

**The Press, The Public,
and
Politics**

POLI 304, section no. 3861
Fall 2008
Prof. Moran

Class Hours	M, 11-12:50 W, 11-11:50
Classroom	K-114
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I. Description

This course examines the interrelationships between the press, the government, and the public and the ways in which these relationships influence our political life. While we will trace the evolution of the press in the United States as it relates to politics, our main focus will be on contemporary developments. In particular we will pay close attention to the impact and implications of increased corporate concentration of the media and the question as to which of the three participants mentioned – the press, the public, or politicians – plays the most significant role in shaping contemporary political life. Finally we will also become active participants in the topic by conducting polls for the *Jersey Journal* during the course of the semester.

II. Materials

We have two required textbooks for the course:

Graber, Doris. 2006. *Mass Media & American Politics*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
ISBN: 1-56802-917-9

Graber, Doris, ed. 2007. *Media Power in Politics*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
ISBN: 1-933116-77-3

The textbook is the latest edition (7th) of one of the classics in this area of political research. Over the past 20 years or so, media studies has become a major area of academic research within political science and there are literally dozens of textbooks that I could have ordered. So, to that end, we have a second collection of essays from other scholars in the field examining more narrow topics. I strongly recommend that you become fairly regular consumers of the news in a variety of outlets (newspapers, television, internet, radio). Finally, because the political dimensions of the media extend beyond the news, I also encourage you to keep an eye on the political messages, content, or implications of any media you are using (that is, almost any “entertainment” form you use: music, film, television, etc.).

III. Class Structure

The basic structure for the class is going to be pretty traditional; that is, a significant amount of lecture and note taking. However, those of you who have been in my classes before know that I allow for and encourage a fairly substantial amount of class discussion and participation. The main wrinkle we're adding is the oral report accompanying the semester length research project (described below).

IV. Requirements

The requirements for the grade in this course fall into three broad areas: examinations, research project, and class participation. To do well in each of these aspects of the course, you are asked and expected to complete a fair amount of reading (usually between 25 and 50 pages a week; excluding the newspaper) and to attend class on a regular basis.

Midterm Exam (30%)

~~We will have a midterm exam in mid-October. It will most likely be a take-home examination. The grading rubric will be distributed with the exam.~~

In lieu of the midterm exam we will have weekly writing assignments based on the edited collection of essays. The effort is collaborative with the class divided into groups of twos and threes to write short (1 to 2 page) essays summarizing the main points of one of the articles in the collection. These essays will form the basis for a discussion the Monday sessions. Grading will be factored into the participation portion of the grade.

Final Exam (35%)

The final exam will be held in class and given at the date and time designated by the University (Tuesday, 13 December, 8:00 am in G-320) If you cannot make that time due to some emergency, I will offer some alternative dates. It will be essay format and you will receive a study guide well in advance of the exam.

Research Project (40%)

Okay, here's the deal. This is a 300-level course, and as such, I try to shift more of the educational responsibilities on to you, the students. If you are taking this course, then you probably have reached that point in your studies where you have a sufficient background in the material and info in the

databank that you can begin to share that knowledge with the class.

The culmination of the research component is a 10-15 minute oral presentation to the class discussing the scope and conclusions of your research and an accompanying paper (the general rule is, to get a good 10-15 minutes, you need about 10-15 pages; not counting the citations and footnotes).

The reason for this is I think we have several opportunities for you to present that research at academic venues beyond our classroom and I'd like for each of you to have the opportunity to experience the thrill that accompanies sharing the fruits of your hard efforts in front of a broader public.

Indeed, if the research is particularly strong, you will have the chance to present at a regional professional political science meeting (the Pennsylvania Political Science Association) in the spring. It would look good on your c.v. if you are applying to grad school; and it's a great learning opportunity.

The written part of the research project is due on the last day of class (not counting the final exam, so that would be December 12).

Class Participation (25%)

Class participation will be based on both the quality and the quantity of your participation in class discussions. Obviously, coming up with a brilliant *bon mot* in September and then sitting mute for the rest of the semester won't help too much. Neither is speaking constantly but off topic. Participation comes in various forms and the grading will reflect the fact that not everybody is comfortable speaking in class. To that end, we will have numerous small group exercises that should allow you all to speak and express your views.

