

Class Syllabus Summer 2016

LAGF 6228 LH: Media and Politics
Meeting Time: Mondays & Wednesdays, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Location: Hall of States

Instructor

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Course Description

This course focuses on the role of mass media in American politics and the influence of the media on Americans' political attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. We will examine the nature of the news and news making organizations, focusing on recognizing slant and angle as well as leveraging the media to move political and policy agendas.

The goal of this class is to help students better understand how all forms of media — print, broadcast and electronic — help shape the course of public policy. In addition to topical lectures, the class format will primarily consist of group discussion and student presentations.

Throughout this course, please be sure to read daily newspapers several times per week, view online and broadcast news programming as much as possible, and occasionally review news weeklies and other media. Think critically about the coverage you see and actively participate in class discussion.

Grading

You are responsible for 3 writing assignments, regular blog posts and a final project. Grading will be based on these assignments as well as class participation, weighted as follows:

- 25% --- Written assignments detailed below
- 25% ---Class participation, including presentation of news analysis
- 25% --- Weekly Blog
- 25% --- Final Project

Grades will be assessed as per the GWU Legislative Affairs grading schedule:

A 94-100

A-90-93

B+87-89

B 83-86

B-80-82

C+77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

F- Any grade under 70

Required Reading

- *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Mass Media and Society, Twelfth Edition* by Alison Alexander and Jarice Hanson (McGraw-Hill/Dushkin)
- Daily and weekly news media
- Additional materials distributed in class

Writing Assignments

Assignment #1: Write an Opinion/Editorial (approximately 700 words) expressing your views on whether the media shapes or reflects American society. Cite research to support your opinion and use examples to illustrate. Review op/eds in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* for style guidance.

Assignment #2: Select an article on any policy issue from print or online media. Study the article and write a Letter to the Editor expressing your position on the issue.

Assignment #3: Select topic A or B below. Determine your position and write your own persuasive essay (approximately 3-4 pages). Use some of the styles and techniques discussed in class and demonstrated in the *Taking Sides* text.

- Topic A: Is there value to news media with an agenda?
- Topic B: Is our society better informed in the age of electronic media?

News Analysis

During one class, you will be required to make a brief presentation and lead class discussion (20-30 minutes total) of recent news. Examine how the medium, format, angle and approach impact the messages and influence the audience's perspective. You can approach this in several ways:

- select a major news topic and analyze the coverage of that topic in three different media outlets;
- follow a single story over the course of several weeks;
- compare coverage of two stories over a defined period of time; or
- conduct a general analysis of news during the previous week.

Congressional Media Blog

Write a weekly blog post focusing on current Congressional issues and news. Blog posts are due each Wednesday and can be submitted in hard copy or as a link to your actual blog. Details will be discussed in class.

Final Project

Craft a media plan on a Congressional issue or for a member of Congress. Prepare a relevant 35 minute class presentation based on the plan and turn in seven to ten pages of the final plan and accompanying written material. Your presentation can focus on pitching the plan itself or on executing selected components of the plan, such as message development, spokesperson training, etc. Details will be discussed in class and you will meet one-on-one with the instructor to discuss your plan.

Course Schedule

July 6

Introduction & Course Overview

July 11

Class Discussion: Becoming a Critical Student of Media

Reading Assignment: Issues 1 and 6 in *Taking Sides*

July 13

Writing Assignment 1 due
Class Discussion: Understanding the Media Plan
News Analysis Presentations 1& 2

July 18

Spokesperson Training
News Analysis Presentations 3, 4 & 5
Reading Assignment: Issues 7 & 14 in *Taking Sides*

July 20

Writing Assignment 2 due
Guest Speaker
News Analysis Presentations 6 & 7

July 25

One-on-one discussions of final project plans
NO FULL CLASS MEETING

July 27

Writing Assignment 3 due
News Analysis Presentations 8, 9 & 10
Reading Assignment: Issues 8 & 9 in *Taking Sides*

August 1

Guest Speaker
News Analysis 11 & 12

August 3

Final Presentations

August 8

Final Presentations

August 10

Final Presentations

Note: Schedule subject to change based on class size.