

University of North Texas at Dallas
Spring 2014
SYLLABUS

PSCI 3160D.090: Mass Media in American Politics			
3 Hrs.			
Department of	Social Sciences	Division of	Liberal Arts and Life Sciences
Instructor Name:	Walt Borges		
Office Location:	Building 2: Rm 221		
Office Phone:	972.338.1552 (I only answer and check phone messages when I am in the office. Please communicate by official university email if you want a prompt reply.)		
Email Address:	walter.borges@unt.edu (do not use Blackboard for email communication)		
Office Hours:	Office hours will be set after I have met with all of my classes. I will try to maximize my availability to students. Office hours will be posted on the course Web page. There are no dedicated hours for each class – first come is first served. Making an appointment will guarantee you access at the times that fit your schedule.		
Virtual Office Hours:	None, but you may email at any time. I will try to answer within 24 hours.		
Classroom Location:	Building 2, Rm. 212		
Class Meeting Days & Times:	Tuesdays 7 – 9:50 pm		
Course Catalog Description:			
Prerequisites:	None		
Co-requisites:			
Required Text:	Students are required to keep current on public affairs, and quizzes will contain questions drawn from the major stories covered by print, broadcast and internet news organizations. Caveat: many internet news sites are converting to pay-to-view sites with limited access for non-paying consumers. Others continue to provide free access. I recommend a few major news sites, a list of which is attached at the end of this syllabus.		
Recommended Text and References:	Additional online readings linked to homework assignments and quizzes will be assigned. Two copies of the Fiorina text are available through the university reserve. The course outline references relevant chapters.		
Access to Learning Resources:	UNT Dallas Library: phone: (972) 780-3625; web: http://www.unt.edu/unt-dallas/library.htm UNT Dallas Bookstore: phone: (972) 780-3652; e-mail: 1012mgr@fhg.follett.com		

Course Goals or Overview:

Politics and Media explores political communication between democratic governments and citizens in terms of its primary conduit – the news media. In democracies, the press serves as an integral part of the system of checks and balances on government. How well the press plays that role is an open question. Does the American press distort reality with its coverage of events and policy? Is the press an institution that helps the government, political parties and powerful economic interests manipulate viewers and readers, or is it a major obstacle to manipulation? Does an independent and free press help or hinder democracy in the United States and around the world? What roles the news media will play in the future is a larger question and the answers are uncertain.

This is a course about politics. Politics in a democracy requires communication between the governors and the governed, and the news media serve not just as major conduits of news and political messages, but as important analysts and interpreters of the messages sent by candidates, officeholders, special interests and the mass public. The course is designed to give you a background in the development of the press as a group of political institutions and to familiarize you with the logistics of news-making and coverage. More importantly, the course is an investigation of the relationships of the public, press and the government through the mechanisms of campaign communications, public opinion and the dissemination of government-generated information.

We will examine the theoretical and actual roles played by the press in public affairs to develop understanding of current and persistent problems of press performance such as bias, independence, manipulation by government and special interests, and the quest for profits at the expense of public service. We will investigate the impact of emerging technologies – the printing press, telegraph, radio, television, Internet and smart cell phones – on the institutions of the press and on political communication. We will look at how the changing business of news media has impacted the traditional practices of news gathering and altered the definition of news. We will view substantial numbers of campaign ads, political videos and news reports in class to determine targeted audiences, approaches to political persuasion and the extent of spin. And we will examine the practices of pack/ herd journalism to determine if journalistic standards are met.

Students should emerge from the course with a deeper understanding of modern information practices in both the public and private spheres, an understanding that is increasingly necessary for citizens and crucial for those pursuing careers in the professions and government.

Learning Objectives/Outcomes: At the end of this course, the student will:

1	Be able to discuss the different approaches taken by the framers of the United States and Texas constitutions and the motivations behind the structure of each charter;
2	Demonstrate the ability to write cogently about major issues in American and state government and public responses to those initiatives;
3	Define roles and processes used in governing institutions in Texas and the United States;
4	Identify past, current and future issues of American and Texas government, including differences and similarities in state and federal approaches to major policy initiatives;
	General Education objectives
5	The course is designed to enhance critical thinking through inquiry and analysis and the creative linking of disparate or similar concepts.
6	The course is designed to enhance written, oral and reading skills to promote communication.
7	The course is designed to ensure UNT Dallas graduates are socially responsible, interculturally competent, and civically engaged through enhanced knowledge of local and global governments and issues, and through various culture-based approaches underlying government institutions and policy.
8	The course promotes personal responsibility through discussions of ethical problems and reasoning in the public sphere.
9	Taken together, these general education objectives are designed to achieve the ultimate goal of the university, to provide a foundation and skills for you to continue learning long after you have left the university.

Course Evaluation Methods

This course will utilize the following instruments to determine student grades and proficiency of the learning outcomes for the course.

- **Exams** – Written tests include identification, multiple choice, short answer and essay questions, and are designed to measure knowledge of presented course material.
- **Class Participation** – weekly participation in class discussions.

Grading Matrix:

Instrument	Value (points or percentages)	Total
Midterm exam 1	20 percent	20
Final exam	30 percent	50
Term Paper	30 percent	80
Short assignments/papers	15 percent	95
Class participation	5 percent	100
Total:	100 percent	

Grade Determination:

A = 90% or better
B = 80 – 89%
C = 70 – 79%
D = 60 – 69%
F = less than 60%

Course Outline

This schedule is subject to change by the instructor. Any changes to this schedule will be communicated by the instructor in class and by posting on Blackboard.

