Campaign

- 📖 “The War Room,” a documentary by Chris Hegedus and Da Pennebaker (video shown in class)

8b. Election Campaigns: “Media Politics,” Campaign Coverage, and Campaign Effects

- ⇒ What have been the long-term consequences of media and especially television coverage of election campaigns?
- ⇒ What are the general campaign strategies of politicians?
- ⇒ How successful are modern media campaigns?
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 4, “Campaigning on Television.” (pp. 71-102)
- 📖 Ansolabehere: ch. 8, “The Consequences of Political Campaigns.” (pp. 157-188)
- 📖 Graber: ch. 8, “Elections in the Television Age.” (pp. 228-268) [optional]

8c. Campaign Strategies: Attack Campaigning

- ⇒ What does the “meltdown” process mean?
- ⇒ What strategies make attack ads successful?
- ⇒ What are possible strategies to counter attack ads?
- 📖 Jamieson: “Introduction” and ch. 1-4, “Part I: Attack Campaigning.” (pp. 1-120).

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9a. Campaign Strategies, their Coverage in the News, and their Consequences

- ⇒ What are the implications of Ansolabehere et al.’s findings for the “real world”?

- 📖 Jamieson: ch. 5-8, “Part II: Ads and the News” and “Part III: News Coverage of the Campaign” (pp. 123-199).
- 📖 Ansolabehere, Stephen; Shanto Iyengar; Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino. 1994. "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review* 88:829-838.

9b. Case Study II: The 1996 Presidential Campaign

- ⇒ What lessons can be drawn from Clinton and Dole’s campaign strategies?
- 📖 Stengel, Richard, and Eric Pooley. 1996. “Masters of the Message: Inside the High-Tech Machine that Set the Clinton and Dole Polls Apart.” *Time*, November 18, 76-96.

8/18

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE

10a. Televised Debates

- ⇒ How important are televised debates with the candidates, and what is their effect?
- 📖 Trent, Judith S., and Robert V. Friedenberg. 1995. “Debates in Political Campaigns.” (ch. 8, *Political Campaign Information: Principles and Practices*. Westport, CT: Praeger, pp. 209-243).

10b. Media and Democracy: A Final Evaluation

- 📖 Jamieson: ch. 9,10, “Accountability, Engagement, and Democracy” (pp. 203-266)

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11. FINAL EXAM