

SYLLABUS
PLSC 387: Politics and the Press
Spring 2019

TTh 1:00 pm – 2:15 pm
Mundelein 414

Instructor

Dr. Eric Hansen

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Office Location: Coffey Hall 326B

Office Hours: TTH 3:45 pm – 5:15 pm, or by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

Some writers refer to the press as the fourth branch of government, in reference to its fundamental role in disseminating the information citizens need to make political decisions in our republican system of government. However, American media organizations face a number of serious challenges in the 21st Century: a decline in gatekeeping power, increasing public mistrust, economic competition and uncertainty, and a sometimes-hostile political elite.

This course will lead students through an in-depth examination of the American press, focusing on political science scholarship but also drawing insights from the fields of communications, psychology, journalism, sociology, and law. The bulk of the material in this course invites students to consider the press as an institution. We will study how organizational structures, economic incentives, and professional norms shape the production of news content. A secondary focus of this class is human behavior in consuming political information. We will study how we learn from the news, how we decide what information to accept or discount, and how we communicate political information to others.

By completing this course, students should be able to:

- 1) Evaluate the role of the press in U.S. politics
- 2) Understand the factors influencing media content
- 3) Explain how Americans learn and engage with political information
- 4) Think critically about the political information they consume and share regularly
- 5) Develop further skills in articulating their thoughts through speaking and writing.

Required Texts

Graber, Doris A., and Johanna Dunaway. 2018. *Mass Media and American Politics*. Sage/CQ Press.

Hall, Thad, and Betsy Sinclair. 2019. *A Connected America: Politics in the Era of Social Media*. Oxford University Press.

Supplementary Texts [Excerpts assigned for class reading will be posted on Sakai.]

Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. University of Chicago Press.

Gans, Herbert J. 1979. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. Pantheon Books.

Graves, Lucas. 2016. *Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism*. Columbia University Press.

Hamilton, James. 2004. *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton University Press.

Ladd, Jonathan M. 2012. *Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters*. Princeton University Press.

Postman, Neil. 1985. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. Viking.

Schudson, Michael. 1981. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. Basic Books.

Sides, John, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck. 2018. *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*. Princeton University Press.

Sunstein, Cass R. 2018. *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton University Press.

Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton University Press.

Grades

Final grades for the course will be based on the following scale. I reserve the right to make adjustments to individual grades based on overall performance in the course and/or extenuating circumstances. There will be **NO** extra credit provided.

Letter Grade	Percentage Score
A	93-100
A-	90-92.99
B+	87-89.99
B	83-86.99
B-	80-82.99
C+	77-79.99
C	73-76.99
C-	70-72.99

D+	67-69.99
D	60-66.99
F	59.99 or below

The proportion of each assignment as part of your overall grade is as follows:

Attendance & Participation: 10%
Reading Quizzes: 15%
Writing Assignment: 25%
 Source Comparison: 12.5%
 Social Media Journal & Self-Assessment: 12.5%
Midterm Exam: 25%
Final Exam: 25%

Attendance & Participation

Attendance and participation are worth 10% of your overall course grade. Students are expected to participate in activities and in-class discussions of the course material. I will assess students based on the frequency of contributions, the relevance and insightfulness of the contributions in discussions, and active contributions to group work. Quality of participation can make up for a lack of frequency. Though there is no formal attendance requirement, attendance is an integral part of discussions. You can't join the conversation if you don't show up!

A Note on Punctuality

I will begin class promptly at our designated meeting time. Students should arrive five minutes before class begins in order to find a seat and make any preparations of materials before class starts. Getting to class ahead of time is also a courtesy to other students, who may become distracted by late arrivers. Students who must routinely arrive late due to circumstances outside their control (for example, a class immediately before mine on the opposite side of campus) should inform me at the beginning of the semester.

Reading Quizzes

Students will be given six pop quizzes throughout the semester to assess their understanding of the assigned reading for the day. All assigned readings must be completed by the beginning of the class period on the day listed on the reading calendar below. Questions will assess students' comprehension of the major themes of the assigned readings. Students will NOT be asked about the textbook readings on the reading quizzes (though textbook readings are fair game for the two exams). At the end of the semester, I will drop each student's lowest reading quiz grade from the calculation of the overall course grade.

All quizzes must be completed in class. No makeup quizzes will be given unless I receive written communication from another university official (e.g. dean, athletics official) requesting me to excuse an absence. I do not request or accept doctors' notes. I understand students must sometimes miss class for reasons outside their control, which is why I drop the lowest quiz grade.

Writing Assignments

Students will complete two five-page writing assignment during the course of the semester, each worth 12.5% of the final course grade. First, students will analyze the coverage of a major news story on a single day in five major outlets, due February 26. Second, students will keep a one-week diary of their own exposure to political media and reflect on their media “diets,” due April 25. I will provide full instructions for each writing assignment and post them on Sakai in the first month of class.

Midterm & Final Exam

There will be two exams during the semester. Each exam is worth 25% of the final grade. Exams will test students on the material covered in the half of the course preceding it. In other words, the final exam is not cumulative. Each exam will contain a mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. I will not offer the final exam at any time besides the time listed below unless the student has petitioned their dean’s office for a change in exam time.

Communication, Office Hours, Question about Grades

Please direct all communication with me outside class or office hours through my campus email account, which can be found in the header of this syllabus. I check my campus email account several times daily and will try to reply to student emails as quickly as possible. That being said, students should not necessarily expect me to reply immediately to emails sent to me at the last minute. I may not be able to reply to questions about course material the morning of an exam or provide resources for an assignment the night before it is to be turned in.

