

POLS 317: Media and Politics

**Washington State University, Spring 2014
MWF, 10:10-11 a.m., Todd 311**

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Introduction

The news media are sometimes called the fourth branch of government—and for good reason. Much of our exposure to politics comes not from direct experience but from mediated stories. This course is designed to help you think about this relationship between the news media and politics. We will explore how news organizations decide what is news, how they report it, how those reports have an impact on viewers or readers, and ultimately, the political system.

Readings

There are two books available for purchase:

Iyengar, Shanto. 2011. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*, 2nd edition. W.W. Norton & Company.

Ridout, Travis N., ed. 2012. *New Directions in Media and Politics*. Routledge.

I also strongly urge you to read a newspaper daily. With luck, free copies of the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Spokesman-Review* will be available again this semester at various places around campus.

Evaluation

Your final grade in this course will depend on your success in four areas:

Midterm Examination – Monday, March 10 & Wednesday, March 12 (300 points)

Long Assignment - Due Friday, April 4, 5 p.m. (250 points)

Final Examination – Tuesday, May 6, 8-10 a.m. (300 points)

Three Short Assignments - various due dates (50 points each)

Exams. The midterm and final exams will consist of three sections: the definition of key terms, short answers and short essays.

Long Assignment: You will write a 6-9 page paper comparing and contrasting news content across organizations.

Choose three days (the same three days for all sources) on which to watch one national television newscast (e.g., NBC Nightly News, the News Hour on PBS), read one major U.S. newspaper (e.g., *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*) and read one international English-language newspaper. Some possibilities in the last category are the *Globe and Mail* from Canada (www.globeandmail.com), the *Guardian* from the U.K. (www.guardian.co.uk), the *Times* from the U.K. (www.thetimes.co.uk), the *Jerusalem Post* from Israel (www.jpost.com), the *Hindustan Times* from India (www.hindustantimes.com) and the *Sydney Morning Herald* from Australia (<http://www.smh.com.au/>). You are not, however, limited to these suggestions.

Answer the following questions in your analysis:

- Describe the three news organizations in terms of their size, ownership and audience.

Answering this question may require some library research.

- 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?

- How did coverage of the same story differ across the organizations? Was the topic framed differently? Why might this be?

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

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

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

Be sure that you relate your discussion to the materials that we have read and discussed in class, and cite all sources using a generally accepted standard of citation. And be sure to provide an introduction that identifies the issue your paper addresses and states your objectives. I will grade your assignment using several criteria, including the extent to which your paper:

1. Identifies, summarizes, and defines the issue or problem at hand
2. Clearly states purposes, objectives, or hypotheses.
3. Presents observations and results in a complete, logical and clear fashion.
4. Assesses, discusses, and reconciles the supporting data/evidence acquired from the exercise in relation to the existing literature.
5. Identifies conclusions, implications and consequences.
6. Effectively organizes and articulates information to promote understanding and communicate significance of the issue or problem.

DUE FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 5 p.m.

Short Assignments. You will complete 3 of the following 5 assignments. Each should be 2-3 pages long (double spaced).

1. Choose a country other than the U.S. and investigate the nature of its media system. Who owns the country's newspapers and radio stations? How many are there? What types of stories do these outlets carry? How much control does the government have over the content of the news media? In general, does the media system of the country you chose seem to serve its citizens well? DUE JANUARY 29, 5 p.m.

2. Visit the websites of two media watchdog organizations, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (www.fair.org) and the Media Research Center (www.mrc.org). Discuss two or three news reports that the organizations criticize. Is the criticism fair? Why or why not? Do you have any criticisms of the watchdog groups? DUE FEBRUARY 5, 5 p.m.

3. Find a recent political advertisement on-line. The Political Communications Lab at Stanford has a large repository: <http://pcl.stanford.edu/campaigns/index.html>, and my website has other links to political ads. Describe the ad, including the candidates mentioned. How would you assess its accuracy and fairness? Do you think it is effective? Why? DUE MARCH 5, 5 p.m.

4. Access the White House website (www.whitehouse.gov) and review the proceedings from a recent press gaggle or briefing. What types of issues are raised by reporters? What types of information did the administration provide? What is your assessment of the quality of the questions reporters are asking and the quality of information that is being given to them? DUE APRIL 9, 5 p.m.

5. Interview several friends or family members, asking them what they like or dislike about President Obama and/or another contemporary political figure such as the governor of or a U.S. Senator from your state. Do they mention issues in their discussion of the political figure? Are they newsworthy issues? How did your interviewees receive their information about the politician? How large was the role of the news media as a source? DUE APRIL 16, 5 p.m.

Grading scale.

