J395 News Media & Politics

Dr. Regina Lawrence

Spring 2014

Class meetings: Fridays 9 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  CMA 3.128

Office Hours: Thursdays 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. or by appointment

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Course Description: This course examines central controversies, theories, and research questions about the role of the media in politics and governing. Some key questions we will consider are: What are the appropriate functions of mass media in a democracy? What laws and economic imperatives affect the quality of the news citizens get? How do political elites attempt to manage the news, and how does that matter? And how do news routines affect not just the news the public receives, but the ability of political officials to lead? We will also attempt to gain a firmer, more thoughtful grasp on the notion of “media bias”—a concept that is widely invoked but often poorly documented or understood.

The following required books are available at various on-line booksellers and most (marked with #) are available through the UT book store.

- Geoffrey Baym, From Cronkite to Colbert: The Evolution of Broadcast News
- #Timothy Cook, Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution
- #Robert Entman, Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy
- #Robert Entman & Andrew Rojecki, The Black Image in the White Mind
- #Daniel Hallin & Paolo Mancini, Comparing Media Systems
- #James Hamilton, All the News that’s Fit to Sell
- #Kathleen Hall Jamieson & Joseph Cappella, Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment
- #Robert W. McChesney, The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas

In addition, journal articles and book chapters marked with “**” on the course reading schedule below will be available on the Blackboard website for this course.
AUDIENCE FOR THE COURSE: There are no formal prerequisites for this course. No previous specific coursework in political communication is required or expected, though students should have a strong background in political science, mass communication, or journalism.

RATIONALE FOR THE COURSE: 40 years ago, Washington reporter and columnist Douglass Cater published a slim volume he titled *The Fourth Branch of Government*. Cater’s book described a fundamental dynamic of governance: “Publicity is as essential to [the] orderly functioning [of modern American government] as the power to levy taxes and pass laws” (1959: 25). As Cater saw it, in a government operating by separation of powers, journalists play the role of “broker and middleman.” Political actors in turn find it in their interest to make news in order to accomplish their political and policy goals. But Cater also worried that the news values of journalism could come to drive the policy-making process.

Thought-provoking as Cater's argument was, it was largely ignored by political scientists, who in the late 1950s were writing a series of classic books suggesting that American politics was largely played out through bargaining among mobilized elite groups, usually behind closed doors. The journalist was deemed a bit player, and the concern of political actors for the news was thought to be secondary at most. Cater had the last laugh, of course. Nowadays, the news media are well recognized as key players in contemporary American politics (though, as we will discuss, journalists are not always comfortable thinking of themselves as political actors). News coverage has been shown to be crucial in a variety of ways, including setting the public agenda and framing issues, events, and actors in political life. And to a far greater extent than when Cater wrote his book, political actors of all sorts are "going public" in order to win influence and make policy in a fragmented political system.

Understanding how these dynamics play out is only one of our goals in this class. We will focus in particular on theories of press-state relations—that is, theories that attempt to explain and predict how news responds to and shapes the political environment. We will also place the American media/political system into cultural context, understanding how it is different than virtually any other system in the developed world, and how the particular economic and legal underpinnings of the American media shape the kinds of news journalists routinely produce and therefore the information American citizens most readily receive. A final goal for this class is to think critically about how political journalism functions today, the considerable challenges it faces in the near future, and how political journalism and political communication might be made more democratically robust.

Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, students should be able to demonstrate:

1. Familiarity with a broad body of literature on the news media and governance.
2. Ability to think analytically about the dynamics and problems of media and governance.
3. Experience conducting original research on topics related to media and governance.
4. Ability to thoughtfully apply theories and data presented in the class to course assignments.
5. An improved ability to write clearly and engagingly.

Professional Values & Competencies Addressed

Engage in research and critical evaluation. Think creatively and analytically. Apply theories in presenting information. Write clearly and accurately.
Course Policies

Citation and academic honesty: Plagiarism is defined to include any unattributed use of another's work and/or submitting others’ work as one's own. Most of the work you will do for this class will require you to deal closely with books and articles assigned for this class; some projects may require you to do additional research. In either case, the rule of thumb is this: If you use material from a source (either one assigned from this class or something you’ve retrieved through outside research), you must cite it. I will not require a particular citation style (e.g. MLA vs. another citation style; parenthetical citations vs. footnotes). Instead, I will simply require that whatever style you use, you clearly describe the original source, including the page number, if applicable.

University Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty: Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information please visit the Student Judicial Services Web site: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs.

Use of IT in class: Use of cell phones is not allowed in my classroom. Laptops are allowed, even encouraged, but I will revoke that privilege if it becomes a distraction rather than an enhancement of our learning environment.

Use of Blackboard: In this class I use Blackboard--a Web-based course management system with password-protected access to distribute course materials, to make course announcements, to post grades, and to submit assignments. You can find support in using Blackboard at the ITS Help Desk (see http://www.utexas.edu/its/helpdesk/).

Use of E-mail for University Correspondence with Students: All students should become familiar with the University’s official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student’s responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html.

Students with disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).

University of Texas Honor Code: The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

University policy on holy days: A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete assigned work.
The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six. The University may not permit an undergraduate student a total of more than six dropped courses, including any course a transfer student has dropped at another institution of higher education, unless the student shows good cause for dropping more than that number.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (“BCAL”): If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual’s behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-505 or visit http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal.

Resources for Learning & Life at UT Austin: The University of Texas has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning. You are particularly encouraged to use the Learning Skills Center on campus for help on writing assignments. Also, the PCL reference librarians can assist you with online news retrieval and other information finding tasks.

The UT Learning Center: http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/
Undergraduate Writing Center: http://uwc.utexas.edu/
Counseling & Mental Health Center: http://cmhc.utexas.edu/
Career Exploration Center: http://www.utexas.edu/student/careercenter/
Student Emergency Services: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/
Safety issues: http://www.utexas.edu/safety/terms/

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: The course will meet once a week. Our meetings will include both lecture and discussion of readings. If we are to have robust and well-informed participation in class discussion, all the reading for a particular class should be finished before that meeting, and students must make every effort to attend each meeting. Absences under any circumstances other than those actuated by documented health or personal emergencies adversely affect the participation portion of your grade.

Course Assignments

There are several components of your final grade in this course:

1) Class discussion papers: Three times during the semester you will write a brief analytical response to the week’s readings, to be submitted to me via email at regina.lawrence@austin.utexas.edu. These essays should be approximately 4 pages in length. Each paper should answer one of the following sets of questions:

   a. What tools (concepts, theories, or questions) do this week’s readings furnish for us as scholars of the media and politics? If more than one author is assigned for
this week, are there any noteworthy disagreements among the authors, or do they point to the same conclusions?

b. What practical lessons for real-world communication can be gleaned from these readings? How do this week’s readings shed light on current affairs involving the media and politics? If more than one author is assigned for this week, would the authors come to the same or different conclusions?

Weekly discussion papers will be evaluated based upon their concision and clarity, demonstrated understanding of the readings, and on the quality of the points and questions you raise.

Each week, paper authors will be asked to initiate class discussion by raising questions related to the week’s readings. A sign-up sheet will be handed out on the first day of class.

2. Final paper. Students may choose one of two formats for their final paper. Students on an academic track are encouraged to write an original research paper or an in-depth literature review (approximately 15-20 pages) examining a topic related to media and politics/governance. Students on a professional track are encouraged to write an original analysis that critiques media practice and offers proposals for improvement. In either case, this paper should explore the theories and concepts in our readings and extend them to new situations and cases -- at any level of government or in international politics or in other political systems outside the United States. And in either case, students must submit a 1 – 2 page prospectus describing their intended final paper project by Friday February 22nd. We will devote the last class meeting to brief presentations on your final paper projects. A selected list of additional readings immediately follows our course reading schedule below, which can point you toward additional literature useful to your final paper.

Grades are calculated as follows:

- Weekly Papers (cumulative) -- 35%
- Final paper -- 35%
- Final Paper Presentation – 10%
- Classroom participation -- 20%

Late work/missed assignments: Some work cannot be late because the class meeting for that day depends on your contribution. Thus, on the weeks you have signed up to write about the readings, you must also be prepared to initiate some class discussion on the readings. In general, you will lose one letter grade if you fail to hand an assignment in when due (e.g. a B paper will automatically become a C paper), and another grade increment for each day after that. No work will be accepted more than three days late. Please note that for the final paper, late papers will not be accepted except in cases of doctor-certified illness or documented family emergency. Please plan your schedule accordingly.
Course Reading Schedule

Note: Articles and chapters marked with asterisks (**) are available on the Blackboard site.

