

Syllabus
Media, Government, and Politics

4:567:458

Fall 2010

Room 101, SCI Building, Mondays 9:50AM-12:50PM

Instructor: Professor Dave Karpf
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Course Website: <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/site/MediaGovtPolitics>

Course Description:

In this seminar, we will examine the interactions between media and political institutions, actors and processes, in light of theories of journalism, communication and political practice. Central questions include: What role does the media play in a well-functioning democracy, and does our media system today fulfill that role? What level of political knowledge should we expect of American citizens, and how do elite media institutions and new media communications channels help us reach that level? Is the news biased towards liberals or conservatives? How is the internet changing all of this, and what constitutes the “media” in an era when anyone with a phone camera and internet connection can engage in acts of journalism themselves?

The course has three sections. The first section will deal with fundamental concepts regarding political news media: The role of news media in a well-functioning democracy, journalistic bias(es), the production of the news, and media effects (framing, agenda-setting, priming, and indexing). The second section will focus on the current news production crisis. Major newspapers and publishing houses are slashing budgets and facing bankruptcy. *Newsweek* magazine was recently sold for \$1. The future of journalism as a profession has never been more uncertain. We will investigate the causes and implications of the news crisis, as well as emerging alternative models of news production. This section will culminate in a 15-page midterm paper assignment. The third section will turn our attention to the opportunities and challenges presented by the internet media environment. How has the rise of online self-publication and “ridiculously-easy group formation” changed the interplay of media and politics? What happens to personal privacy when everyone’s information is permanently on display? Has technology dramatically changed the power of existing political elites, and how will ongoing dilemmas of copyright and net neutrality policies influence these questions in the near future?

Pre-Requisites

Junior or Senior Status, Introduction to Media Systems and Processes
(4:189:102)

Course Objectives:

Developing writing skills

Learning key concepts in the field and applying them to develop a critical eye for the news

Developing familiarity with the new media environment, including search skills and a clearer sense of privacy concerns

Developing oral skills through participation in classroom discussion and debate

Course Requirements and Grading:

-Response essays (20%). This course relies on a combination of lecture and Socratic Method-based discussion. To aid this discussion, a list of questions will be passed out at the end of every class period and also posted to Sakai. These are guiding questions to think about while doing the following week's reading. You will be expected to produce 10 response essays, two pages in length (double-spaced), over the course of the semester. The response essay should explore your thinking on one of the questions provided. *These essays are due two hours before the class period starts (7:50AM, to give me time to read them beforehand).* Essays will be graded on a 10-point scale and handed back the following week. There will be no response essays for week 1, 8, or 14. Submit a response essay for 10 of the remaining 11 weeks (1 free skip).

-Class Participation (20%). This includes not only attendance but also active engagement in class discussion. This is a discussion-based learning environment, so attendance is mandatory. If you must miss a class period, please email beforehand.

-Midterm Assignment (25%). With newspapers across the country declaring or nearing bankruptcy, major policy debates are currently under way regarding the future of the news industry. The midterm assignment will be a 15 page paper asking you to analyze and expand upon some element of this ongoing debate.

-Final Exam (35%). The final exam will be an open-book, take-home exam inviting you to summarize and expand upon several themes touched upon through the course of the semester.

Required Readings:

W. Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 8th edition. New York: Longman Publishing.

Lessig, Lawrence. 2004. *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York: Penguin Books.
[can be downloaded for free online at <http://free-culture.cc/freecontent/>]

Schudson, Michael. 1995. *The Power of News*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sunstein, Cass. 2007. *Republic.com 2.0*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zittrain, Jonathan. 2008. *The Future of the Internet – And How to Stop It*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press
[can be downloaded for free online at <http://futureoftheinternet.org/download>]

Class Schedule:

Part 1: Fundamentals Concepts in the Media and American Politics

Class 1 (September 8th): Some Introductory Points: Comforting Myths and Harsh Truths: the state of American News

Course Overview, Major Topics, Syllabus, Expectations and Requirements

Class 2 (September 13th): The Role of the Media in Public Life

-Schudson, *The Power of News*, introduction, chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7
Michael Hastings, "The Runaway General." *Rolling Stone Magazine*.
<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/17390/119236>

Class 3 (September 20th): Journalists, Citizens, and the Public(s)

-Schudson, Chapters 8, 9, and 10
-Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, chapter 1

Class 4 (September 27th): press bias(es)"

-Bennett chapters 2 and 6
-Jay Rosen: "Clowns to the Left of Me, Jokers to the Right: On the Actual Ideology of the American Press."
http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2010/06/14/ideology_press.html

Assignment: watch an episode of Countdown or Maddow and an episode of O'Reilly or Beck. Also visit newsbusters.org and Mediamatters.org

Class 5 (October 4th): The journalistic profession: indexing, framing, and priming

-Bennett chapters 3, 4, and 5

-Kurt Vonnegut, "Here is a Lesson in Creative Writing." Chapter from *A Man Without a Country*. (Sakai)

-Shorenstein Center: "Torture at Times: Waterboarding in the Media."

http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/torture_at_times_hks_students.pdf

Assignment: search for three major responses to this waterboarding story. We will discuss the debate that ensued in class.

