

# Communication 713: Political Communication

Winter 2011, TR 1:30 – 3:18, 3116 Derby Hall

## Professor

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3026 Derby Hall, TR 3:30 – 4:30 or by appointment

## Course description

This course is an overview of political communication theory and research that emphasizes questions relevant to the health of democracy over those relevant to winning elections, such as how to persuade or mobilize voters.

## Format & participation

Because this is a graduate seminar, class time will be devoted to discussion of the readings instead of a lecture redundant with the readings. All students need to master the readings and come prepared each day with questions, criticisms, and comments.

## Required texts

- Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  - Alternative for cheapskates: Cappella, J. N. & Jamieson K. H. (1996) News frames, political cynicism, and media cynicism, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546, 71-84
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (1987). *News That Matters: Agenda-Setting and Priming in a Television Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
  - Alternative for cheapskates: Iyengar, S., Peters, M. D., & Kinder, D. R. (1982). Experimental demonstrations of the “not-so-minimal” consequences of television news programs. *American Political Science Review*, 76(4), 848-858.
- Zaller, J. (1992): *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - Alternative for cheapskates: Zaller, J., & Feldman, S. (1992). A simple theory of the survey response: Answering questions versus revealing preferences. *American Journal of Political Science*, 36(3), 579-616.
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mutz, D. (2006). *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative Versus Participatory Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## Evaluation

Grades will be based on regular and active participation in class discussion (10%), two class days as a designated discussion leader (10%), five reaction papers (25%), a core literature review assignment (5%), and a final research paper and presentation (50%).

## Discussion leadership

Each student will serve as a discussion leader for one class period during the course of the quarter. Discussion leaders will be responsible for facilitating class discussion about the assigned

readings. Accordingly, discussion leaders should come to class prepared with a set of stimulating questions. Such questions can be about a single reading, how the assigned readings for that day relate to one another, how they relate to previous readings, implications for future research, and social significance. You should also read reaction papers from other students (see below), so that you can prompt them to talk about interesting ideas from their papers.

### **Reaction papers**

You will turn in five short reaction papers during the course of the quarter, each reacting to a single day of readings of your choice. These should be 1-2 pages long and should not summarize the content of the readings. In addition, you should find at least one outside academic publication related to the topic and incorporate it into your reaction, citing this outside publication and reacting to it but again not summarizing its content. Reaction papers are due at 8pm the night before class. Turn them in by emailing them both to me and to the day's discussion leader(s) (see the schedule on Carmen).

### **Core literature review assignment**

In this assignment, you will find 10 academic articles that will form the core of your literature review for your research paper. By the core, I mean cites that help you tell the story that leads up to and motivates your hypotheses. In other words, these are the things you will cite in some detail for some particular reason. There are many such reasons (e.g. motivating your hypotheses, making or failing to make important conceptual distinctions, ways the effects of interest have been implied but not adequately tested in past research, etc.), but the key point is that you're not just summarizing related articles, you're pulling something valuable out of them that you think will help you tell a story in the front end of your paper that leads up to and motivates your hypotheses and research design.

For each article, just say briefly how it's relevant to helping tell your story. This can often be done in a sentence, which is fine, but should for at least a few articles take a paragraph or two. You don't need to provide any connections or transitions between them or worry about how they're organized. At most five of your articles can be from the syllabus. This assignment is worth 5% of your final grade and is due at 10pm on Feb. 4<sup>th</sup>.

### **Research paper**

The major requirement for this course is an original research paper written individually by each student and presented to other seminar participants, worth 55% of your grade. The paper should contain the following sections: (1) brief introduction, (2) literature review, (3) statement of hypothesis or research questions, (4) actual or proposed methods, (5) results or proposed analysis, (6) concluding discussion about what was or will be learned. The methodology may be quantitative or qualitative. The goal of the paper is to contribute, however modestly, to research in political communication. The paper can present findings based on existing and available data sets (e.g., National Election Study, General Social Survey, The Pew Internet and American Life Project, the National Annenberg Election Study, etc.) or can be based on collection of original data.