My office hours exist solely for you to visit me with questions about this class. If you can’t make those times, email me to schedule a more convenient appointment time. Email is only for brief communications. If you have long and complicated questions, come to my office hours. I will not send grades over email—check Sakai for the latest updates. After I have graded and returned your assignments, there is a 24-hour moratorium before I will answer questions about that assignment.

Technology Use

I will not allow the use of computers, tablets, or other electronic devices during class. There may be some days when I will ask you to bring a computer with you (if there is an online activity, for example). Most of class time will involve lecture or discussion of articles and concepts related to the course—this can be accomplished without computers.

The use of cell phones or other mobile communication devices is strictly prohibited during class, except in the event of an emergency. Cell phones minimally should be put on silent but preferably should be turned off. Students discovered using their phones during class time will be asked to turn off their phones and place them out of reach.

Student Accessibility

Loyola University Chicago provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with Students Accessibility Center (SAC), located in Sullivan Center, Suite 117. Students should provide me with an accommodation notification from SAC, preferably

within the first two weeks of class. Students are encouraged to meet with me individually in order to discuss their accommodations. All information will remain confidential. For more information or further assistance, please call (773) 508-3700 or visit <http://www.luc.edu/sac>.

Academic Integrity

Students are responsible for adhering to university policy on academic honesty and avoiding acts of plagiarism or cheating. Students can find more information about what constitutes plagiarism at the Writing Center’s website: (<http://www.luc.edu/writing/studentresources/onlineresources>). Consult the College of Arts and Sciences’ statement to learn more about college policy: (<http://www.luc.edu/cas/advising/academicintegritystatement>). I reserve the right to exercise case-by-case discretion in assigning penalties for acts of academic dishonesty. Generally speaking, however, students should expect to receive a score of “0” on any assignment or exam where they are observed plagiarizing, cheating, or passing off someone else’s ideas as their own. If more than one instance occurs during the semester, offending students should expect to fail my course. I report all acts of academic dishonesty to the Dean of College of Arts and Science’s office.

Readings

Students are expected to complete daily reading assignments in preparation for class. Students should read carefully and be ready to discuss the material, as discussions based around these readings will form the basis of the participation grade. I reserve the right to make changes to the reading list and will inform students well in advance of any changes.

All reading assignments are to be completed by the beginning of class on the day the assignment is listed. Assigned readings in normal typeface in the calendar are *required* for the day. Textbook readings (in *italics*) are considered *recommended* for that day. My lectures will draw heavily from the textbook material; students may find it in their interest to read the textbook ahead of time to supplement their understanding of lecture material. Students are responsible for understanding the material from the textbooks for the midterm and final exams, though textbook readings will never be the subject of an in-class reading quiz.

Students are responsible for obtaining their own copies of the Graber and Dunaway (abbreviated GD below) and Hall and Sinclair textbooks. All articles/chapters denoted with “[S]” will be posted on Sakai. Students may not share course materials with others outside of the class without my written permission.

<i>January</i>	
January 15 Introduction	Read Syllabus <i>GD Ch. 1</i>
January 17 Freedom of the Press	Matthews [S] <i>GD Ch. 3</i>
January 22 Historical American Press	Schudson, pp. 12-60 [S]

January 24 The News Business	Hamilton, pp. 7-37 [S] <i>GD Ch. 2</i>
January 29 What Makes the News?	Gans, pp. 78-115 [S] <i>GD Ch. 5</i>
January 31 Fact & Objectivity	Graves, pp. 53-79 [S] <i>GD Ch. 6, pp. 190-201</i>
<i>February</i>	
February 5 Bias(es)	Molotch and Lester [S] Budak et al. [S] French [S]
February 7 Agenda Setting	Baumgartner and Jones, pp. 103-125 [S] <i>GD Ch. 6, pp. 201-219</i>
February 12 Framing I	Gubitz et al. [S] Rose and Baumgartner [S] (skim)
February 14 Framing II	Aaroe [S] Druckman [S]
February 19 Covering the Presidency	Carr [S] <i>GD Ch. 7</i>
February 21 Covering Congress & Courts	Snyder & Stromberg [S] <i>GD Ch. 8</i>
February 26 Wrap-up & Review	Bring review questions Writing Assignment #1 Due
February 28	Midterm Exam
<i>March</i>	
March 5 & 7	NO CLASS – Spring Break
March 12 Campaigns & Elections I	Sides et al., pp. 47-69 [S] <i>GD Ch. 12</i>
March 14 Campaigns & Elections II	Vavreck, pp. 70-93 [S]
March 19 Changes in the Media Industry	Hall & Sinclair Ch. 2 <i>GD Ch. 4</i>
March 21 State & Local News	Mitchell et al. [S] Capps [S] <i>GD Ch. 9</i>
March 26 Learning from the News	Sunstein, pp. 1-30 [S] <i>GD Ch. 11</i>
March 28 Information Search	Hall & Sinclair Ch. 3 Bakshy [S]

<i>April</i>	
April 2 Infotainment	Postman, pp. 16-29 & 83-98 [S] Baum and Jamison [S] (skim)
April 4	NO CLASS – Dr. Hansen at conference
April 9 Trust in Media	Ladd pp. 65-127 [S]
April 11 Fake News & Conspiracy Theory	Sunstein & Vermeule [S] Lazer et al. [S]
April 16 Incivility & Negativity	Sobieraj & Berry [S] <i>GD Ch. 13</i>
April 18 Online Communication	Hall & Sinclair Ch. 4 & 6
April 23 Anxieties of Modern Media	Klein/Rosen [S] (audio) <i>GD Ch. 14</i>
April 25 Wrap-up & Review	Bring questions for review Writing Assignment #2 Due
May 3	Final Exam – 1:00 pm

Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time. If changes are made, students will be informed through email and verbally in class, and a new syllabus document will be posted on Sakai.