

**American Politics and the Mass Media**  
**Political Science 386.090, Tues., 5:30-8:30 p.m., Maybank 207**  
Fall 2006, College of Charleston

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This course “describes the mass media’s political contents, and analyzes and explains the consequences” they have had and have for American political systems and our form of democracy (Paletz, 1999). We will cover the usual subjects: the interactions between mass media contents and formats and elections, branches of government and governmental actions. We will concentrate on the U.S. news media and their dominate forms, and explore questions about media effects.

**Required Texts:**

Graber, Doris. *Mass Media and American Politics*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition. CQ Press, 2006. ISBN: 1-56802-917-9  
Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. *Everything You Think You Know About Politics...And Why You’re Wrong*. Basic Books, 2000. ISBN: 0-465-03627-9  
West, Darrell. *Air Wars: Television Advertising in Election Campaigns, 1952-2004*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. CQ Press, 2006. ISBN: 1-56802-933-0  
*New York Times*, Monday-Friday subscription. Available through the College of Charleston bookstore.

Class Readings available only through E-Reserves, Addlestone Library. **Password = polmedia**

**Course Objectives:**

- To encourage critical assessment of the mass media’s role as a political institution in the American context
- To learn the historical and contemporary social mechanisms that underlie the interactions of the American mass media and American political system
- To learn that language and images channeled through mass media are means of public engagement or public disengagement
- To understand the dynamics of interdisciplinary studies
- To become aware of the history of the subfield of political communication

**Skill Objectives:**

From *Critical Thinking Cognitive Skills and Sub-skills*, The California Academic Press, Milbrae, CA: 1997.

- Interpretation – Categorization, Decoding Sentences, Clarifying Meaning
- Analysis – Examining Ideas, Identifying Arguments, Analyzing Arguments
- Evaluation – Assessing Claims, Assessing Arguments
- Inference – Querying Evidence, Conjecturing Alternatives, Drawing Conclusions
- Self-Regulation – Self Examination, Self Correction

Paletz, David L. (2004) *The Media in American Politics: Contents and Consequences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

**Honor Code and Academic Integrity**

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved.

Incidents where the instructor determines the student's actions are clearly related more to a misunderstanding will be handled by the student's instructor. A written explanation designed to help prevent the student from repeating the error in the future will be given to the student by his/her instructor. The explanation, submitted by form and signed by both the instructor and the student will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and placed in the student's file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the X to be expunged. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration--working together without permission-- is a form of cheating. Unless an instructor specifies that students can work together on an assignment and/or test, no collaboration is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (such as a PDA), copying from others' exams, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance.

Research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the professor.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the *Student Handbook* at [http://www.cofc.edu/studentaffairs/general\\_info/studenthandbook.html](http://www.cofc.edu/studentaffairs/general_info/studenthandbook.html).

### **Students with Disabilities**

If there is a student in this class who has a documented disability and has been approved to receive accommodations through SNAP Services, please feel free to come and discuss this with me during my office hours. The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations should notify their professors as quickly as possible.

### **Class Participation and Attendance**

You will be expected to contribute to class discussions and collaborative learning groups. Experiences in your other classes, your life, and through reading will be an important ingredient of the learning process in this course. A good deal of the success of the class and your perception of excitement depends on student involvement and open-minded and tolerant exchange. The expectation is that you will be prepared to discuss or be quizzed on the reading on the date under which you see the reading.

Your attendance is important. You will not be penalized for **one** unexcused absence. More than one unexcused absence will adversely affect your final grade. For excused absences take the necessary documentation to 67 George Street, office of the Associate Dean of Students. Do not bring it to the professor.

**The instructor reserves the right to change any aspect of this course without prior notification or consultation with the class.**

### **White House Media Simulation (Due either Oct. 31, Nov. 14 or Nov. 21)**

Each student will assume a role and participate in a simulation project based on the text CQ's *White House Media Simulation: Government in Action* by Julie Dolan and Marni Ezra, published in 2002. There will be more than one student playing the same role.

The roles: President of the United States, Director of White House Communications, Press Secretary, Deputy Press Secretaries, Print Journalists, Electronic Journalists.

The responsibilities: “Learn about the role or actual person you will play; Familiarize yourself with the policy issues under consideration; Keep up-to-date with current events; Research the background and policy positions of the current administration.” The simulation entails three events: a White House Rose Garden speech followed by a press conference; the early morning “gaggle” in the press secretary’s office and the afternoon press briefing.

