Course Description

This course examines the role of the news media in the democratic system, the changing nature of that role over time, biases in news coverage, and the influence of media effects on public opinion. There is also a heavy emphasis on current events in this course. Students are expected to monitor the national political news throughout the semester and to find connections between the news and the course reading.

The course has four learning objectives:

- Students will understand the incentives and journalistic norms that shape public affairs reporting, including the influence of the profit motive and norms of newsworthiness on the selection of issues for coverage.
- Students will be able to articulate the role the news media play in a democratic system.
- Students will understand how the rise of new media has influenced mainstream news reporting. They will be able to reflect on the implications of these changes in the news media on citizen knowledge and public polarization.
- Students will be able to discuss different ways to define and measure news slant and media bias.
- Students will know the definition of issue framing and will be able to discuss how news frames influence mass public opinion.

Course Reading


Additional readings as assigned (posted on Canvas).

Expectations And Procedures

This syllabus contains the policies and expectations I have established for this course. Please read the entire syllabus carefully before continuing in this course. These policies and expectations are intended to create a productive learning atmosphere for all students. Unless you are prepared to abide by these policies and expectations, you risk losing the opportunity to participate further in the course.

The standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be by announcement in class or by written or email notice or by changes to this syllabus posted on Moodle.

If I am late in arriving to class, you must wait a full 15 minutes after the start of class before you may leave without being counted absent, or you must follow any written instructions I may give you about my anticipated tardiness.

If you notice an error or problem with the syllabus it is your responsibility to bring it to my attention prior to the due date in question. Otherwise, I will expect you to meet all deadlines listed on the syllabus.

Phones, Laptops, Recording Devices etc.

The use of cell phones, tablets, or other mobile communication devices is disruptive and is therefore prohibited during class. I will allow students to take notes using their laptops, however, if students abuse this privilege, I will ban laptops as well. Recording our class meetings is not permitted unless you have a documented disability that requires such an accommodation.

Disabilities

I am happy to make accommodations for students with disabilities who require them. Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should, 1) contact the UNCC Office of Disability Services and 2) follow the instructions of that office for obtaining accommodations. This should be done during the first week of school. Even if you aren’t sure whether you will require any accommodation, contact the department of disability services and talk with me about your disability at the start of the semester. If the need for accommodation arises and your disability has not been documented, I might not be able help due to university policies regarding the exam schedule, etc.

Academic Honesty

All students are required to read and abide by the Code of Student Academic Integrity. Violations of the Code of Student Academic Integrity, including plagiarism, will result in disciplinary action as provided in the Code. Definitions and examples of plagiarism are set forth in the Code. The Code is available from the Dean of Students Office and online.
You may not give or receive any assistance while taking examinations or quizzes. Students should not work together on assignments unless group work is expressly permitted by the instructor. *All work handed in is expected to be your own.* Ideas and statements from reference materials (including, but not limited to books, articles, and web content) may not be included in student assignments unless they are properly cited. Violations of this policy will be taken very seriously and may result in the student receiving an “F” on the assignment, an “F” in the course, and/or the submission of a report to the Academic Integrity Board.

You can find short, helpful tutorial on citations, plagiarism, and related topics [here](#). Please make use of these resources and if you have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism, ask me BEFORE handing in the assignment. Information included by students in written course work that is based on a source such as a web site, news article, textbook, or any other material must be clearly and completely attributed to the original author. This applies whether or not the student quotes from the source material directly. Failure to do so is a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity.

**Late Work**

You will lose one letter grade for each day you are late handing in an assignment. This starts as soon as you miss the deadline, so make sure you hand things in on time.

**Written Assignments**

All written assignments should be typed and submitted as either a word doc or a PDF. It is the responsibility of each student to make sure they meet this requirement. If a file is submitted in another file format and the instructor is unable to open the document, the submission will be counted as late.

**Course Requirements**

Attendance 10%
Quizzes and Homework 10%
Discussion Board 20%
News Comparison Paper 30%
Final Exam 30%

**Attendance and In-Class Activities**

This course relies heavily on class discussion and in-class activities, which makes attendance vital to student success. For this reason, I will take attendance at the start of each class period. Students get two excused absences for the semester, after which I will deduct 5 points from your attendance grade for each class missed. Students who come late, leave early, or do not participate in activities and discussions during the class period will lose partial credit for the day. The attendance category is worth 10% of your grade for the course.
Reading Quizzes and Homework Assignments

Throughout the semester, I will assign activities and quizzes designed to make sure you are keeping up with and understanding the assigned reading. These activities will include quizzes (both announced and unannounced), and short homework assignments designed to get you to apply concepts from the reading to the real world. Together, these activities will make up 10% of your grade for the course.

