

COMM 4814: Issues and Images in Political Communication

Spring 2013, TR, 9:35-10:55am, 253 Denney Hall

Professor

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Office Hours: specific hours TBA during exam weeks, other times by appointment

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Course Overview

This course compares the role of political communication in a theoretical healthy democracy to the one we actually have. The ideal versus actual communication behavior of journalists, citizens, policy experts, and partisan pundits are explored, with particular attention to how these behaviors affect the quality of decisions made in the overall democratic process. Specific topics include journalism, agenda setting, polarization, sensationalism, cynicism, public engagement, and psychological mechanisms of effects.

Required readings

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings will be available in Carmen. Scheduled readings are subject to change, so refer to the latest version of the syllabus on Carmen, and do not rely on a saved or printed copy of it.

Grade scheme

- 10% In-class activities
- 10% Discussion participation
- 10% Designated discussion leadership day
- 10% Agenda paper (due March 19th)
- 15% Midterm 1
- 20% Midterm 2
- 25% Final exam

In-class activities

Most class periods will include some kind of in-class activity. One purpose of these activities is to check attendance. You will receive full credit for each one you turn in as long as you put in a reasonable effort.

Your lowest 5 activity grades will be dropped. Think of these as your sick days (i.e. don't waste them early on, or you won't have them in case you need them later). Because these drops are automatic, you don't need to tell me when you have a good reason to miss class. The only way you can get more drops is if you have documented reasons to miss 6 or more classes.

Discussion participation

You are expected to have done the readings for the day at least enough to be ready to contribute to in-class discussion. This will be graded for each unit when you hand in your exam, based on how much I remember you saying in that unit.

Discussion leadership

In addition to everyday discussion participation, you will be assigned one particular day during the quarter as a discussion leader for a 30-minute discussion after my lecture about the readings. Remember, this is not a presentation. All you need to do is make sure you do the readings carefully and bring three short questions to pose to the class (and turn in to me at the end of class). These questions should be designed to stimulate open-ended discussion of the topics in the readings. In most cases you will be sharing this responsibility with another student, but you will be graded separately on your own questions.

Agenda paper

This is a 3-4 page, double-spaced research paper in which you will compare two issues in terms of both their news values and their actual importance. A rubric will be posted on Carmen with more details on this paper.

Exams

There will be three non-cumulative exams: two midterms and a final. They will consist of about 60% multiple choice and 40% short essay questions.

Course Policies

1. Academic misconduct, including but not limited to plagiarism, will be penalized through the procedures set up by the university.
2. 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

Readings need to be completed prior to the corresponding class session. Any changes to this tentative schedule will be posted on Carmen. Refer to the latest copy of the syllabus on Carmen – don't save a copy, or you may miss changes!

Jan 8 (Tues): **Introduction, no readings.**

Jan 10 (Thurs): **Democracy as a discussion**

Fearson, J. (1998). Deliberation as discussion.

Jan 15 (Tues): **Spin and substance in our “national discussion”**

Reed, B. (2004). [Bush’s war against wonks](#).

Jan 17 (Thurs): **Effects of incivility**

Mutz, D. C. (2007) Effects of “In-Your-Face” Television Discourse on Perceptions of a Legitimate Opposition

Jan 22 (Tues): **Effects of elite polarization**

Druckman, J. N., Peterson, E., & Slothuus, R. (2013). How elite partisan polarization affects public opinion formation.

Jan 24 (Thurs): **Strategy framing of news**

Cappella, J. N. & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). The Spiral of Cynicism, ch 2.

Jan 29 (Tues): **Strategy framing continued**

Cappella, J. N. & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). The Spiral of Cynicism, ch 1.
deVreese, C., & Elenbaas, M. (2008). Media in the Game of Politics: Effects of Strategic Metacoverage on Political Cynicism.

Jan 31 (Thurs): **Unit 1 wrap up and exam review**

No readings.

Feb 5 (Tues): Midterm 1

Feb 7 (Thurs): **Journalism in crisis**

McChesney, R. W. & Nichols, J. (2009). The death and life of great American newspapers.

Feb 12 (Tues): **Movie: All the President’s Men.**

No readings.

Feb 14 (Thurs): **Movie continued.**

No readings.

Feb 19 (Tues): **Bias and professionalism in newsrooms**

Lee, T. T. (2005). The Liberal Media Myth Revisited. *Read pages 43-47*.
Cunningham, B. (2003). Re-thinking Objectivity.

Feb 21 (Thurs): **Covering factual disputes**

Pingree, R. J. (2011). Effects of unresolved factual disputes in the news on epistemic political efficacy.

Feb 26 (Tues): **News values and sensationalism**

Price, V. and Tewksbury, D. (1997). News values and public opinion. *Read pages 177-179 only (we'll read the rest later).*

Slattery, K., Doremus, M., & Marcus, L. (2001). Shifts in Public Affairs Reporting on the Network Evening News: A Move Toward the Sensational.

Feb 28 (Thurs): **Agenda setting**

Excerpt from Iyengar, S. (1987). *News That Matters.*

Mar 5 (Tues): **Agenda framing**

Excerpt from Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is Anyone Responsible?*

Mar 7 (Thurs): **Agenda cueing and reasoning**

Pingree, R. J. & Stoycheff, E. (2012). Differentiating cueing and reasoning in agenda setting effects.

Mar 19 (Tues): **Unit 2 wrap-up and exam review**

No readings.

Agenda paper due at start of class.

Mar 21 (Thurs): Exam 2

Mar 26 (Tues): **Topic and readings TBA**

Mar 28 (Thurs): **Scientific polling**

Readings TBA

Apr 2 (Tues): **How people really answer survey questions**

Zaller, J., & Feldman, S. (1992). A simple theory of the survey response: Answering questions versus revealing preferences.

Apr 4 (Thurs): **Deliberative polling**

Luskin, R. C., Fishkin, J. S., & Jowell R. (2002). Considered opinions: Deliberative polling in Britain.

Apr 9 (Tues): **Campaign innovations**

[Exley, Z. \(2008\). *The New Organizers: What's Really Behind Obama's Ground game.*](#)

Apr 11 (Thurs): **Citizen Journalism**

Joyce, M. (2007). The citizen journalism web site "OhmyNews" and the 2002 South Korean presidential election.

Apr 16 (Tues): **Case study in democratic innovation: participatory budgeting**

Abers, R. (2006). Porto Alegre and the participatory budget: Civic education, politics, and the possibilities for replication.

Apr 18 (Thurs): Unit 3 wrap-up and exam review

Apr 25 (Thurs): Final exam 10am-11:45am