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# POS 4235 - MEDIA & POLITICS

Fall 2022

Last Updated: October 03, 2022

Note: All times and dates in the syllabus or other course material correspond to Tallahassee's Eastern Time Zone

**Class Time:** TUE/THUR, 11:35AM-12:50PM

**Class Location:** BEL 0114 (Bellamy building, floor 1)

**Instructor:** Matthew Pietryka (you can call me *Professor Pietryka* or just *Prof. P*)

**Pronouns:** he/him

**Email:** [mpietryka@fsu.edu](mailto:mpietryka@fsu.edu) (<mailto:mpietryka@fsu.edu>)

**Office:** BEL 561

**Office Hours:** I will be available to meet in person after most class meetings (for quick conversations) and in my office Tuesdays 2-3pm (for longer conversations). You may alternatively schedule a virtual meeting using this link: <https://calendly.com/pietryka/office-hours> (<https://calendly.com/pietryka/office-hours>)

## 1 Course Description

This course examines the roles of campaigns and the mass media in United States politics. The mass media are a diverse group of news sources that include the elite media like *NBC*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* as well as cable outlets, chat-rooms, bloggers, talk radio, Internet sites, and tabloid shows.

The goals of this course are for students to understand the forces that shape the information that these sources provide and the impact of this information on citizens, politicians, and public policy.

The first 2/3 of the course will focus primarily on the news media. We will examine the specific forces that shape the news, in hopes of understanding which topics make the news—and which topics do not become news. It then explores the impact of the news on citizens' political attitudes, knowledge, and behavior.

The final 1/3 of the course explores the content of campaign media and their effects on citizens.

### 1.1 Objectives

By the end of the semester, successful students will be able to:

- identify the main functions the media must perform in a democracy
- evaluate the extent to which a news story, news outlet, or media system fulfills those functions

- compare and contrast different sources of bias in news coverage
- appraise the causes of various biases in the media
- discuss several components of campaign strategy
- compare the relative importance of different forms of campaign media on election outcomes

## 1.2 Required Materials

You will be required to read a variety of articles, posted to Canvas, and two **required** books:

1. Shanto Iyengar. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide* (Fourth Edition). ISBN: 978-0393664874.
  - Students will need this book ASAP
2. John G Geer. *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns*. ISBN: 978-0-22628-499-6
  - Students will need this book during the second half of the semester
  - Access a free electronic copy of the book (<https://proxy.lib.fsu.edu/login?url=https://chicago.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.7208/chicago/9780226285009.001.0001/upso-9780226284989>) courtesy of the FSU library. The link requires you to log in through my.FSU for off-campus access.

## 2 Grades

Students' grades for the course depend on the scores they earn for three exams, fourteen online reading quizzes, three media journal entries, and two content analysis projects. Details about each are below.

Students can calculate their cumulative Percentage using the following formula, expressing their scores in percentage points:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Cumulative Percentage} &= \\
 &= .40 \times \text{Exam percentage} \\
 &+ .30 \times \text{Quiz percentage} \\
 &+ .10 \times \text{Media Journals percentage} \\
 &+ .20 \times \text{Content Analysis percentage}
 \end{aligned}$$

At the end of the semester, the final letter grade will be assigned according to the standard table:

Cumulative Percentage	Grade
93-100%	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
00-59	F

## 2.1 Components of the grade

Each assessment is described briefly below. I will provide students with additional guidance for each assessment in class and on Canvas.

### Exams

**The course features three exams.** All three exams are take-home exams—they will be completed at a location of your choice and submitted on Canvas.

During the exams, students are allowed and encouraged to use their books and notes. Therefore, students should strive to take careful notes so they can easily find relevant material during the exams.

Students are not allowed to communicate with anyone about the exams while the exams are occurring.

Each exam will be written so it can be completed during a typical 75-minute class period. To provide greater flexibility in these uncertain times, I will give students additional time to complete them. Barring unforeseen changes to the schedule, the exams will be available at 7am and due before 11:59PM on the following dates:

Exam	Day	Date
Exam 1	THUR	September 22
Exam 2	TUE	November 1
Exam 3 (Final Exam)	MON	December 5

**WARNING:** To take this class, you must be available at those times. If you will not be available during those times, you must contact the instructors **during the first week of instruction** to explain your situation and see if alternative arrangements are possible.

### Quizzes

Quizzes encourage students to recall and recognize key concepts. Repeated recall and recognition help solidify information in long-term memory (<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/test-enhanced-learning-using-retrieval-practice-to-help-students-learn/>).