Some of you may wish to extend projects you have developed elsewhere, collaborate with other students to allow a more ambitious project, or refine ideas toward completion of Master's or Doctoral theses; please consult with me if this is the case. I want this assignment to further your

own research in political communication, so I am open to hearing a good argument about what kind of project would be most useful to you.

You will spend 3 minutes explaining an initial idea for this project *on the second day of class* (see below). Ten-minute final paper presentations will be held during the last two class periods. The final paper is due March 11 by 5:00 P.M. and should be between 15-20 pages of double-spaced text, not including cover, bib, tables, and figures. Do not exceed 25 pages without my permission.

### **Course Policies**

Academic misconduct, including plagiarism, will be penalized through the procedures set up by the university. Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to me and seeking assistance in a timely manner. If you feel you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please also contact the Office for Disability Services at (614) 292-3307 in Room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

## **Schedule**

### **Jan 4: Introduction**

### **Jan 6: Overview of political communication research**

- McLeod, D. M., Kosicki, G. M., and McLeod, J. M. (2002). Resurveying the boundaries of political communication effects. In J. Bryant and D. Zillmann (Eds.). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 215-267). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

*Sharing research paper ideas (in class). Come to class prepared to spend 3 minutes explaining an initial idea for your research paper. You are not committing to this idea. Try to make it something new and original. In your 3 minutes, you should pose a question your paper will attempt to answer, say why it matters (make us care about the answer to your question), and briefly explain a research design you could use to answer your question. The assigned reading above may be useful to guide your thinking about why effects are important, what aspects of media content have been criticized but lack empirical research on their effects on audiences, and what effects have been studied in ways that you think fail to make some conceptual distinction that would clarify whether the effects found were good or bad for democracy.*

### **Jan 11: The current state of the Fourth Estate**

- McChesney, R. W., & Nichols, J. N. (2009). The death and life of great American newspapers. *The Nation*, April 6, 2009.
- Plasser, F. (2005). From hard to soft news standards? How political journalists in different media systems evaluate the shifting quality of news. *Press/Politics*, 10(2), 47-68.
- D'Alessio, D., & Allen, M. (2000). Media bias in presidential elections: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Communication*, 50(4), 133-156.
- Cunningham, B. (2003). Re-thinking objectivity. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 24(2), 24-32.

### **Jan 13: Media trust and trustworthiness**

- Jones, D. A. (2004). Why Americans don't trust the media: A preliminary analysis. *Press/Politics*, 9(2), 60-75.
- Ladd, J. M. (2010). The role of media distrust in partisan voting. *Political Behavior*, 32, 567-585.
- Tsftati, Y. & Cappella, J. N. (2005). Why do people watch news they do not trust? The need for cognition as a moderator in the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Media Psychology*, 7(3), 251-271.

### **Jan 18: Political knowledge and learning**

- Friedman, J. (2006). Democratic competence in normative and positive theory: Neglected implications of "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." *Critical Review*, 18, i-xliii.
- Bartels, L. (1996). Uninformed votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(1), 194-230.
- Eveland, W. P., Shah, D. V., & Kwak, N. (2003). Assessing causality in the cognitive mediation model: A panel study of motivations, information processing, and learning during campaign 2000. *Communication Research*, 30(4), 359-386.

### **Jan 20: Factual misperceptions: causes and consequences**

- Kull, S., Ramsay, C., Subias, S., Lewis, E., & Warf, P. (2003). Misperceptions, the media, and the Iraq war. *PIPA / Knowledge Networks poll report, Oct. 2, 2003*.
- Jerit, J., & Barabas, J. (2006). Bankrupt rhetoric: How misleading information affects knowledge about social security. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70(3), 278-303.
- Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2010). When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions. *Political Behavior*, 32, 303-330.
- Pingree, R. J. (in press). Effects of unresolved factual disputes in the news on epistemic political efficacy. *Journal of Communication*.

### **Jan 25: Agenda setting: effects on prioritization of social problems**

- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (1987). *News That Matters: Agenda-setting and priming in a television age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McCombs, M., Lopez-Escobar, E., & Llamas, J. P. (2000). Setting the agenda of attributes in the 1996 Spanish general election. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 77-92.

### **Jan 27: "Agenda framing:" effects on *understanding* of social problems**

- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Coleman, R., & Thorson, E. (2002). The effects of news stories that put crime and violence into context: Testing the public health model of reporting. *Journal of Health Communication*, 7, 401-425.

