

# Media and Politics

POS 4235  
Tu/Th 11AM-12:15 in HCB 310

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**Office:** BEL 561

**Office Hours:** W 9-10AM, F 2-3PM, and by appointment

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## 1 COURSE INFORMATION

### Course Objectives

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 (e.g., *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*) as well as cable outlets, chat-rooms, bloggers, talk radio, Internet sites, and tabloid shows. The goal of this course is to understand the forces that shape the information that these sources provide as well as to understand the impact of this information on citizens, politicians, and public policy. The course has two sections. The first section explores the content of campaign messages and their effects on citizens. This section pays particular attention to understanding why campaigns are often so negative and whether negativity is good or bad for democracy. The second section begins by examining 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.

### Required Texts

1. *Media Power in Politics*, sixth edition, edited by Doris A. Graber, CQ Press (ISBN 978-1-60426-610-8).
2. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*, third edition, by Shanto Iyengar, Norton. ISBN: 978-0-393-93779-4.
3. *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns*, by John G. Geer, University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 978-0-22628-499-6 .
4. Additional articles, available on Blackboard, will be assigned throughout the semester.

Students should do the assigned readings before each lecture. The instructor will discuss some of the more difficult material from the readings in lecture, but will not discuss all of the readings. Before the exams, students should be sure to understand the main argument expressed in each assigned reading as well as the evidence the author(s) present to support their argument.

In addition to the assigned readings, students should consult several news sources (e.g., CNN, The New York Times, [www.sayfiereview.com](http://www.sayfiereview.com), [nationalreview.com](http://nationalreview.com), [politico.com](http://politico.com)) before each class. Pay attention to what gets covered, how it gets covered, and the differences in coverage between media outlets.

## 2 GRADES

Students' grades for the course are comprised of the following components:

- ✓ **Midterm Exam:** 30%
- ✓ **Final Exam:** 30%
- ✓ **Reading Quizzes:** 20%
- ✓ **Negative Ads Project:** 10%
- ✓ **News Analysis Project:** 10%

The final letter grade will be assigned according to the standard table:

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

### Midterm and Final Exams

A midterm exam will be held on Thur., 10/13 and a final exam on Fri., 12/16 3-5PM. The exams will feature multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Therefore, **students must bring a pencil and blue book to each exam.** Exams will cover material from lectures, guest speakers, and the assigned movies and readings. There will be no make-up exams, except in cases with university-approved, documented excuses. The final is *not* cumulative; it covers only the material since the midterm.

### Reading Quizzes

At least eight reading quizzes will be administered in class on randomly chosen days throughout the semester. The quizzes will cover basic questions about readings assigned in the last week, recent guest speakers, and films. A student's six highest scores will determine their grade. In cases of university-approved, documented absences, students will be able to perform an alternative writing assignment for equal credit.

### Negative Ads Project

This project asks students to watch a series of presidential ads and evaluate these adds on a number of dimensions using an excel spreadsheet. There is no written component of this project. More details will be given as the semester progresses. **The data are due on Tue., 9/27.** Late projects will not be accepted and will receive a score of zero.

### News Analysis Project

The project asks students to perform a content analysis of two news sources over five days. Students will systematically compare which topics received attention, how many topics received attention, and how each topic was framed. More details will be given as the semester progresses. **The collected data are due on Tue., 11/29.** Late projects will not be accepted and will receive a score of zero.

### Late Work Policy

Technology failure (e.g., hard drive crash) is not an acceptable excuse for late work—students must back up their data. Likewise, except in rare, prolonged cases, illnesses and family emergencies are not acceptable excuses for late work; students should get their work done early in case unforeseen problems arise.

### **3 EXPECTATIONS**

#### **Participation & Attendance**

To succeed in the class, students should show up to class having done the assigned readings for the day. Students do not need to have mastered the material, but rather they must have begun to think about the concepts in order to keep up with lecture. There is no formal grade for participation or attendance.

#### **Email Policy**

The instructor encourages email questions and comments. The instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours, excepting weekends and holidays. To receive a response, the email must be sent from your FSU email address and the subject line of all emails must include the course number (POS 4235), followed by a descriptive subject title (e.g., “POS 4235: Question about [topic]”). The instructor *will not* respond via email to the following:

1. Emails that fail to include the course number and a descriptive title in the subject line.
2. Questions that students can answer themselves by reading the syllabus.
3. Questions that require more than a short paragraph to address fully. For more detailed responses, students are encouraged to see the instructor during office hours.

