

Mass Communication  
MC3505 Media and Policy Process  
Fall 2013  
M/W/F 11:30-12:20 p.m.  
Journalism #135

Mr. Jason Turcotte  
Manship School of Mass Communication  
Louisiana State University  
Hodges Hall #252  
Email: [jturco2@lsu.edu](mailto:jturco2@lsu.edu)  
Office Hours: Mondays, 2-4 p.m.

**Required Texts:**

Graber, D. A. (2011). *Media Power in Politics* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.)  
Cook, T. E. (1998). *Governing With the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*  
Fallows, J. (1996). *Breaking the News: How Media Undermine American Democracy*  
Simon, D. (2008). "The Wire," Season 5 (HBO)

**Recommended Texts:**

Ridout, T. N. (2012). *New Directions in Media and Politics*  
CQ Researcher (2012). *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy* (any recent edition)

---

***Course description and objectives***

This course focuses on the impact of the media on American politics through their interactions with political actors and involvement in the policymaking process; use of strategic political communication in government, and the media's role in spotlighting policy problems and suggesting policy solutions. This course provides students with a greater understanding of how media shape public policy, as well as an understanding of strategic media uses for political elite, policymakers, and the public. A key objective of this course includes proficiency with political communication phenomena such as agenda-setting, framing, and bias. When possible, we will examine media influence within unique policy-specific contexts. In sum, this course promotes expertise in the relationship between media and governance, but also skills associated with media criticism, media literacy, critical thinking, and persuasive and analytical writing skills.

***Expectations***

This course is designed as an upper-level discussion-based seminar; you are expected to make contributions to class discussions throughout the semester. Dead weight in the classroom is frustrating to me as well as your classmates. You are expected to complete all assigned readings on time. Fruitful class discussions will keep response papers to a minimum. In other words, speak up if you want to avoid *weekly* written work. You are

expected to come to class on time, well-read, and prepared to make contributions. Laptops are for note taking purposes only; Facebook, texting, gaming, and online shopping will *not* get you very far in the course. **Note:** All written work must be stapled, double-spaced, and typed in 11 or 12-point Times New Roman font. All papers must be free of factual errors, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and typos. Written work must also conform to the citation style outlined in the assignment instructions.

### ***Academic integrity***

Academic integrity is held to the strictest of standards. The work you turn in is yours – and no one else's. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to give an unfair academic advantage to the student (such as, but not limited to, submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructors, providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment), or the attempt to commit such an act.

Plagiarism is defined as the unacknowledged inclusion of someone else's words, structure, ideas, or data. When a student submits work as his/her own that includes the words, structure, ideas, or data of others, the source of this information must be acknowledged through complete, accurate, and specific references, and, if verbatim statements are included, through quotation marks as well. Failure to identify any source (including interviews, surveys, etc.), published in any medium (including on the internet) or unpublished, from which words, structure, ideas, or data have been taken, constitutes plagiarism. LSU's policy on plagiarism states: "Plagiarism is defined to include any use of another's work and submitting that work as one's own. This means not only copying passages of writing or direct quotations but also paraphrasing or using structure or ideas without citation." If you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism please see the instructor or visit <http://saa.lsu.edu/Plagiarism.html>.

### ***Late work policy***

I extend the benefit of the doubt to everyone once and only once. This means I will accept late work resulting from sickness, conference or any other engagement I deem acceptable for 1 assignment if you notify me **prior** to the start of class as to the reason for your absence. No-shows do not have the luxury of make-up work unless the absence is due to extreme circumstances such as severe medical or family emergency. I reserve the right to require documentation for approved absences and make-up work. *All unapproved late work will receive a zero.*

### ***Classroom respect***

Since this is a course examining the role of media in politics and public policy, there will undoubtedly be times when your classmates express views counter to your own. Every voice and opinion will be heard and respected both within and outside of the classroom. I encourage you to challenge myself and/or your classmates but discussions must remain collegial, respectful, and germane to the topic.