Section #1: Introduction to the Study of News and/as Politics

Week #1 (1/18)

Course Introduction & Overview; The News Media as a Political Institution

** Lawrence, “Media and Politics”


**The Economist, “Political Science and the Boys On the Bus”

Section #2: Structural & Cultural Determinants of News

Week #2 (1/25)

Culture & History: American Media & Government in Comparative Perspective

Hallin & Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, chapters 1 – 4 and 7 – 9

**Katrin Voltmer, “How Far Can Media Systems Travel?”, from *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, ed. Hallin & Mancini

Week #3 (2/1)

Legal Structure of the US Media; Challenging Contemporary Understandings of the First Amendment; Current Practice and Future of Press Freedom

Cook, *Governing with the News*, chapter 8

**Lawrence (ed.), *Freeing the Presses: The First Amendment in Action*, chapters by Clark, Schauer, Schudson, Lawrence, Bennett, Owen, and Stein

Week #4 (2/8): Media Economics and News Quality

McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*

[READER’S Choice: Read chapters 1-3 and 5, then choose 3 or 4 of the other chapters that interest you]
Hamilton, *All the News that’s Fit to Sell*, chapters 1, 3 – 7, and 9


Week #5 (2/15) Race and Gender in Political News

Robert Entman & Andrew Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind*

**Lawrence & Rose, *Hillary Clinton’s Race for the White House*, chapters 1, 3, & 6

Section #3: Theories of News & Politics

Week #6 (2/22) [Final paper prospectus due today]

The Theory of Indexing

**Bennett, “Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations”**

**Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, *When the Press Fails*, Introduction & chapters 1 - 3, 5 & 6**


Week #7 (3/1): Press-Government Relations and US Foreign Policy

Robert Entman, *Projections of Power*

Week #8 (3/8): Beyond Indexing: Unexpected Events, Active Journalists, and Other Theoretical Vistas


**Lawrence, “Defining Events: Problem Definition in the Media Arena,” from Hart & Sparrow, *Politics, Discourse, and American Society***

Section #4: Political Information in a Rapidly Changing Media Environment

Week #9 (3/22)

Technological Transformations/New Media and Democracy

Geoffrey Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert: The Evolution of Broadcast News*


**Davis, *Typing Politics: The Role of Blogs in American Politics*, Introduction & chapters 1 – 3, 5 & 6

**Lawrence, “Campaign News in the Time of Twitter: An Observational Study”

Week #10 (3/29)

Partisan Media Bias and Political Polarization

Jamieson & Cappella, *Echo Chamber*


Section #5: Governing With the News in the New Media Age

Week #11 (4/5)

News and Politics in a Fragmented Media Environment

Cook, *Governing with the News*, introduction and chapters 4-7

**Williams & Delli Carpini, *After Broadcast News: Media Regimes, Democracy, and the New Information Environment*, chapters 1, 2, 4, & 7

[NO CLASS 3/15: Spring Break]
Week #12 (4/12)

Political Communication Strategies, Media Responses, and the Quality of the Information Environment

**Stephen Farnsworth, “The Many Channels of Presidential Spin” and “Modern Media Channels: Presidents and Presidential Candidates Spin the New Media,” from Spinner In Chief: How Presidents Sell Their Policies and Themselves.**

**Stephanie Burkhalter, “Losing the Narrative”**

**Paul Starr, “Governing in the Age of FOX News,” The Atlantic**


Week #13 (4/19): Guest lecture/ ISOJ

Section #6: The Future of Political Journalism

Week #14 (4/26)

**In the Name of Democracy: Political Communication Research and Practice in a Polarized Media Environment** [hard copies provided]


**David Wessel, ’Can Newspaper Journalism Survive Blogs, Fox News, and Karl Rove?’” [or you can listen to his lecture in iTunes]**

**Trudy Lieberman, “An Rx for Reporting,” Columbia Journalism Review**

**Lloyd Grove, “The Death of the White House Press Corps,” The Daily Beast**

Week #15 (5/3)

Student Presentations of Research Projects & Synthesis/Conclusion of Course
RECOMMENDED READINGS on selected topics in news media and governance:

Journalists as Political Actors/The News Media as a Political Institution


Journalistic Norms and Routines and the Precursors of Indexing Theory


Media Economics


**Media Bias and Selective Exposure**


**New Media**


**Press-State Relations, Governing With the News, Indexing and Beyond**