#### **Classroom Etiquette**

Students must be courteous to the instructor and fellow students. Students should arrive to class on time. Those who must leave early should sit near the exit to avoid distracting others, but do not need to inform the instructor in advance. Students who miss class should talk to other students to find out what material they missed. Cell phones must be silent and *out of sight*. Laptops are allowed in class if they are used solely for note taking and other course-relevant purposes. Students must ensure that they are not distracting others with the content of their screen.

#### **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 <http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy> .)

## **Americans With Disabilities Act**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the Student Disability Resource Center, 874 Traditions Way, 108 Student Services Building, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167, 850-644-9566 (voice), 850-644-8504 (TDD), [hsdrc@admin.fsu.edu](mailto:hsdrc@admin.fsu.edu), <http://www.disabilitycenter.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). 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.

## 4 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- (Q) Is the final exam comprehensive?**  
(A) No.
- (Q) You assigned [insert reading] on the syllabus, but didn't talk much about it in class. Will it be on the exam?**  
(A) Yes, it might be. The readings and lecture are both essential for your understanding of the material.
- (Q) When should I do the readings?**  
(A) Once before lecture, then again (and again) as necessary until you understand the material.
- (Q) I need a [insert specific letter grade] in this class. [Blank stare].**  
(A) Well, that's not really a question. I assume everyone wants the best grade possible. If you need a good grade, put in the work. I'm always happy to clarify difficult material in lecture and office hours, but I will not change grading policies for individual students—no matter how badly they want a [insert specific letter grade].
- (Q) I just need [X] points to receive a [insert specific letter grade] in this class. Is there anything I can do to improve my grade?**  
(A) There are no additional ways to earn credit for the course beyond those specified in the syllabus.
- (Q) Will there be study guides for the exams?**  
(A) Yes.
- (Q) When will the study guide be ready?**  
(A) Usually 3-5 days before the exam.
- (Q) When will the exam grades be posted?**  
(A) As soon as possible. It often takes a day or two to scan and another day or two to look the scores over and upload them to Blackboard.
- (Q) I need to miss an exam because [insert reason]. Can I take it at a different time?**  
(A) No, you must take the exam at its scheduled time; drop the class if you cannot attend one of the exams. Documented excuses are the *only* acceptable reason to miss an exam.
- (Q) What type of doctor's note do I need to be excused from an exam?**  
(A) Once you are no longer contagious, bring me a doctor's note stating that you were not well enough to attend class on the day of the exam. A note stating only that you saw the doctor that day is not sufficient.
- (Q) If I have an emergency, when and where can I take a makeup exam?**  
(A) All makeup exams will be held on the same day. Meet in my office on Fri 12/09 9-10:15AM. Students must get the instructor's approval to take a makeup prior to the makeup exam date and within one week of returning to class.

## 5 SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading	Due
Tue., 8/30	Introduction		
Thur., 9/1	Campaign Reporting	I:9	
Tue., 9/6	Types of Campaign Ads	G:1	
Thur., 9/8	Negative Ads Workshop	G:2	
Tue., 9/13	Defense of Negativity	G:3,4,	
Thur., 9/15	Journeys with George	MPIP:18	
Tue., 9/20	Campaign Strategy	I:6	
Thur., 9/22	Guest: Mark Zubaly		
Tue., 9/27	Campaign Effects I	B:1,2	Negative Ads Data
Thur., 9/29	Campaign Effects II	G:5,6	
Tue., 10/4	Guest Speaker: Dara Kam		
Thur., 10/6	Negative Ads Results	G:7	
Tue., 10/11	Review For Midterm		
Thur., 10/13	<b>Midterm</b>		
Tue., 10/18	Media in Crisis	I:1,2, MPIP:5	
Thur., 10/20	Guest Speaker 3		
Tue., 10/25	Watchdog Journalism	I:3, MPIP:33	
Thur., 10/27	Harvest of Shame	MPIP:3	
Tue., 11/1	Domestic and Foreign News	I:4	
Thur., 11/3	News Analysis Workshop		
Tue., 11/8	Profit Biases	B:3	
Thur., 11/10	Group Biases	MPIP: 22, B:4	
Tue., 11/15	Guest Speaker 4		
Thur., 11/17	Ideological Biases	B:5,6,7,8	
Tue., 11/22	Motivated Reasoning	I:5, B:9	
Thur., 11/24	No Class		
Tue., 11/29	Learning from the Media I	I:8, MPIP:13	News Analysis Data
Thur., 12/1	Learning from the Media II	MPIP:9,12	
Tue., 12/6	News Analysis Results		
Thur., 12/8	Review for Final Exam		

**Final Exam:** Fri., 12/16 3-5PM

### READING KEY

MPIP:3 = *Media Power in Politics*, Chapter 3

I:1 = Iyengar text, Chapter 1

G:3,4 = Geer text, Chapters 3 and 4

B:6 = Reading number 6 on Blackboard

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