

COMM/POSC 340
Politics and the Media

Spring 2021

ONLINE MWF 11:15 am – 12:05 pm

Instructor: Dr. Dannagal Young

Course Readings all Available on Canvas for FREE download

- (Perloff, R.) *The Dynamics of Political Communication, 3rd edition* (2021)
- (Young, D. G.) *Irony and Outrage: The Polarized Landscape of Rage, Fear, and Laughter in the U.S.*, Oxford University Press.
- Readings as assigned on Canvas (see syllabus for readings) including news and select news articles (we'll discuss this in class)

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to examine the intersecting roles of political actors, the media, and citizens. We will examine in depth how politicians use the news media to get their messages to citizens; how journalists interpret this information and provide it to news audiences; and how citizens receive and make sense of this information. There will be a focus on digital technologies, nontraditional media; public opinion; and how political psychology interacts with all of the above.

THE NEWS!

All students are expected to keep up with the news and be ready to evaluate it through the lens of the material presented in lectures and in readings.

Some sources to consider making a part of your daily (or weekly) news diet:

- *New York Times*
- *Washington Post*
- *Wall Street Journal*
- *Axios.com*
- *National Public Radio*

If you like *listening* to news, you might enjoy:

- *The New York Times DAILY* podcast
- *NPR's brief Up First* podcast
- *AP Headline News* Podcast

At the conclusion of this course, you should be able to:

- Explain the role of traditional and nontraditional media in the American political system.
- Explain how organizational constraints and professional norms affect how journalists choose and report political news.
- Describe the communication strategies that politicians and political candidates use to manage media coverage.
- Understand several theories of media effects and apply them to media coverage of politics.
- Define and critically examine claims of bias in news media coverage of politics.
- Discuss and evaluate the use of language and symbolism in political discourse.
- Understand the ways citizens interpret political events and news.
- Understand how digital technologies, political polarization, and social identity have contributed to mis and disinformation in the political environment.
- Evaluate the role of technology in politics and political campaigns.
- Understand how emotions and perceptions can modify political attitudes and behavior.
- Critically evaluate messages from candidates, politicians, interest groups, and media.

Preamble

- A course syllabus is one of the most important documents you will read for *any* course. It is a contract in the works between you and your professor. Use this document to identify whether the course requirements match your abilities and schedule this semester. If they do not, you may wish to drop the class or talk to me if you have concerns.
- *“Media and politics? What if I don't know much about either of those things?!”* This course will cover some topics that are perhaps unfamiliar to you, but isn't that the fun thing about college? That said, I do not assume you have an advanced understanding of political science. This is an overview of the many topics under “media and politics” and we will examine them through the lens of current events. If you keep up to date on readings, research what you don't know, pay attention to news, and keep an open mind, you will succeed.
- Events that transpire over the semester may require me to modify the administration of the course and therefore the syllabus. In the event that I need to modify the syllabus, I will announce the modification in class and on Canvas. It is your responsibility to keep up with any such modifications and be aware of current policies, deadlines, etc.

Attendance & Participation

Although attendance is **not mandatory**, it will be very difficult for you to succeed in this course without attending. You are expected to have completed the assigned readings for every week (PRIOR to the class meetings). If you are not in the live class sessions, it is less likely that you will fully engage with the course material and your grade could suffer. And, of course, everyone benefits when we are able to have an interactive discussion during class time – which we can't do if you're not in class! So, the best solution is to attend class as frequently as possible.

We will have **small-group discussion days** in class where you will be assigned a topic to discuss with classmates in your breakout room group. You will be graded on the outcome of this group work.

- See the university policy for attendance and excused absences here: <http://facultyhandbook.udel.edu/handbook/3113-student-class-attendance-and-excused-absences> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site..