## ***Assignments & Grading:***

Response papers (7):	350 pts	35%
Final paper:	200 pts	20%
Op-ed project:	150 pts	15%
Participation:	100 pts	10%
Blog project:	100 pts	10%
Policy synopsis:	100 pts	10%

A = 900-1,000 pts; B = 800-899 pts; C = 700-799 pts;  
D = 600-699 pts; F = 599 pts or less

### ***Response papers***

Respond to one of two (2) question prompts in order to demonstrate your understanding of the readings. The format of these papers is open-ended and you are allowed to interject your opinion and/or bring current events into the discussion to support your claims. The bottom line: show me you've read and show me you understand what you've read. These papers should be approximately two (2) pages in length. Oral quiz option: Since mass communication students should demonstrate mastery in both writing and public speaking, for up to 3 response papers you may instead elect to schedule a 20-minute oral quiz at my office prior to the class in which the response paper is due. For this option you are responsible for articulating your response to one of the 2 question prompts. I may also ask sub-questions related to the prompt you select, have you elaborate on arguments made or raise points of clarification. Additional details to be discussed in class.

### ***Policy Synopsis***

During the course of the semester you are responsible for conducting basic research on a specific policy area of relevance to the current political landscape. Your research should consider the following questions: What are the two (or more) competing discourses attempting to frame the policy issue? Who are the stakeholders – what does the public stand to gain or lose? What recent media attention has this policy area attracted? What recent legislative action, consensus or progress have public officials made in this area? And where is public opinion on the issue today? You will synthesize your findings in a class handout and share an informal synopsis with the class.

### ***Op-ed Project***

Assume the role of communications director for your assigned nonprofit organization or think tank. After researching your organization – its mission, objectives, and policy agenda – craft a persuasive, fact-based 750-word *New York Times* op-ed piece. Be prepared to discuss your key policy points in class. Additional details to be discussed in class.

### ***Class Blog***

Early on in the semester we will launch a policy blog, with its scope, focus, and mission to be determined by the class. Each of you will have admin access to the blog and are

expected to make contributions throughout the semester by way of aggregated news and the posting of original content. Additional details to be discussed in class.

### **Tentative Schedule**

#### *Week 1: Course Introduction; Preview of News in the Policymaking Process*

- Monday, Aug. 26: Course introduction and expectations.
- Wednesday, Aug. 28: Read Fallows, Chap. 1 “Why we hate the media” (pp.10-46).
- Friday, Aug. 30: Read Fallows, Chap. 2 “What changed?” (pp. 47-73).

#### *Week 2: News and the Policymaking Process: A Critical Perspective.*

- Monday, Sept. 2: **No class** (Labor Day).
- Wednesday, Sept. 4: Read Fallows, Chap. 4 “Bad attitude” (pp.129-181).
- Friday, Sept. 6: Read Fallows, Chap. 5 “Getting in the way” (pp.182-205). In class viewing: Bill Moyers interview with Baltimore Sun journalist/television producer David Simon.

#### *Week 3: The Institutional Press and Journalists as “Political Actors”*

- Monday, Sept. 9: Read Cook, Chap. 1 “Why don’t we call journalists political actors?” (pp. 1-16) & Chap. 4 “The institutional news media” (pp.63-84).  
**Response paper #1 due.**
- Wednesday, Sept. 11: **No class.** Assignment: In lieu of class you are expected to attend the Baton Rouge Metro Council meeting scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 11 at 4:30 p.m. at 222 St. Louis St., Baton Rouge (downtown) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor council chambers and take notes on the policy discussion. We’ll compare our observations with local media coverage on Friday.
- Friday, Sept. 13: Read Cook, Chap. 5 “The political news media” (pp. 85-115). Discussion on news norms and routines and implications for policy coverage; analysis of Metro Council meeting coverage from local broadcasts and *The Advocate*.

#### *Week 4: State of the News Industry – and what it means for Public Affairs*

- Monday, Sept. 16: Read Dunaway, “Markets, ownership, and the quality of campaign news coverage” (on Moodle). Review Pew’s 2013 State of the News Media report (on Moodle).
- Wednesday, Sept. 18: Read Jones, Chap. 5 (in Graber) “Losing the news: The future of the news that feeds democracy” (pp. 57-65); Bennett & Serrin, Chap. 33 (in Graber) “The watchdog role of the press” (pp. 395-404).
- Friday, Sept. 20: Read Alterman, “Out of print: The death and life of the American newspaper” (on Moodle). In-class viewing: “The Wire” Season 5, Episode 1 “More with less.”