Each student will be graded across distinct components of the simulation: quality of the research about your role; quality of the research about the issues within the simulation; quality and amount of collaboration with others; quality of your performance in the role selected. All students must compile, organize, analyze and turn in the materials they research for this simulation.

The entire class will vote on the two issues to be the basis of the simulation for each group. The voting rules will be discussed in class.

**Paper (Due. Nov. 28)**

Students will write a 5-page paper for this class. The paper will have three components: 1) designing and posing a question arising from one or more class readings, 2) justifying the question (why it is an important question), and 3) answering the question. All outside materials used in answering the question must be referenced on a works cited page and the first page of each item attached to the paper. Sample questions will be discussed in class.

**Grading:**

**Due Date:**

Attendance	10%	
Writing Exercise	05%	August 22
Reading Exercise	05%	Sept 12
In-class quiz	05%	Sept 26
Mid-term Test	15%	Oct 10
Simulation materials	15%	Oct 31 or later
Simulation performance	10%	Oct 31 or later
Paper	15%	Nov 28
Final	20%	Dec. 8, Friday, 4-7 pm

**Grade Scale**

100-94%	A
93-90	A-
89-87%	B+
86-83%	B
82-80%	B-
79-77%	C+
76-73%	C
72-70%	C-
69-67%	D+
66-63%	D
62-60%	D-
59-	F

**Course Calendar**

**Aug 22** – Introduction to Course –  
 Introducing the White House Media Simulation Project  
 Political Contents in the Media  
 Development of Political Communication as a subfield of study  
**In-class writing exercise**

**Aug 29 –**

Historical development of the Media-Government Relationship

Reading:

Graber, chap. 1; Jamieson, chap. 24

Class discussion on Postman chapter

Electronic Reserves

Neil Postman, (1984) “Reach Out and Elect Someone” in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, pp. 125-141.

**Sept 5 –**

Ownership, Regulation and Guidance of Media

Reading:

Graber, chap. 2

Electronic Reserves

Ben Bagdikian (1997) “The US Media: Supermarket or Assembly Line?” in Shanto Iyengar and Richard Reeves, *Do the Media Govern?*

Ken Auletta, (1987) “Three Blind Mice.” In *Do the Media Govern?*

Julie Dolan and Marni Ezra, (2002) *CQ’s White House Media Simulation*, chaps. 1 and 2

**Sept 12 —**

Press Freedom and the Law

Reading:

Graber, chap. 3

Finalization of role assignment for the simulation

**Reading Exercise**

**Sept 19 –**

News Making and News Reporting Routines

What Political Journalists Do

Reading:

Graber, chap. 4

Jamieson, chaps. 25-26

Class vote on two issues/per group to use for the simulation

**Sept 26 –**

Reporting Extraordinary Events

Reading:

Graber, chap. 5

**In-class Quiz on Reading**

**Oct 3**

Media and Policy Makers

Reading:

Graber, chap. 6

Jamieson, chaps. 17-23

Electronic Reserves

F. Christopher Arterton, (1978) “Campaign Organizations Confront the Media-Political Environment,” and Donald Matthews, “Winnowing:” The News Media and the 1976 Presidential Nominations” in James

David Barber, *Race for the Presidency*.

*Last day for students to withdraw from class with a grade of “W”*

**Oct 10**

Reading:  
West, chaps. 1-5

**In- class test**

Guest presenters

**Oct 19 –**

Media Influence on Attitudes and Behavior  
Multiple effects on Public Opinion

Reading:  
Graber, chap. 7  
Jamieson, chaps. 1-9

Electronic Reserves

James David Barber (1978) “Characters in the Campaign: The Scientific Question,” in *Race for the Presidency*.

*Mid-term grades available to students via CougarTrail*

**Oct 24 –**

Elections in the Internet Age

Reading:  
West, chaps. 6-10

Graber, chap. 8; Jamieson, chap. 27 and Conclusion

**Oct 31**

News from the Presidency and Congress

Reading:

Graber, chap. 9

Elaine Povich, (1996) *Partners & Adversaries: The Contentious Connection Between Congress & the Media*. Text will be distributed in class. Students will be assigned to read specific sections.

**Simulation**

**Nov 14 –**

Covering the Justice System and State and Local News

Reading:

Graber, chap. 10

**Simulation**

**Nov 21 –**

Foreign Affairs Coverage

Reading:

Graber, chap. 11

**Simulation**

**Class discussion on Povich**

*Class evaluations*

**Nov 28 –**

Trends in Media Policy

Reading:

Graber, chap. 12

**Paper due**