A:	930-1000
A-:	900-929
B+:	870-899
B:	830-869
B-:	800-829
C+:	770-799
C:	730-769
C-:	700-729
D+:	670-699
D:	600-669
F:	0-599

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Student Learning Outcomes At the end of this course, students should be able to:	Course Topics/Dates The following topic(s)/dates(s) will address this outcome:	Evaluation of Outcome: This outcome will be evaluated primarily by:
Explain and evaluate the role of the news media in the U.S.	History, Ownership and Media Regulation; Media and Election Campaigns	Midterm examination
Understand and explain the factors influencing the content of the media	Making the News	Short assignment 2, Midterm examination
Evaluate and critique various media systems around the globe	History, Ownership and Media Regulation; Global Media and Foreign Policy	Short assignment 1, Long Assignment
Analyze the interaction of the news media and politicians/campaigners	Media and Election Campaigns	Short assignment 4, Midterm examination
Understand and explain the effects of the news media on the public	The Media and Public Opinion, Media and Campaign Effects, Consequences of Going Public	Short assignment 3, Short assignment 5, Final examination
Evaluate research using scientific methods	throughout course	Short assignments, Midterm examination, Final examination

Other information

If there are things I talk about in class that you do not understand, do not hesitate to talk to me about them. I am here to help you learn the course material. And if there are other matters that you think should be brought to my attention, let me know.

ATTENDANCE. Your attendance in class does not factor directly into your grade. That said, students who attend class regularly typically do much better on exams and assignments than students who do not.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES. The use of cell phones, smart phones, or other mobile communication devices is disruptive, and is therefore **prohibited** during class. All such devices must be turned off. Those using such devices must leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.

USE OF LAPTOPS/TABLETS. Students are permitted to use computers during class for note-taking only. Those using computers during class for other purposes must leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period. I reserve the right to ban the use of laptops/tablets entirely if the use of such devices interferes with the learning environment.

MAKE-UP EXAMS. I will give make-up exams only in extraordinary circumstances. These are limited to 1) absences due to membership in an official university group or athletic team that will be out of town on the day of the exam 2) serious illness or injury and 3) family emergencies. Students who will miss an exam due to membership in an official university group must notify me at least FIVE days in advance, and I will have you take the exam before you leave town.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS. Assignments must be at my office by 5 p.m. on the due date or they will be considered late. For each day an assignment is late, including weekends, I will subtract 10 percent of the assignment's total point value from your score. I prefer to receive hard copies of assignments in my office, but if you are turning in a late assignment, please also email me an electronic copy so I know exactly when it was submitted.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. Academic integrity will be strongly enforced in this course. Any student caught cheating on any assignment will **FAIL THE COURSE** and will be reported to the Office Student Standards and Accountability. Cheating is defined in the Standards for Student Conduct WAC 504-26-010 (3). It is strongly suggested that you read and understand these definitions.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION. Students with Disabilities: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center (Washington Building 217; 509-335-3417) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the Access Center. For more information contact a Disability Specialist: 509-335-3417, <http://accesscenter.wsu.edu>, Access.Center@wsu.edu.

SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PLAN. Washington State University is committed to enhancing the safety of the students, faculty, staff, and visitors. It is highly recommended that you review the Campus Safety Plan (<http://safetyplan.wsu.edu/>) and visit the Office of Emergency Management web site (<http://oem.wsu.edu/>) for a comprehensive listing of university policies, procedures, statistics, and information related to campus safety, emergency management, and the health and welfare of the campus community.

ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION. Please provide me with hard (paper) copies of all assignments.

Course Outline

Introduction (Jan 13)

Iyengar 1

History, Ownership and Media Regulation (Jan 15, 17, 22, 24)

Iyengar 2, Ridout 2 & 3

Making the News (Jan 27, 29)

Iyengar 3, Ridout 4

Global Media and Foreign Policy (Jan 31, Feb 3, 5, 7)

Iyengar 4, Ridout 5

The New Media (Feb 10, 12, 14)

Iyengar 5, Ridout 6 & 13

Media and Election Campaigns (Feb 19, 21, 24, 26, 28, Mar 3, 5)

Iyengar 6, Ridout 7, 8 & 9

CATCH-UP DAY/MIDTERM EXAM REVIEW (Mar 7)

MIDTERM EXAM (Mar 10, 12)

Governing Through the Media (Mar 14, 24, 26, 28, 31)

Iyengar 7, Ridout 10, 11

The Media and Public Opinion (Apr 2, 4, 7, 9, 11)

Iyengar 8, Ridout 12

Media and Campaign Effects (Apr 14, 16, 21)

Iyengar 9

Consequences of Going Public (Apr 23, 25)

Iyengar 10

Future of the News Media (Apr 28, 30)

Iyengar 11, Ridout 14

CATCH-UP DAY/FINAL EXAM REVIEW (May 2)

FINAL EXAM (Tuesday, May 6, 8-10 a.m.)