Note to students:
This syllabus is a draft that will be updated throughout the semester.
See the course Canvas page for the most recent version.

MEDIA & POLITICS

SYLLABUS

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COURSE INFORMATION

- **Course Hours:** Asynchronous
- **Course Meeting Location:** The cloud!

COURSE INSTRUCTOR

👤 Matthew Pietryka

(pronounced Pih-tree-ka. Call me Professor Pietryka or Professor P for short)

✉ mpietryka [at] fsu.edu

🏛 Political Science/ Bellamy 561

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↩ Contact me for all questions about the course. I will try to respond to all messages within 24 hours, except on holidays or weekends

COURSE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

I am lucky to work with David and Giulia, who will help me create, edit, and grade the course material. Unless otherwise instructed, contact me (Prof. Pietryka) for all questions about the course and the material.

👤 Juan David Irigoyen	👤 Giulia Venturini
✉ jdi17@my.fsu.edu	✉ gventurini@fsu.edu

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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.

COURSE MATERIALS

The course is divided into 15 modules, each of which will include a mix of video lectures, articles, and other media. Most modules will also include assigned reading from one of the **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

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HOW THIS COURSE WORKS

THE MATERIAL IS ORGANIZED INTO 15 MODULES

Students will navigate the course material by completing 15 modules. A new module will typically become available each Monday at 10AM. Some modules are longer than others, however. I will alert students about the longer modules and release those modules early so that students have more time to complete them.

The tentative topics for the 15 modules are listed below.

Module 1: Why attention matters
Module 2: The functions of the media
Module 3: Surveillance: What makes the news?
Module 4: Interpretation: Framing the news

Module 5: Muckraking and the Watchdog Role of the Press
Module 6: Biases, pt 1: Group Biases
Module 7: Biases, pt 2: Ideological and partisan biases

THE GRADING SCHEME IS BUILT FOR FLEXIBILITY

In light of the pandemic, I am making large changes to my typical class format and grading scheme. These changes are intended to make the structure more flexible so that students can cope with the many challenges that the pandemic has created (along with the variety of challenges we all encounter from time to time).

To accommodate as many students' needs as possible, this course will use **specifications grading** ↗ **(https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/01/19/new-ways-grade-more-effectively-essay)**. The core concept behind specifications grading is that all assessments will be evaluated as either *satisfactory* or *unsatisfactory*, based on whether a student demonstrates mastery of the material.

Assessments will be grouped into *bundles* that reflect the amount of course material a student must master to receive a specific letter grade. Students will receive the final grade that corresponds to the bundle of material that they completed.

Students can gain some flexibility by using *tokens*, which allow students to extend deadlines and revise submissions that do not receive satisfactory grades.

Each of these components are explained in detail below.

The bar for mastery is high and students must be prepared to work hard on all assessments required for the bundle they choose to pursue. But students are not alone in this endeavor! My goal as instructor is to help each student master the material that they choose to pursue. And to do so, I am happy to answer any questions you have about this unconventional grading system.

THE **ASSESSMENTS**: HOW LEARNING IS MEASURED

QUIZZES

Quizzes encourage students to recall and recognize key core 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 administered in every module to assess comprehension of the material. The quizzes may also include material covered in previous modules. Most quiz questions will be in the multiple-choice format, though some questions may use a different format such as short answers or matching.

Students must correctly answer at least 80% of questions to receive a *satisfactory* grade for a quiz.

Unless otherwise noted, quizzes will be due before 11:59PM on the Sunday after the module becomes available.

ACTIVITIES

Each module will include one or more *activities*. Activities will encompass a wide range of assignments that will be used to replace tasks that students would otherwise complete during class meetings. Activities will include tasks like answering surveys, summarizing readings, responding to Canvas Discussions, and perhaps providing short video responses. I hope these assignments will help students become more active participants in their learning, providing a richer experience than the video lectures and assigned readings can do on their own.

Activities will often provide a low-stakes introduction to course material. Therefore, the bar to receive a *satisfactory* grade will tend to be lower than for the other assessments. Though the requirements will vary from activity to activity, the evaluation will usually focus on effort rather than mastery of the material.

EXAMS

The course features four essay-based exams. The exams will focus primarily on recent material, but will also include concepts from earlier in the course. The exams will grow in length and stakes. The first exam will be a single question so students can become familiar with the format. The second and third exams will include three questions each. The final exam will include five questions.

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. Each exam will be available for several days so students can fit them into their schedules.

Students will receive a *satisfactory* grade on a question, if and only if they cover a nuanced understanding of all the relevant readings and lecture material for a given question. Satisfactory responses must synthesize material from *multiple* lectures, readings, and other course content to form a coherent and comprehensive answer to the question. They also must provide clear definitions of all terms and examples to help clarify important concepts.

Before the first exam, I will provide students with examples and additional guidance.

I expect the exams to occur on the following dates:

Exam	Dates
1	September 14-16
2	October 14-16
3	November 11-13
4	December 7-9

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 five days. Students will systematically compare which topics receive attention in the news, how many topics receive attention, and how each topic was framed.

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. There is no written component of this project.

More details for each project will be given as the semester progresses.

CONTENT ANALYSIS REFLECTIONS

Students will also be given the option of writing reflection essays after each content analysis data collection. These reflections will allow students to demonstrate that they can apply the various theories and concepts from the class to new examples from the news and the 2020 presidential campaign. Full details will be given as the semester progresses.

THE BUNDLES: HOW FINAL GRADES ARE ASSIGNED

At the end of the semester, students will receive a final grade that corresponds to the bundle of assessments they completed.

