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 your 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 four books available for purchase:


There is also a course reader available for purchase at the Bookie.

I also strongly urge you to read the *New York Times* daily. With luck, free copies will be available again this semester at various places around campus. You may also read it online at www.nytimes.com.

Evaluation

Your final grade in this course will depend on your success in four areas:
Midterm Examination – Thursday, February 16 (250 points)

Final Examination – Thursday May 4, 7-9 p.m. (250 points)

Long Assignment - Due Friday, April 7 (200 points)

Three Short Assignments - various due dates (100 points each)

**Exams.** On each exam you will identify several key terms and answer a few short essay questions.

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

Choose two or three days (the same days) 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.timesonline.co.uk), the *Jerusalem Post* from Israel (www.jpost.com) and the *Hindustan Times* from India (www.hindustantimes.com).

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? 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 Bush? What major differences, if any, did you detect across news organization?
- 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. I will grade your assignment using five criteria: correct spelling and use of English grammar (50 points), the ease with which you express your ideas (30 points), the quality and originality of your ideas (70 points), your use of academic sources, including books assigned for this course, to underpin your arguments (25 points) and your thoroughness in completing the assignment (25 points).

**DUE FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 5 p.m.**

**Short Assignments.** You will complete 3 of the following 5 assignments. Each should be 2-3 pages long.
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? DUE JANUARY 31, 5 p.m.

2. Visit the websites of two media watchdog organizations, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (fair.org) and the Media Research Center (mediaresearch.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 14, 5 p.m.

3. Interview several friends or family members, asking them what they like or dislike about President Bush 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? Can you figure out where your interviewee received his or her information about the politician? DUE MARCH 30, 5 p.m.

4. Access the White House website (whitehouse.gov) and review the proceedings from a recent press conference 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 information that is being given to them? DUE APRIL 6, 5 p.m.

5. 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 APRIL 25, 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

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. Although a fairly large class like this one is not as conducive to discussion as smaller seminars are, it is my hope that we can engage in substantial back and forth. I definitely do not want to lecture for 75 minutes straight without interruption!

*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. In all instances, I will ask for documentation. If you will miss an exam because of a university-sanctioned event, you must alert me of the absence at least one week in advance.

*Late Assignments.* Assignments must be turned into my office (just slide it under the door if I’m not there) by 5 p.m. on the date they are due. For each day your assignment is late (this includes weekends), I will deduct 10 percent of the total points available for the assignment.

*Extra-Credit.* I do not generally give extra-credit assignments, though in rare circumstances I may offer extra credit for participation in special events (such as taking part in an out-of-class experiment).

*Academic Etiquette.* Do not carry on side conversations or read the newspaper during class. Doing so is disrespectful to your classmates, and I will ask you to leave the room if you are disturbing others. Turn off all cellular phones during class.

*Academic Misconduct.* I do not tolerate plagiarizing or cheating of any kind. Such behavior will result in failing the course and other disciplinary action. In my brief tenure at WSU, I have failed five students for plagiarizing, and I have no qualms about doing it again. Please visit the university’s website at http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/plagiarism/main.html for a full description of the types of academic misconduct. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, see me immediately.

*Disability Accommodation.* Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify the instructor during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for the course. Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be unavailable. All accommodations must be approved through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Administration Annex 206, 335-3417.

**Course Outline**

**Introduction (Jan 10)**
Models of the mass media, theories of mass communication
Leighley - Chapter 1

**History of the Media in the U.S. (Jan 12, 17)**
The partisan media, the commercial media, the objective media, the interpretative media
West and Croll - Chapters 1-6
Leighley - Chapter 2 (pages 20-33)
Ownership of Media (Jan 19, 24)
Corporatization and consolidation
   McChesney - The Problem of the Media (all, except Ch. 3)
   Crews - “A Defense of Media Monopoly” (CP)

Regulation of Media (Jan 26)
Equal time, the FCC and “7 Dirty Words”
   Leighley - Chapter 2 (pages 33-end)

Making the News (Jan 31, Feb 2)
The ratings game, profitability, news routines
   Leighley - Chapter 4
   Cohen - “The Quote Machines” (CP)

Media Bias (Feb 7, 9)
Liberal reporters, conservative owners, watchdogs
   McChesney - The Problem of the Media (Ch. 3)
   Conason - “Peroxide Paradox: The Blonde Misleading the Blind” (CP)
   Goldberg - “The News Mafia” (CP)
   Chait - “Bad Press: How Political Journalists Get the Story Wrong” (CP)

MAKE-UP DAY/MIDTERM EXAM REVIEW (Feb 14)
FIRST MIDTERM EXAM (Feb 16)

Media and Foreign Policy (Feb 21, 23)
Covering wars in Vietnam, Serbia, Iraq
   VIDEO: “Counterfeit Coverage”

Election Coverage (Feb 28, Mar 2, 7, 9)
The “horse race,” the pack mentality
   Leighley - Chapter 8 (pages 199-211)
   Pelosi – Sneaking Into the Flying Circus (all)
   Scheiber - “Organization Man: Joe Trippi Reinvents Campaigning” (CP)
   VIDEO: “Journeys With George”

Impact of Media (Mar 21, 23, 28)
Priming, framing, agenda setting, bandwagons, spiral of silence
   Leighley - Chapter 6, Chapter 7

Media Relations with Institutions of Government (Mar 30, Apr 4)
Presidency, Congress, Courts, Bureaucracy
   Leighley - Chapter 5
   Cook - Chapter 7 (CP)
   Robertson – “In Control” (CP)
Paid Media (Advertising) (Apr 6, 11, 13, 18)
Buying time, “going negative”
   Leighley – Chapter 8

Future of Media (Apr 20, 25)
The internet, blogging, fragmented media
   Klam – “Fear and Laptops on the Campaign Trail” (CP)
   West and Croll – Chapter 7

MAKE-UP DAY/FINAL EXAM REVIEW (Apr 27)
FINAL EXAMINATION (Thursday, May 4, 7-9 p.m.)