Academic Misconduct

WITHOUT EXCEPTION, any form of cheating or academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the assignment. At the professor's discretion, cheating or dishonesty may also result in a failing grade for the course and a formal report to the Office of Student Conduct. All students must be honest and forthright in their academic studies. To steal the words or ideas of another (and yes, this also includes copy-paste without quotation

marks), to cheat on a quiz or assignment, or to assist or be assisted by another student to commit these acts corrupts the educational process. You are expected to do your own work and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance. Any violation of this standard will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. The faculty member, in consultation with a representative from the Office of Student Conduct, will decide under which option the incident is best filed and what specific academic penalty should be applied. See the policy here: <http://www1.udel.edu/stuguide/19-20/code.html>.

Department of Communication Faculty Statement on Disclosures of Instances of Sexual Misconduct

If, at any time during this course, I happen to be made aware that a student may have been the victim of sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic/dating violence, or stalking), *I am obligated by federal law to inform the university's Title IX office*, at which point they will decide if the incident should be examined further. If such a situation is disclosed to me in class, in a paper assignment, or in office hours, I can promise to protect your *privacy* (meaning, I will not disclose the incident to other people in my department or across the university), but I cannot promise *confidentiality* (meaning, I am required to report the incident to the university's Title IX Coordinator).

In the event that you, or someone you know, has experienced sexual misconduct that you would like to discuss with a trained individual in a *confidential* setting, please go to the website of the University's Office of Equity and Inclusion. Here, you will find resources to help you. You are not alone, and this is not your fault. There are members of the University community that you can speak to *confidentially*, including licensed counselors and members of the clergy. These individuals can be found at the Center for Counseling & Student Development, as well as certain licensed counselors in Student Wellness & Promotion and within pastoral care.

1. At UD, we provide 24-hour crisis assistance and victim advocacy and counseling. For information on the various places you can turn for help and for more information on Gender-based Violence: <https://sites.udel.edu/sexualmisconduct/>
2. For more information on the university's policies on sexual misconduct and your possible courses of action, please see: <https://sites.udel.edu/oei/>

Assignments and Grading

Your final grade in this course is based upon 1) **2 exams**, 2) **4 in-class discussions**, and 3) **3 news reflection short papers**. Each grade will be calculated based on the number of points allocated for each assignment. I do NOT use Canvas's weighting system, so the scale below is how you should calculate your grade:

Exam 1	30% of final grade (30 points)
Exam 2	20% of final grade (20 points)
4 Small Group Discussions	20% (5 points each) X 4 = 20 points
3 News reflections: short responses	30% (10 points each) X 3 = 30 points

Exams

There will be two exams over the course of the semester. Exams will be multiple choice, true-false, and short answer and will cover material only from the first half (Exam 1 for 30%) and second half (Exam 2 for 20%) of course material (i.e., **the final exam is not comprehensive**). Missed exams will result in a failing grade, except in the case of an extreme emergency with approval from the Dean's office. If you know in advance that you have a conflict, please let me know ASAP so we can make arrangements for you.

THREE News Reflection Papers (10 points each)

There will be three news reflections due over the course of the semester (on Wednesdays). These 2 page double-spaced (**maximum 600 words**) writing assignments will be graded and count towards your final grade in the class (10 points each, for a total of 30 points). These writing opportunities will be tied directly to news events. They will be announced on by Saturday or Sunday, and will be due by the midnight that Wednesday, giving students 4 days to complete them. Students are expected to integrate concepts from class and the readings in a thoughtful and comprehensive way, illustrating that they are elaborating on and applying these ideas in a new context.

News Reflection Grading Rubric (total of 10 points each)

- Integration of concepts from class (3 points)
- Writing and organization (3 points)
- Novelty and depth of reflection (4 points)

FOUR Small Group Discussions (5 points each for total of 20 points)

Small Group Discussions: There will be four class meetings throughout the semester on Fridays (dates indicated below) in which the class will be divided into the small group breakout rooms to discuss a pressing topic or question with their group. Over the course of the discussion, group members will be charged with coming up with answers to various questions as a team. **NOTE:** Attendance and participation in the breakout room discussions *will* affect a student's grade for this assignment (the TA and instructor will pop into these rooms to observe student presence and engagement).