**Quizzes will be due each Monday night by 11:59PM.** Each quiz will focus mostly on material from the previous week's readings and class material. The quizzes will also occasionally include material covered earlier in the semester. Most quiz questions will be in the multiple-choice format, though some questions may use a different format such as short answers or matching.

I will drop your two lowest quiz scores and thus your final grade will be based on your 12 highest quiz scores.

### Media Journals

Over these course of the semester, students will write three journal entries. Each entry will discuss how recent news exemplifies (or contradicts) concepts from the course. The chief goal of the journal entries is to help you see how the course material connects to your own life.

### Content Analysis Data Collection

Students will have the opportunity to collect data about two types of political media: news coverage and political advertisements.

The **News Analysis Project** asks students to perform a content analysis of two news sources over four days. Students will systematically compare which topics receive attention in the news, how many topics receive attention, and how each topic was framed. It will be due by 11:59PM, October 17.

The **Negative Ads Project** asks students to watch a series of presidential ads, evaluating each one on a number of dimensions such as how informative it seems. It will be due by 11:59PM, November 21.

Both projects will be weighted equally for your final grade.

## 2.2 Tokens

The bar for success in this course is often high. And students will face many challenges outside of this class that will only make it more difficult to keep up. To ease students' stress and increase the course's flexibility, I use a token system that allows students to extend deadlines and revise assessments. **Each student begins the course with three tokens.**

Students can choose to exchange a token for any one of the following things:

- Extend any deadline by 24 hours.
- Revise a submission to an exam question or Media Journal. *You must use these tokens within one week of receiving the grade on the response you wish to revise.*
- Retake a quiz. *You must use these tokens within one week of receiving the grade on the quiz you wish to retake.*

**To use a token**, complete a Token form on Canvas (<https://canvas.fsu.edu/courses/217300/modules/718439>)  
( Canvas -> Token Module )

## 3 Schedule

Day	Date	Topic	Reading
TUE	August 23	Intro	
THUR	August 25	Why attention matters	Pinker-2018^ ( <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/17/steven-pinker-media-negative-news">https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/17/steven-pinker-media-negative-news</a> ); Patterson-2017*
TUE	August 30	Functions of the media	Iyengar Chapter 1
THUR	September 1	Surveillance	Iyengar Chapter 2
TUE	September 6	Interpretation I	Iyengar Chapter 3
THUR	September 8	Interpretation II	Entman-1991*; Kim-Shepherd-Clinton-2020*
TUE	September 13	Watchdog Journalism	Bennett-Serrin-2005*; Knobel-2018^ ( <a href="https://www.cjr.org/analysis/newspapers-financial-crisis.php">https://www.cjr.org/analysis/newspapers-financial-crisis.php</a> )
THUR	September 15	No Class: APSA Conference	
TUE	September 20	Exam 1 Review	
THUR	September 22	Exam 1	
TUE	September 27	(canceled due to Hurricane Ian)	

Day	Date	Topic	Reading
THUR	September 29	(canceled due to Hurricane Ian)	
TUE	October 4	News Analysis Workshop	
THUR	October 6	Group Biases	Deutch-2019^ ( <a href="https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/02/gender-bias-persists-international-reporting-atlantic/582235/">https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/02/gender-bias-persists-international-reporting-atlantic/582235/</a> )
TUE	October 11	Partisan Bias I	Groseclose-Milyo-2005*; Nyhan-2012*; Hall-Jamieson-2012*; Rosenblum-2012*
THUR	October 13	Partisan Bias II	Hassell-et-al-2020^ ( <a href="https://theconversation.com/claims-of-ideological-bias-among-the-media-may-be-overblown-135617">https://theconversation.com/claims-of-ideological-bias-among-the-media-may-be-overblown-135617</a> ); Martin-McCrain-2019^ ( <a href="https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2019/10/18/the-fccs-hands-off-approach-to-media-consolidation-means-that-local-news-increasingly-looks-more-like-fox-news/">https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2019/10/18/the-fccs-hands-off-approach-to-media-consolidation-means-that-local-news-increasingly-looks-more-like-fox-news/</a> )
TUE	October 18	Fake news	Watts-Rothschild-2017^ ( <a href="https://www.cjr.org/analysis/fake-news-media-election-trump.php">https://www.cjr.org/analysis/fake-news-media-election-trump.php</a> ); Nyhan-2020*
THUR	October 20	Learning from the news	Iyengar Chapter 8; Baum-2007*; Prior-2017*
TUE	October 25	News Analysis Results	
THUR	October 27	Exam 2 Review	
TUE	November 1	Exam 2	
THUR	November 3	Campaign News	Silver-2017^ ( <a href="https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-media-has-a-probability-problem/">https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-media-has-a-probability-problem/</a> ); Messing-2018^ ( <a href="https://towardsdatascience.com/projecting-confidence-5fe3a799913d">https://towardsdatascience.com/projecting-confidence-5fe3a799913d</a> )
TUE	November 8	Campaign Advertising	Geer Chapters 1-3
THUR	November 10	Negative Ads Project	Iyengar Chapter 7
TUE	November 15	Guest Speaker: Tom Flanigan ( <a href="https://news.wfsu.org/people/tom-flanigan">https://news.wfsu.org/people/tom-flanigan</a> )	
THUR	November 17	Campaign Effects I	Freedman-et-al-2004*
TUE	November 22	Campaign Effects II	Geer Chapters 4-5; Franz-2013^ ( <a href="https://themonkeycage.org/2013/05/who-won-the-ad-war/">https://themonkeycage.org/2013/05/who-won-the-ad-war/</a> )
THUR	November 24	No Class: Thanksgiving	

