

Mass Communication  
MC3505 Media and Policy Process  
Spring 2014  
T/TH 10:30-11:50 p.m.  
Journalism #140

Mr. Jason Turcotte  
Manship School of Mass Communication  
Louisiana State University  
Hodges Hall #252  
Email: [jturco2@lsu.edu](mailto:jturco2@lsu.edu)  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2-5 p.m. and by appointment

**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*  
Simon, D. (2008). "The Wire," Season 5 (HBO)

---

***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 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 an understanding of concepts such as agenda-setting, framing, bias, and public opinion. When possible, we will examine media influence within unique policy-specific contexts. In sum, this course builds expertise in the relationship between media and governance, but also emphasizes skills associated with media criticism, media literacy, critical thinking, and persuasive and analytical writing.

***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 (unless otherwise specified). 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 (3):	300 pts	30%
Midterm exam:	200 pts	20%
Final project:	200 pts	20%
Op-ed:	150 pts	15%
Participation:	150 pts	15%

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

***Response Papers (10% each)***

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 draw from current events 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 2-3 pages in length. Oral quiz option: Since mass communication students should demonstrate mastery in both writing and public speaking, you may elect to schedule a 20-minute oral quiz in lieu of *1 and only 1* response paper. 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. You must email me prior to the response paper due date to schedule the oral quiz.

***Op-ed Project (15%)***

You will select a policy issue you're passionate about and articulate a specific policy position. After researching your policy issue you will craft a persuasive, fact-based 750-word *New York Times* op-ed piece. Be prepared to discuss your key policy points in class. Prior to the project, we will analyze a series of op-eds, and discuss structure and tools of persuasion. Extra points are awarded to those who choose to submit their op-eds to a publication. Additional details to be discussed in class.

***Participation & Class Blog (15%)***

Participation is a key component of the class. This grade includes your attendance in class, your contributions to class discussions, and your contributions to the class blog. Everyone is expected to contribute 2-3 blog posts over the course of the semester; those who post more will be adequately compensated. If you find it difficult to jump into class discussions, blog contributions are a good way of balancing your efforts and ensuring high participation points. You can also earn extra points if your blog topics are used by the instructor in class discussions. Additional details to be discussed in class.

***Final Project (20%)***

Scope of the project will be determined no later than mid-semester.

**Tentative Schedule**

Week 1: Course Introduction; Preview of the Policymaking Process

- Thursday, Jan. 16: Course introduction/class expectations.

Week 2: News Media and Democracy: A Critical Perspective.

- Tuesday, Jan. 21: Read Fallows, “Why Americans hate the media” (on Moodle). *Recommended* reading: Gronke & Cook, Chap. 8 (in Graber) “Disdaining the media: The American public’s changing attitudes towards the news” (pp. 101-108).
- Thursday, Jan. 23: 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). In-class viewing: Interview with Baltimore Sun journalist/television producer David Simon.

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

- Tuesday, Jan. 28: Read Cook, Chap. 1 “Why don’t we call journalists political actors?” (pp. 1-13) & Chap. 4 “The institutional news media” (pp.63-84).
- Thursday, Jan. 30: Read Cook, Chap. 5 “The political news media” (pp. 85-115). Discussion on news norms and routines – and implications for policy coverage.

Week 4: State of the News Industry – and Implications for Public Affairs

- Tuesday, Feb. 4: Review Pew’s 2013 State of the News Media report (on Moodle). In-class viewing: The Wire, episode 1; “More with less.” **Response paper #1 due.**
- Thursday, Feb. 6: Read Prior, Chap. 12 (in Graber) “Audience fragmentation and political inequality in the post-broadcast media environment” (pp.153-163). *Recommended* reading: Dunaway, “Markets, ownership, and the quality of campaign news coverage” (on Moodle). Discussion on economic influences of the news and commercial bias.

Week 5: Public Opinion and Policy Agenda-Setting (watch The Wire, episode 2)

- Tuesday, Feb. 11: Read McCombs & Shaw, “The agenda-setting function of mass media” (on Moodle). In-class viewing: Robert Entman on media gatekeeping and agenda-setting.
- Thursday, Feb. 13: Read Kohut, “But what do the polls show? How public opinion surveys came to play a major role in policymaking and politics” (on

Moodle). *Recommended* reading: Page et al., Chap. 7 (in Graber) “What moves public opinion” (pp.85-98).