### **Feb 1: Framing**

- Druckman, J. N. (2002). The implications of framing effects for citizen competence. *Political Behavior*, 23(3), 225-256.
- Nelson, T. E., Oxley, Z. M., & Clawson, R. A. (1997). Toward a psychology of framing effects. *Political Behavior*, 19(3), 221-246.
- Miller, P. M., & Fagley, N. S. (1991). The effects of framing, problem variations, and providing a rationale on choice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17(5), 517-522.

### **Feb 3: Game framing**

- Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Valentino, N. A., Buhr, T. A., & Beckmann, M. N. (2001). When the frame is the game: Revisiting the impact of "strategic" campaign coverage on citizens' information retention. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(1), 93-112.

### **Feb 8: Media effects on political participation**

- De Vreese, C. (2005). The spiral of cynicism reconsidered. *European Journal of Communication*, 20(3), 283-301.
- Ansolabehere, S., Iyengar, S., Simon, A., and Valentino, N. (1994). Does attack advertising demobilize the electorate? *American Political Science Review*, 88, 829-838.
- Prior, M. (2005) News vs. entertainment: How increasing media choice widens gaps in political knowledge and turnout. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49, 577-592.

### **Feb 10: Cognitive mechanisms of media effects**

- Valentino, N. A. (1999) Crime news and the priming of racial attitudes during evaluations of the president. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 63, 293-320.
- Price, V., and Tewksbury, D. (1996). News values and public opinion: A theoretical account of media priming and framing. In G. Barnett and F. Boster (Eds.) *Progress in communication sciences*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Pub. Corp.
- Miller, J. M. & Krosnick, J. A. (2000) News media impact on the ingredients of presidential evaluations: Politically knowledgeable citizens are guided by a trusted source. *American Journal of Political Science*, 44, 301-315.

### **Feb 15: Cognition and public opinion**

- Zaller, J. (1992): *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lodge, M., McGraw, K., & Stroh, P (1989). An Impression-Driven Model of Candidate Evaluation. *American Political Science Review*, 83 (2), 399-419.

### **Feb 17: Perspectives on public opinion**

- Luskin, Fishkin, & Jowell (2002). Considered opinions: Deliberative polling in Britain. *British Journal of Political Science*, 32, 455-487.
- Bennett, W. L. (1990) Toward a theory of press-state relations in the U.S. *Journal of Communication*, 40, 103-125.
- Edelman, M. J. (1993). Contestable categories and public opinion. *Political Communication*, 10, 231-242.

### **Feb 22: Political discussion in theory**

- Schudson, M. (1997). Why conversation is not the soul of democracy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14, 297-309.
- Fearson, J. (1998). Deliberation as discussion. In J. Elster (Ed.), *Deliberative Democracy* (pp. 44-68). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Eliasoph, N. (1996). Making a fragile public: A talk-centered study of citizenship and power. *Sociological Theory*, 14, 262-289.
- Pingree, R. J. (2007). How messages affect their senders: A more general model of message effects and implications for deliberation. *Communication Theory*, 17, 439-461.

### **Feb 24: Discussion across lines of difference**

- Mutz, D. (2006). *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus participatory democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Price, V., Cappella, J. N., & Nir, L. (2002). Does disagreement contribute to more deliberative opinion? *Political Communication*, 19(1), 95-112

### **Mar 1: Interpersonal and mass influences**

- Mendelsohn, M. (1996). The media and interpersonal communications: The priming of issues, leaders, and party identification. *Journal of Politics*, 58(1), 112-125.
- Druckman, J. N., & Nelson, K. J. (2003). Framing and deliberation: How citizens' conversations limit elite influence. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(4), 729-745.
- Mutz, D. C. (2007) Effects of "In-Your-Face" Television Discourse on Perceptions of a Legitimate Opposition, *American Political Science Review*, 101, 621-635

**Mar 3: Open day**

*Email me to suggest a topic or readings. Some ideas: political socialization, social media, democratic innovations / reforms. We can also return to any of the topics already covered.*

**Mar 8 & 10: Research presentations**