Day	Date	Topic	Reading
TUE	November 29	Negative Ads Results	Geer Chapters 6-7
THUR	December 1	Exam 3 Review	
MON	December 5	Exam 3 (Final Exam)	

KEY:

lyengar = Shanto Iyengar. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide (Fourth Edition)*

Geer = John G Geer. *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns*

\* = PDF posted to Canvas  
(<https://canvas.fsu.edu/courses/217300/modules/718443>)  
( Canvas -> Modules -> Readings )

^ = Online reading. Click the link to read.

Note: The schedule is tentative and is likely to change as the semester progresses.

## 4 Course Policies

### How to ask questions and get help

I encourage you to reach out if you have questions, thoughts, or suggestions you'd like to share about the course. I will strive to respond to all inquiries within 24 business hours as long as you follow these instructions:

- **Most questions** about the syllabus, assignments, and course material **should be posted to the course Q&A discussion thread** ([https://canvas.fsu.edu/courses/217300/discussion\\_topics/1578121](https://canvas.fsu.edu/courses/217300/discussion_topics/1578121)) ( Canvas -> Ask a Question ).
- For short questions of a personal nature or for questions about the content of quiz or exam questions and answers, please contact Professor Pietryka directly via email at [mpietryka@fsu.edu](mailto:mpietryka@fsu.edu) (<mailto:mpietryka@fsu.edu>).
- For questions that require a response of more than a few sentences, seek help in office hours.

### How I will communicate with you

- When contacting individual students, I will reach out via Canvas Inbox or their [@fsu.edu](mailto:@fsu.edu) email.
- When contacting all students, I will use the Announcements feature of the course Canvas.
- To ensure you do not miss an announcement, you can receive email alerts or push notifications each time announcements are posted. To do so, you must configure your Canvas notification settings (<https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Student-Guide/How-do-I-manage-notifications-for-a-single-course-as-a-student/ta-p/430>).

# Student Responsibilities

- Students should log on to Canvas at least every other day to check for course updates.
- Students are expected to keep up with the class, engage with the course material, and submit assignments by the due dates.
- All work that students submit is expected to be products of the individual students per the FSU Academic Honor Policy (<http://registrar.fsu.edu/bulletin/undergraduate/information/integrity/>). Students should not discuss any of the questions with each other before or during the actual assignments, discussions, quizzes, or exams without instructor approval.
- To receive credit, students must follow the instructions carefully, follow word limits as instructed, and use correct spelling and grammar.
- For email, please respond to your instructor's messages within a 24-hour period on weekdays and 48-hour period on weekends.
- Please use your @fsu.edu email address for all course-related emails.
- When communicating with the instructor or your fellow classmates, be respectful and use professional email etiquette (<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/04/16/advice-students-so-they-dont-sound-silly-emails-essay>)

## Participation & Lateness Policy

**If you think you cannot finish an assignment by the due date, please let me know via email.** I will do my best to accommodate any reasonable needs, but **only if you alert me to these needs before the class or due date** (or, in extreme circumstances where communication is not feasible prior to the due date, as soon as feasible thereafter).

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

## Grade Grievances

Each student is responsible for ensuring their gradebook is correct and up to date.