Discussion Board

At least four times during the semester (twice before fall break and twice after fall break), you will post to an online discussion board prior to our class meeting. The post should include three discussion questions posed to the class and either, A) A link to an example from the news related to the day’s reading and a discussion of its relevance, or B) A discussion of the relationship between the day’s reading and the reading assigned for a previous class period (perhaps there is a disagreement between authors you wish to weigh in on, a response you think one author might offer to another, etc.). Posts should be 300-500 words long (no longer than 750 words).

Your posts will guide our class discussions, so please read the material carefully and think through the issues it raises before drafting them. The more thought you put into your posts, the more engaging and relevant our class discussions will be.

Each post will count for 5% of your grade in the class, for a total of 20% overall. All posts are due at midnight the day before the relevant class meeting.

You are free to post as many times as you like during the semester. If you would like to post for fun but don’t want the post to be graded (for example, if you want to share a relevant news article but don’t want to write a full post), please indicate that at the top of the submission.

News Comparison Paper

Due Dec 4. For this assignment, you will select three different news sources to watch or read on (the same) three days. One source should be a national newspaper, the second should be a network news cast, and the third should be an online or cable news source. The goal is to compare and contrast the news coverage provide by the different sources on the same days. Your papers should answer the questions outlined below, each of which is related to readings we will complete during the semester. Papers will be graded based on the clarity and thoroughness of your answers to these questions, the strength of the connections made to the assigned reading, the usage of proper citation style, and the quality of the writing. Papers should be seven to ten double-spaced pages long (using 12 point font and one inch margins). We will discuss the papers early in the semester and I will provide a formal grading rubric at that time.

1. Describe the news organizations in terms of their size, ownership and audience. (Answering this question may require some research.)

1 Adapted from Travis Ridout’s Media and Politics Syllabus

4
2. Did the three news organizations emphasize different stories? What was the most prominent story for each? Did one organization cover a story that another completely ignored? What explanation do you have for any differences in emphasis that you found?

3. How did coverage of the same story differ across the organizations? Why might this be?

4. Did you detect any bias in any of the media? What evidence leads you to this conclusion?

5. What types of visual images accompanied the main stories? How did the availability of compelling images affect coverage of issues across sources?

6. How did each news organization cover President Trump? What major differences, if any, did you detect across news organization? What might account for the differences or similarities you identified?

7. In your opinion, which news organization did the best job conveying political information? Why?

Final Exam

A cumulative final exam will be given on Thurs, Dec 13 at 11 am (the exam time assigned by the university).

Tentative Course Timeline

***All readings and assignments are due the day they are listed.***

**August 21:**
Welcome

The role of the media in a democracy

**Aug 23:**

**Aug 28:**

**Aug 30:**
James Campbell, Getting it Wrong, Ch. 7, Watergate, pp. 119-129
Video (in class): All the Presidents Men, part 1
The Changing Landscape: New Media and Fake News:

**Sept 4:**
News Grazers (NG), Chs 1&2

**Sept 6:**
NG, Ch 3

**Sept 11**
NG, Ch 4

**Sept 13**
NG, Ch 5

**Sept 18**
NG, Ch 6
Ubarti, David. 2016. The Real History of Fake News

**Sept 20:**
HW: Complete this short course on fake news [https://firstdraftnews.org/en/education/](https://firstdraftnews.org/en/education/)
Video (in class): All the Presidents Men, part 2

What was the role of Woodward and Bernstein in reporting the Watergate Affair? What obstacles did they have to overcome to follow the story? Should they have relied so much on Deep Throat? Did their work harm any innocent people?

**Sept 25:**
Wrap up and Review

The Importance of Visual Images

**Sept 27:**

**Oct 2:**
Guest Speaker, Travis Dove (Photo journalist)

**Oct 4:**
Meetings with professor about final paper.
***Notes on one comparison due.***

**Oct 9:**
Fall Break
Media Effects

Oct 11

Oct 16:

Oct 18:
Atkinson, Mary Layton. 2017. Combative Politics (CP). Ch 1

Oct 23:
CP, Chs 2

Oct 25
CP, Chs 3 & 5

Oct 30
CP, Ch 6

Nov 1

Race, Sex and Partisanship: Are the News Media Biased?

Nov 6
Cable News: A White Man’s World
Power Sources: On party, gender, race, and class, TV news looks to the most powerful groups.
https://fair.org/extra/power-sources/

Nov 8

Nov 13:

Nov 15:
Bridget Nacross and Oscar Torres-Reyna, Fueling Our Fears Stereotyping, Media Coverage and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans, Ch. 1.

Nov 20:

Nov 22:
Happy Thanksgiving!!
Nov 27:

Nov 29:

Dec 4
Final Exam Review ***News Comparison Paper Due***

Dec 13
Final Exam at 11 am