Generally I use the following as a rough guide for determining this part of the grade:

Participation in the form of regular *attentive* attendance to class is generally good for a "B." I don't have a hard mathematical formula for determining "regular attendance" – i.e., I don't take attendance and you don't have a set number of classes that you can miss before a penalty kicks in. You're all adults and you should want to come to class rather than being coerced into doing so. Please note, however, the "attentive" part of the criteria. Stopping by regularly, but then spending the class time dozing, dining, and disrupting will adversely affect the grade.

The same general rules apply in the discussions (both full class and small group). As a rule, it's better to speak more rather than less, but the discussion has to be on topic. Regaling your colleagues with your exploits at the bar over the weekend will not help the grade.

Occasional pop quizzes (see "Caveats" below) will be factored into this portion of the grade as well.

V. Meeting Schedule

Part I: Intro & Historical Background

3 September: Introduction
Reading: Pick up the textbooks mentioned above.

For this first class here we'll review the structure and content of the course and refresh ourselves as to the basics of American political life.

8-10 Sept: News and American Politics
Reading: Graber 1, chp. 1

Note: Readings here refer to the Graber text, not the edited collection. Readings for the edited collection will be announced and distributed separately.

15-17 Sept: Ownership of the News?
Reading: Graber 1, chp. 2

Reading: Graber 1, chp. 10

17 –26 Nov: Foreign Affairs Coverage

Reading: Graber 1, chp. 11

1 – 8 Dec : Oral Reports

More detailed schedule of reports will be distributed early in November.

Caveats

1. This syllabus is meant as a guide for the course. While I will do my best to maintain the pace outlined above, I am not guaranteeing that that will in fact occur. *Any substantive changes related to due dates, course content, or course requirements will be distributed in class.*

2. Please do your best to **get to class on time**. I live out in the wilds of Pennsylvania and I am well aware of the joys of traveling in this little corner of the Garden State. That being said, you all know traffic is a nightmare and parking can be a pain, so plan accordingly. Tardiness adversely affects the “Participation” part of the grade.

22-24 Sept: Press Freedom and the Law

Reading: Graber 1, chp. 3

29 Sept – 8 Oct: News Making and Reporting

Reading: Graber 1, chp. 4, 5

13 – 15 Oct: Media and Policy Makers

Reading: Graber 1, chp. 6

20- 22 Oct: Media Influence

Reading: Graber 1, chp. 7

27- 29 Oct: Elections & the Internet

Reading: Graber 1, chp. 8

3 – 5 Nov: Controlling the News

Reading: Graber 1, chp. 9

10 – 12 Nov: Covering the Courts

3. **Keep the food consumption to a minimum.**

Coffee, tea, or something to drink is fine; a five course meal from the truck is not. If you're gonna chow down, bring enough to share with everybody, make sure it doesn't stink too badly, or better yet, keep it out of the classroom (and I strongly prefer the latter – eat on your own time).

4. *Turn off the cell phones, pagers, two ways, Gameboys, iPods, or whatever latest bit of nonacademic technological wizardry you possess.*

If I hear any of these or see you text messaging during class, the class stops and it's quiz time. Again, this isn't high school. You're attending a university because you want to, not because the state is forcing you. Show some respect for your colleagues and me. If you really are so indispensable that disconnecting from the world for the time that we're together is impossible, then skip class and come back later when you feel you can participate fully. The grades for the quizzes will be factored in to the "participation" part of the course.

5. **Respect your colleagues.** Politics is great fun to talk about and I want to encourage you all to express your thoughts freely, but be mindful of the impact your words can have on others in the room.

6. **Missed and Late Exam Policy:** If we have any take home exams, all exams are due on the date assigned. Exams received after that time will be

docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late for the first 2 days, then 1/3 for each class day late after that. In the event of missed in-class exam (including the final), you will receive a grade of "F" for the missed work unless you give me prior notification of the conflict and reason for missing the exam.

7. **Plagiarism:** All submitted work must be the product of your own thought. If you are found to have plagiarized all or part of an assignment, you will receive a grade of "F" for that assignment.