To earn an:	You must achieve at least the following:
A	• 10 satisfactory grades on exam

	- questions - Satisfactory grades on 95% of activities - Satisfactory grades on 90% of quizzes - Satisfactory grades on two content analysis data collections - A satisfactory grade on two content analysis reflections
B	8 satisfactory grades on exam questions - Satisfactory grades on 85% of activities - Satisfactory grades on 80% of quizzes - Satisfactory grades on two content analysis data collections - A satisfactory grade on one content analysis reflection
C	6 satisfactory grades on exam questions - Satisfactory grades on 80% of activities - Satisfactory grades on 75% of quizzes - Satisfactory grades on two content analysis data collections
D	6 satisfactory grades on exam questions - Satisfactory grades on 80% of activities - Satisfactory grades on 70% of quizzes

	• Satisfactory grades on one content analysis data collection
F	Given if the requirements for a D grade are not met

Modified grades of + and – will be used when a student's Satisfactory activities fall between the bundles. For instance, a student who met the requirements for the B Bundle, as well as completing two content analysis reflections would receive a B+, while a student who fell just short of the B Bundle requirements would likely receive a B– final grade.

USE **TOKENS** TO MAKE THE COURSE MORE FLEXIBLE

The bar for satisfactory grades 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 am creating a token system that will allow students to extend deadlines and revise assessments. **Each student begins the course with five tokens**.

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

- Extend a deadline on any single assessment by 24 hours.
- Revise an exam question that received an unsatisfactory grade. *You must use these tokens within one week of receiving the grade on the exam response you wish to revise.*
- Revise a content analysis reflection essay that received an unsatisfactory grade. *You must use these tokens within one week of receiving the grade on the reflection you wish to revise.*
- Retake a quiz that was not completed or received an unsatisfactory grade. *You have until Friday, December 4 to use tokens for this purpose.*
- Receive a satisfactory grade for an activity that was not completed or originally received an unsatisfactory grade. *You have until Friday, December 4 to use*

tokens for this purpose.

To use a token, students must email me (**mpietryka@fsu.edu** ⬈ **(https://mail.google.com/mail/? view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=mpietryka@fsu.edu&su=Use%20a%20token)**) with the subject line: "Use a token". The body of the email must explain how the student would like to use the token.

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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 satisfactory grades, students need to follow the instructions carefully, follow word limits as instructed, and use spell and grammar checking.

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TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Course content is accessible through Canvas. Students will need to be able to view videos, write and upload assignments, post to discussion boards, and take assessments. Students should have access to high-speed internet and updated software. Mobile devices may be used to view course content, upload

assignments, and take assessments as determined by the instructor. To view the most current technology requirements, visit the **FSU Canvas support site** ⬀ **(https://support.canvas.fsu.edu/kb/article/899-technology-recommendations-for-learning-online-at-fsu/)** .

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CANVAS SUPPORT

Need help with Canvas? Contact FSU Canvas Support:

✉ **Email: canvas@fsu.edu** ⬀ **(https://mail.google.com/mail/?view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=canvas@fsu.edu)**
📞 **Phone:** (850) 644-8004
🌐 **Website: support.canvas.fsu.edu** ⬀ **(http://support.canvas.fsu.edu)**
⧗ **Hours:** 8am to 5pm, Monday - Friday

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COURSE POLICIES

COMMUNICATIONS/ETIQUETTE

How to communicate with the instructor:

- Contact the instructor via Canvas Inbox or email at `mpietryka@fsu.edu`
- Use **professional email etiquette** ⬀ **(https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/04/16/advice-students-so-they-dont-sound-silly-emails-essay)**
- For email, please respond to your instructor's messages within a 24-hour period, excepting weekends and holidays.
- Ask yourself whether you would be comfortable if someone other than the intended receiver were to read your message. Remember, email is not a

completely secure form of communication.

- I encourage you to reach out if you have questions, thoughts, or suggestions you'd like to share about the course. The only exception is you should avoid asking questions that can be answered by reading this syllabus.

How I will communicate with you:

- When contacting individual students, I will reach out via Canvas Inbox or 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)** .

PARTICIPATION & LATENESS 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.

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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." (For more details see the **FSU Academic Honor Policy and procedures for addressing alleged violations** ⬈ **(http://fda.fsu.edu/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy)** .)

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should:
(1) register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services; and
(2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type.

Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation 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 more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the

> **Office of Accessibility Services (*Tallahassee Campus*)** ⬈ **(https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas)**

874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
Email: **oas@fsu.edu** ↗ **(https://mail.google.com/mail/?
view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=oas@fsu.edu)**
https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas

Student Disability Services (*Panama City Campus*) ↗
(https://pc.fsu.edu/students/student-disability-services)
Office of Student Affairs
4750 Collegiate Drive
2nd Floor Barron Building (Room 215)
Florida State University Panama City
Panama City, FL 32405
(850) 770-2172 (office)
(866) 693-7872 (toll free)
Email: **sds@pc.fsu.edu** ↗ **(https://mail.google.com/mail/?
view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=sds@pc.fsu.edu)**
https://pc.fsu.edu/students/student-disability-services

FREE TUTORING FROM FSU (*TALLAHASSEE CAMPUS*)

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance are 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 the **Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services'
website** ↗ **(http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring)** or contact **tutor@fsu.edu** ↗
(https://mail.google.com/mail/?view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=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."

A PERSONAL NOTE

I'd like to end this syllabus with a personal note. I am so so sad that I will not get to meet most of you in person. Helping students is one of the greatest joys of my job, but it will be so much harder in this online setting.

I have tried my best to adapt this course to the unique circumstances that the COVID-19 pandemic has created. I know it will be far from perfect. I welcome any questions, thoughts, or suggestions you have about the course content and organization. Likewise, should you experience any COVID-related challenges, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can find the most appropriate accommodations. Good luck this semester! Wear a mask, keep your distance, and stay healthy!