Slack channel: To help enrich the group conversations, **students will be provided with the questions on MONDAY prior to the in-class discussion** and are encouraged to discuss the questions in their group's **slack channel** in the week leading up to the discussion date. You might share news articles, video clips, and other resources to help enrich the discussion.

Rotating group leader: For each group discussion, one group member will be responsible for writing up the group's responses and submitting them on Canvas the day after the in-class discussion. **The group leader should rotate throughout the course of the semester.** (In the event your group has 3 participants, one group member will serve as group leader twice). Responses will be graded for clarity, thoroughness, creativity, and integration of concepts from the course.

Final Grading Scale

A	93-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	0-59

Schedule for Spring 2021: Feb 15 – May 18 (last day to drop/add is Feb 26)

Date		Topics and Class Agenda	Readings (* = on Canvas)
WEEK 1 2/15		Course Introduction	
2/17		Politics and Media Today	<i>Perloff, Ch. 1</i>
2/19		Defining Political Communication	<i>Perloff, Ch. 2</i>
WEEK 2			
2/22		Philosophy, Democracy, and Political Communication	<i>Perloff, Ch. 3</i>
2/24		Consolidation of Media Ownership	Light online
2/26		Traditional News: Content Biases	<i>Bennett*</i>
WEEK 3			
3/1		History of political communication research	<i>Perloff, Ch. 4</i>
3/3	News reflection 1	History of political communication research	<i>Perloff, Ch. 4</i>
3/5		Media and Political Knowledge	<i>Perloff, Ch. 5</i>
WEEK 4			
3/8	Discussion questions posted	Media fragmentation and the rise of satire and political opinion talk	<i>Young I&O Prologue, Ch. 2&3 on canvas*</i>
3/10		Political Socialization and Political Entertainment	<i>Perloff, Ch. 6</i>
3/12	Small group discussion		
WEEK 5			
3/15		Agenda Setting and Priming	<i>Perloff, Ch. 7</i>
3/17	News reflection 2	Framing	<i>Perloff, Ch. 8</i>
3/19		News Routines and Norms:	<i>Donsbach (2004) on canvas*</i>

WEEK 6 3/22	Discussion questions posted	Political Polarization	Dimock & Wike (2020) online
3/24		Political Polarization and Social Sorting in the U.S.	Mason (2018) on canvas*
3/26	Small group discussion		
WEEK 7 3/29		Discussion	Young I&O Ch. 6 on canvas*
3/31		Review	
4/2		Exam 1 (on 2/15 – 3/26)	
WEEK 8 4/5	Discussion questions posted	Digital Technologies and the changing role of the gatekeeper	Young (2016) online Smith (2020) online
4/7		Mis and disinformation	Wardle (2017) online Pennycook & Rand (2020) on canvas*
4/9	Small group discussion		Sobieraj (2020) online
WEEK 9 4/12		Presidential Election Campaigns	Perloff, Ch. 10
4/14		Public opinion polling and news	Perloff, Ch. 13
4/16		Public opinion polling and news	Perloff, Ch. 13
WEEK 10 4/19		NO CLASS: Blue Hen Re-Coop Day	
4/21	News reflection 3	Political Campaigns	Perloff, Ch. 14
4/23		Political Advertising	Perloff, Ch. 15
WEEK 11	Discussion	Biases in the audience	Perloff, Ch. 9

4/26	questions posted		
4/28		Biases in the news and the newsroom	Perloff Ch. 11 Perloff Ch. 12
4/30	Small group discussion	Biases in the newsroom	Arana (2018) online
WEEK 12			
5/3		Satire and the liberal aesthetic	Young I&O Ch. 7 on canvas*
5/5		Opinion talk and the conservative aesthetic	Young I&O Ch. 8 on canvas*
5/7		Satire and opinion talk: functions, impact, and implications	Young I&O Ch. 9 & 11 on canvas*
WEEK 13			
5/10		Catch up	
5/12		Review	
5/14		Exam #2 (on 4/5 – 5/7: not cumulative)	
WEEK 14			
5/17		Debrief!	

Note: All readings marked with * are available on Canvas in Files → Readings.