Week 6: Media Frames and Domestic Policy Issues (watch The Wire, episode 3)

- Tuesday, Feb. 18: Read Hitlin et al., “News coverage conveys strong momentum for same-sex marriage” (on Moodle). Discussion on news frames: episodic v. thematic. In-class viewing: Frank Luntz, GOP strategist, leadership talk.
- Thursday, Feb. 20: Read Gilliam & Iyengar, Chap. 10 (in Graber) “News coverage effects on public opinion about crime” (pp. 129-138); Martin Gilens interview (on Moodle). In-class viewing: “The Mean World Syndrome” excerpts. Discussion on media coverage of crime, welfare, and poverty.

Week 7: Policy-Shaping Tactics & Strategy (watch The Wire, episode 4)

- Tuesday, Feb. 25: Read Cook, Chap. 6 “The Uses of News: Theory and (Presidential) Practice” (pp. 120-140). In-class viewing: April 2011 President Obama budget speech and Paul Ryan’s response.
- Thursday, Feb. 27: 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); *Recommended* reading: Farnsworth & Lichter, Chap. 19 (in Graber) “The struggle over shaping the news” (pp. 241-248).  
**Response paper #2 due.**

Week 8: Tactics & Strategy of Political Elite cont. (watch The Wire, episode 5)

- Tuesday, March 4: **Mardi Gras Break: No class.**
- Thursday, March 6: Read Manheim, Chap. 35 (in Graber) “The news shapers: Strategic communication as a third force in newsmaking” (pp. 421-429). Introduction to op-eds: persuasive writing workshop.

Week 9: Midterm Exam Week

- Tuesday, March 11: **Midterm Exam.**
- Thursday, March 13: In-class viewing: The Wire, episode 6: “The Dickensian Aspect.”

Week 10: Campaign Coverage in Current Media Landscape (watch The Wire, episode 7)

- Tuesday, March 18: 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). See Pew report (on Moodle): “Low marks for the 2012 election.”

- Thursday, March 20: 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.

Week 11: The Policy Implications of Entertainment Media (watch The Wire, episode 8)

- Tuesday, March 25: 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. In-class viewing: BuzzFeed founder Jonah Peretti; Stephen Colbert’s 2010 Congressional testimony.
- Thursday, March 27: *Recommended* reading Holbert et al., “The West Wing as endorsement of the U.S. presidency: Expanding the bounds of priming in political communication” (on Moodle). **Op-eds due.**

Week 12: Digital Technology and the Policymaking Process

- Tuesday, April 1: Read Davis, Chap. 24 (in Graber) “A symbiotic relationship: Bloggers and journalists” (pp. 293- 300); Discussion on bloggers as agenda-setters: The Lewinsky Scandal and Trent Lott case studies. In-class viewing: The Wire, episode 9: “Late Editions.”
- Thursday, April 3: Read Hiar, “How the Tea Party used digital media to gain power” (on Moodle); *Recommended* reading: Bennett et al., “Communication and political mobilization: Digital media and anti-Iraq war demonstrations in the U.S.” (on Moodle). Discussion on role of technology in advancing movements and influencing policy; social networks and political capital.

Week 13: Media Influence on Foreign Policy Issues (watch The Wire, episode 10)

- Tuesday, April 8: 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 press freedom vs. national security.
- Thursday, April 10: Read 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). Discussion on ethnocentrism and re-cap of The Wire, Season 5.  
**Response paper #3 due.**

Week 14: Spring Break: No classes

Week 15: Fragmenting Trends: Incivility, Polarization, and Bias

- Tuesday, April 22: Read Dunaway, “Incivility, negativity, and bias in the media” (on Moodle). Discussion on types and trends of media bias.
- Thursday, April 24: Read Forgette & Morris, “High-conflict television news and public opinion” (on Moodle); Hart, “The seductions of incivility” essay from Reilly Center’s 2011 Breaux Symposium (on Moodle). Discussion on cynicism, conflict, and polarization. In-class viewing: Jon Stewart on CNN’s “Crossfire.”

Week 16: Media and Policy Case Studies: Climate Change and Healthcare

- Tuesday, April 29: 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).
- Thursday, May 1: Read Dove, “The ‘meh’ of a salesman” (on Moodle); Purdum, “The Obamacare fumble” (on Moodle). Bloggy Awards.

Week 17: Finals Week

- **Final project due date to be announced.**

*Note: Readings and/or assignments are subject to change.*