Week 5: Public Opinion and the Policy Influence of News Frames and Agenda-Setting

- Monday, Sept. 23: Read McCombs & Shaw, “The agenda-setting function of mass media” (on Moodle). In-class viewing: Robert Entman on media gatekeeping and agenda-setting. **Response paper #2 due.**
- Wednesday, Sept. 25: Read Kohut, “But what do the polls show: How public opinion surveys came to play a major role in policymaking and politics” (on Moodle); Page et al., Chap. 7 (in Graber) “What moves public opinion” (pp.85-98).
- Friday, Sept. 27: Read Lawrence, “Game-framing the issues: Tracking the strategy frame in public policy news” (on Moodle).

Week 6: Media Influence on Domestic Policy Issues

- Monday, Sept. 30: Read Gilliam & Iyengar, Chap. 10 (in Graber) “News coverage effects on public opinion about crime” (pp. 129-138). In-class viewing: “The Mean World Syndrome” documentary excerpts.
- Wednesday, Oct. 2: Read Martin Gilens interview (on Moodle). Discussion on media coverage of welfare, poverty, and immigration. Immigration reform readings TBA.
- Friday, Oct. 4: Read Lizza, “As the world burns: How the Senate and the White House missed their best chance to deal with climate change” (on Moodle). In-class viewing: PBS Frontline, “Climate of Doubt” (2012). **Response paper #3 due.**

Week 7: Media Influence on Foreign Policy Issues

- Monday, Oct. 7: Read Aday, Chap. 27 (in Graber) “The real war will never get on television: An analysis of casualty imagery” (pp. 327-334); Graber, Chap. 34 (in

Graber) “Terrorism, censorship, and the First Amendment” (pp. 407-418).  
Discussion on Snowden and NSA policy.

- Wednesday, Oct. 9: Read Entman, Chap. 26 (in Graber) “Mediating the public’s influence on foreign policy” (pp. 315-323); Seib, Chap. 23 (in Graber) “The Al Jazeera effect: How the new global media are reshaping world politics” (pp. 283-291); Calderone, “Al Jazeera promises to stand out in cable news market, but concerns loom” (on Moodle).
- Friday, Oct. 11: **Op-ed projects due.**

Week 8: Tactics & Strategy: Policy-Shaping Functions of the Presidency

- Monday, Oct. 14: Read Cook, Chap. 6 “The Uses of News: Theory and (Presidential) Practice” (pp. 120-140). Introduction to strategic uses of the news media.
- Wednesday, Oct. 16: Read Tulis, “The Rhetorical Presidency” introduction (pp.1-16). Discussion on bully pulpit and “going public” as strategic governance. In-class viewing: April 2011 President Obama budget speech and Paul Ryan’s response.
- Friday, Oct. 18: Read Domke et al, Chap. 20 (in Graber) “Going Public as Political Strategy: The Bush Administration, and Echoing Press, and Passage of the Patriot Act” (pp. 251-263).

Week 9: Strategic Communication: A Closer Look at Elite Political Influence

- Monday, Oct. 21: Read Cook, Chap. 7 “Beyond the White House” (pp. 141-163). In-class viewing: Leadership talk with GOP strategist Frank Luntz.
- Wednesday, Oct. 23: Read Sellers, Chap. 21 (in Graber) “Manipulating the message in the U.S. Congress” (pp. 267-273); Manheim, Chap. 35 (in Graber) “The news shapers: Strategic communication as a third force in newsmaking” (pp. 421-429).
- Friday, Oct. 25: **No class** (fall break).

Week 10: Campaign Coverage in the Current Media Landscape

- Monday, Oct. 28: Read Patterson, Chap. 15 (in Graber) “The miscast institution” (pp. 193-200); Sabato, Chap. 18 (in Graber) “Open season: How the news media cover presidential campaigns in the age of attack journalism” (pp. 225-234).  
**Response paper #4 due.**

- Wednesday, Oct. 30: Read Fallows, “Rhetorical questions” (on Moodle); West, Chap. 18 (in Graber) “Learning about the candidates” (pp. 185-192). Discussion on role of campaign debates in setting policy agendas.
- Friday, Nov. 1: Read Pew report, “Low marks for the 2012 election: Voters pessimistic about partisan cooperation” sections 1 & 4 (on Moodle); Pew report, “Winning the media campaign 2012” (on Moodle). Discussion on 2012 election and Senator Mary Landrieu’s re-election campaign.