The instructor works to ensure that all grades are unbiased by grading with students names blinded where possible. Therefore, regrades are only allowed in cases of mistakes.

If you think you received an incorrect grade by mistake, please do the following:

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving the grade.
2. Email the instructor. In the email, respectfully explain why you believe the grade you received was a mistake. The email must make clear that you have read the feedback you received on the assignment.

## Classroom Recording

In this class, consistent with state law and university policy, students are permitted to make recordings of class lectures for personal use only. As noted, sharing, posting, or publishing classroom recordings may subject you to honor code violations and legal penalties associated with theft of intellectual property and violations of other state law. Moreover, students and educators have expressed concern that recording classroom activities may negatively impact the learning experience for others, especially in classes that involve questions, discussion, or participation. To protect a learning environment in which everyone feels free to experiment with ideas, we ask you refrain from recording in ways that could make others feel reluctant to ask questions, explore new ideas, or otherwise participate in class. Students must monitor their recording so that they do not include participation by other students without permission. Students with disabilities will continue to have appropriate accommodations for recordings as established by the Office of Accessibility Services.

I will record each class meeting and post them to the course Canvas. These recordings are only for your own use and may not be shared with others. If at any point you share something in class that you wish to have edited out of the recording, please email me.

## 5 University Policies

### UNIVERSITY ATTENDANCE POLICY

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

### ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "...be honest and truthful and...[to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <https://fda.fsu.edu/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy> (<https://fda.fsu.edu/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy>))

### ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Your academic success is a top priority for Florida State University. University resources to help you succeed include tutoring centers, computer labs, counseling and health services, and services for designated groups, such as veterans and students with disabilities. The following information is not exhaustive, so please check with your advisor or the Department of Student Support and Transitions to learn more.

### AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Florida State University (FSU) values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. Our goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. FSU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities in a manner that is consistent with academic standards of the course while empowering the student to meet integral requirements of the course.

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should:

1. register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services; and
2. request a letter from the Office of Accessibility Services to be sent to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type; and,
3. meet (in person, via phone, email, skype, zoom, etc...) with each instructor to whom a letter of accommodation was sent to review approved accommodations.

Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from the Office of Accessibility Services has been provided.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For the latest version of this statement and more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Office of Accessibility Services 874 Traditions Way 108 Student Services Building Florida State University  
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167 (850) 644-9566 (voice) (850) 644-8504 (TDD) [oas@fsu.edu](mailto:oas@fsu.edu) (<mailto:oas@fsu.edu>)  
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas>

### CONFIDENTIAL CAMPUS RESOURCES



Various centers and programs are available to assist students with navigating stressors that might impact academic success. These include the following:

Victim Advocate Program University Center A, Rm. 4100 (850) 644-7161 Available 24/7/365 Office Hours: M-F 8-5  
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/vap>

Counseling and Psychological Services Askew Student Life Center, 2nd floor 942 Learning Way (850) 644-8255  
<https://counseling.fsu.edu/>

University Health Services Health and Wellness Center (850) 644-6230 <https://uhs.fsu.edu/>

## FREE TUTORING FROM FSU

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services' comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options - see <http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring> or contact [tutor@fsu.edu](mailto:tutor@fsu.edu) (<mailto:tutor@fsu.edu>). High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

## SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

## PANDEMIC PROTOCOLS

The CDC recommends that all individuals, even vaccinated individuals, wear proper and well-fitting masks in public indoor spaces, like classrooms, especially where social distancing is not possible and virus rates are high. The CDC assesses the infection rate in Leon County as High.

As of August, Florida is experiencing a surge of the Omicron BA.5 variant, the most easily transmissible Covid variant to date, which is able to evade previous immunity from infection and vaccination. It is a much more transmissible variant than the original virus, the Delta variant, or even the earlier Omicron variants. It can infect even vaccinated individuals and can be spread by them to others. It poses a special threat to members of the community with underlying health conditions and family members vulnerable to the virus. The best way to protect against serious illness is to be fully vaccinated, but not everyone among us can be.

For these reasons, FSU expects each of us to continue cooperating with common-sense public health protocols, including (1) getting vaccinated and boosted, (2) testing for the virus if you have symptoms, (3) staying home and away from others if you are sick, and (4) masking in public indoor spaces to protect yourself and others whenever there is reason for concern. **Please remember that you should NOT attend class if you have tested positive for Covid-19 or are in quarantine.**

# 6 Syllabus Changes

- 2022-10-03: updated the schedule due to Hurricane Ian