Part II: Who Killed the News?

Class 6 (October 11th): The Looming News Crisis

-Bennett, chapter 7

-Clay Shirky: "Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable"

<http://www.shirky.com/weblog/2009/03/newspapers-and-thinking-the-unthinkable/>

-Paul Starr, "Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers, Hello to a new era of public corruption" *The New Republic*

<http://www.tnr.com/politics/story.html?id=a4e2aafc-cc92-4e79-90d1-db3946a6d119>

-Newspaper Economic Action Plan (American Press Institute)

<http://www.niemanlab.org/pdfs/apireportmay09.pdf>

-"The Newspaper Suicide Pact" xark.typepad.com

http://xark.typepad.com/my_weblog/2009/06/the-newspaper-suicide-pact.html

-"How Newsweek Blew It" *The Daily Beast*, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-08-03/newsweek-losses-revealed/full/>

Recommended Readings (for midterm):

-"Printing the New York Times Costs Twice as Much as Sending Every Subscriber a Free Kindle" by Nicholas Carlson

<http://www.businessinsider.com/2009/1/printing-the-nyt-costs-twice-as-much-as-sending-every-subscriber-a-free-kindle>

-Pew Internet and American Life Project: "Online Classifieds"

<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/7--Online-Classifieds.aspx>

-"Build the Wall" by David Simon, *Columbia Journalism Review*.

http://www.cjr.org/feature/build_the_wall_1.php?page=1

Class 7: (October 18th): Alternative Models of Journalistic Production

-Bennett chapter 8

-"The (Josh) Marshall Plan," *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 2007

- “How Andrew Breitbart Hacks the News” *Wired Magazine*, March 2010.
http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/03/ff_andrew_brietbart/
- Daniel Roth, “The Answer Factory: Demand Media and the Fast, Disposable, and Profitable as Hell Media Model.” *Wired Magazine*, October 2009.
http://www.wired.com/magazine/2009/10/ff_demandmedia/all/1
- “The Huffington Post Turns Five.” *Columbia Journalism Review*. May 10, 2010.
http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/the_huffington_post_turns_five.php (Sakai)

Class 8: (October 25th): Intermission.

(Midterms due. 15 page paper on future of journalism.)

- No readings, no response papers. We’ll discuss an interesting recent news controversy and summarize core lessons from the first half of the semester.

Part III: Are We the Media Now?

Class 9: (November 1st): Post-broadcast Democracy

- Sunstein, Chapter 1-3.
- Markus Prior. 2005. “News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout.” *American Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 49, No. 3. pp. 577-592

Class 10: (November 8th):The Internet is not a “Series of Tubes”

- Zittrain, introduction and chapters 1-3
- Sunstein, chapters 5 and 6
- Clay Shirky, chapter 1 of *Here Comes Everybody* (available on Sakai)

Class 11: (November 15th): Privacy Online and other concerns

- Zittrain chapter 9
- Chapter 1 of Daniel Solove’s “The End of Reputation (Sakai)
- Philip N. Howard. 2005. Deep democracy, thin citizenship: The impact of digital media in political campaign strategy. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 597. (Sakai)
- Matthew Honan. February 2009. “I Am Here.” *Wired Magazine*. (Sakai)

Assignment: Search for 5 pieces of critical coverage of facebook’s privacy policy changes from the past year.

Class 12 (November 29th): Copyrights or Copywrongs/Talk like a Pirate Day [note: no class on November 22nd]

- Lessig, introduction, chapters 1, 3-10.
- Christina Mulligan. “Copyright: The Elephant in the Middle of the Glee Club.”
<http://yaleisp.org/2010/06/copyright-and-glee/>

Assignment: Search for “Creative Commons” online, come to class ready to discuss.

Class 13 (December 6th): Net Neutrality

-Zittrain chapters 7 and 8

-Daniel Roth. January 2009. "The Dark Lord of Broadband Tries to Fix Comcast's Image." *Wired Magazine* http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/17-02/mf_brianroberts (Sakai)

-"Keeping the Internet Neutral?: Tim Wu and Christopher Yoo debate." *Federal Communications Law Journal*. Volume 59 Pps 575-592

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=953989 (Sakai)

-A recent article on "Googizon" (to be assigned. Sakai)

Class 14 (December 13th): Final Thoughts on the Media (old and new) and Politics

-No readings, no response papers

-Final Exam question distributed