*Week 11: The Policy Implications of Entertainment Media*

- Monday, Nov. 4: Read Baum, Chap. 9 (in Graber) “How soft news brings policy issues to the inattentive public” (pp.113-125); Bunting & Burkeman, “Pro Bono” (on Moodle). Discussion on talk media and celebrity influence on policy.
- Wednesday, Nov. 6: **TBA.**
- Friday, Nov. 8: Read Holbert et al., “*The West Wing* as endorsement of the U.S. presidency: Expanding the bounds of priming in political communication” (on Moodle); Bennett, “Relief in hard times: A defense of Jon Stewart’s comedy in an age of cynicism” (on Moodle). In-class viewing: Colbert’s 2010 Congressional testimony.

*Week 12: Digital Technology and the Policymaking Process*

- Monday, Nov. 11: Read Davis, Chap. 24 (in Graber) “A symbiotic relationship: Bloggers and journalists” (pp. 293- 300); Hindman handout. Discussion on bloggers as agenda-setters: The Drudge Report and Trent Lott case studies. **Response paper #5 due.**
- Wednesday, Nov. 13: Read Hiar, “How the Tea Party used digital media to gain power” (on Moodle); Weisbrod & Merica, “Seeing red: Same-sex marriage debate goes viral” (on Moodle); Discussion on role of technology in advancing and influencing policy.
- Friday, Nov. 15: Read Wolf, “How the internet invented Howard Dean” (on Moodle); Franz, Chap. 8 (in Ridout) “Targeting campaign messages. Good for campaigns but bad for America?” (pp. 113-130). Discussion on “big data” and micro-targeting communication strategies.

*Week 13: Media Power in Social/Policy Movements*

- Monday, Nov. 18: Read Bennett et al., “Communication and political mobilization: Digital media and anti-Iraq war demonstrations in the U.S.” (on Moodle); Hitlin et al., “News coverage conveys strong momentum for same-sex

marriage” (on Moodle). Discussion on contemporary social/policy movements: Kony 2012 case study.

- Wednesday, Nov. 20: In-class viewing: “The Wire” Season 5, Episode 9 “Late Editions.” **Response paper #6 due.**
- Friday, Nov. 22: **No class** (NCA Conference).

Week 14: Fragmenting Media Trends; Effects on Incivility, Polarization, and Bias

- Monday, Nov. 25: Read Prior, Chap. 12 (in Graber) “Audience fragmentation and political inequality in the post-broadcast media environment” (pp.153-163); Read Stroud & Muddiman, Chap. 2 (in Ridout) “The American media system today: Is the public fragmenting?” (pp. 6-20).
- Wednesday, Nov. 27: Read Forgette & Morris, “High-conflict television news and public opinion” (on Moodle). Discussion on cynicism, conflict, and partisan media. In-class viewing: Jon Stewart on CNN’s “Crossfire.”
- Friday, Nov. 29: **No class** (Thanksgiving break).

Week 15: The Democratic Implications of the Changing Media Environment

- Monday, Dec. 2: Read Gronke & Cook, Chap. 8 (in Graber) “Disdaining the media: The American public’s changing attitudes toward the news” (pp. 101-108); Hart, “The seductions of incivility” essay from Reilly Center’s 2011 Breaux Symposium (on Moodle).
- Wednesday, Dec. 4: Read Hayes, Chap. 13 (in Ridout) “The news anew? Political coverage in a transformed media age” (pp. 193-207). Discussion on astroturfing, misinformation campaigns, and crowdsourcing.
- Friday, Dec. 6: Discussion on “The Wire” – implications for media and policy, and connections to course readings. **Response paper #7 due.**

Week 16: Finals Week

- Thursday, Dec. 12: **Final papers on “The Wire” due by 6 p.m.**

*Note: Readings are subject to change.*