DATE	TOPICS
Tuesday Jan 14	General course info/ writing for this class Introduction. Syllabus review. Democracy, information and media politics. Elite entitlement v. dumbass democracy? Can ordinary citizens participate in their own governance? The Triad – modeling political communication
Jan 21	The Press: watchdogs, gatekeepers and other mythological creatures of democracy. Roles and audiences. Political communication: Theories of the press, the public and political elites
Jan 28	Klapper, Zaller and press-centered theory. A Brief History of The Times – The technologies and psychologies of political communication across time and space.
Feb 4	The American press – revolutions, control and regulations. Profit centers, globalization and conglomeration: the business of news.
Feb 11	Shaping the news. Journalism by punditry: the triumph of opinion over knowledge.
Feb 18	Midterm exam Feb. 23. Campaign communication.
Feb 25	Covering the campaigns. The art of spin: sending political messages.
March 4	New media: blogs, social networks and other internet channels.
March 10-16	Spring Break – no classes
March 18	Presidential popularity and the press.
March 25	Conflict, indexing and proximity.
April 1	Wars and the press. (MPSA week: April 8 class may be cancelled)
April 8	Iraq and the failure(?) of the American press
April 15	The new press: emerging or collapsing democracy?
April 22	
April 29	
Tues. May 6	Final exam: 7:30-9:30 pm

University Policies and Procedures

Students with Disabilities (ADA Compliance):

The University of North Texas Dallas faculty is committed to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students with documented disabilities are responsible for informing faculty of their needs for reasonable accommodations and providing written authorized documentation. Grades assigned before an accommodation is provided will not be changed as accommodations are not retroactive. For more information, you may visit the Student Life Office, Suite 200, Building 2 or call Laura Smith at 972-780-3632.

Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness Policy:

The Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SETE to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Assignment Policy:

Assignments come in several flavors. 1. At least five readings will be assigned, with associated quiz questions that focus on reading mastery and critical thinking. These will be handed out at the start of classes and may be submitted at any time, up to the deadline noted in the syllabus. **Late assignments will be penalized 20 percent per day late.** 2. **I do not accept emailed assignments.** If you are unable to hand in the assignment, you may send in an email file to show you had completed the work, but if you do not present a hard copy by the next class, your grade for that assignment is zero. 3. Chapter quizzes, public affairs quizzes and in-class assignments will be given without notice. You are required to keep up with your reading. At least one quiz grade will be dropped, so and **there are no quiz make-ups.** 4. Format and citation requirements will be included on written and posted assignments on Blackboard. An American Political Science Association citation sheet provides details of bibliography and citation form, and it is posted on the class pages on Blackboard under the Writing folder.

Exam Policy:

Exams should be taken as scheduled. No makeup examinations will be allowed except for documented emergencies (See Student Handbook).

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is a hallmark of higher education. You are expected to abide by the University's code of Academic Integrity policy. Any person suspected of academic dishonesty (i.e., cheating or plagiarism) will be handled in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. Refer to the Student Code of Academic Integrity at http://www.unt.edu/unt-dallas/policies/Chapter%2007%20Student%20Affairs,%20Education,%20and%20Funding/7.002%20Code%20of%20Academic_Integrity.pdf for complete provisions of this code.

In addition, all academic work submitted for this class, including exams, papers, and written assignments should include the following statement:

On my honor, I have not given, nor received, nor witnessed any unauthorized assistance that violates the UNTD Academic Integrity Policy.

You will be required to sign the pledge to authenticate it.

Bad Weather Policy:

On those days that present severe weather and driving conditions, a decision may be made to close the campus. In case of inclement weather, call UNT Dallas Campuses main voicemail number (972) 780-3600 or search postings on the campus website www.unt.edu/dallas. Students are encouraged to update their Eagle Alert contact information, so they will receive this information automatically.

Attendance and Participation Policy:

The University attendance policy is substantially in effect for this course. However, you will be treated as responsible adults for most of the semester: you miss class at your own peril. Details of attendance policy will be discussed in class during the first session.

Class attendance and participation is expected because the class is designed as a shared learning experience and because essential information not in the textbook will be discussed in class. The dynamic and intensive nature

of this course makes it impossible for students to make-up or to receive credit for missed classes. Attendance and participation is essential to your ability to demonstrate proficiency in the subject.

If you must miss a single, isolated class, you need not notify the instructor, but it becomes your responsibility to obtain notes of the missed class from your colleagues. I do not post the notes of my lectures. Before you ask the professor what was missed, you should have reviewed notes for the missed class.

In the case of extended absences due to illness or crises, you are expected to inform the instructor as soon as possible about the extent of your absence, preferably before the absence occurs. You may be required to produce written evidence of the reasons for your absence.

In all cases, missing exams and other assignments requires a good-faith effort on your part to inform the instructor of your absence beforehand. Unless you have a rock-solid reason for missing the test, you will not be permitted to make it up.

Diversity/Tolerance Policy:

Students are encouraged to contribute their perspectives and insights to class discussions. However, offensive & inappropriate language and remarks offensive to others of particular nationalities, ethnic groups, sexual preferences, religious groups, genders, or other ascribed statuses will not be tolerated. Disruptions which violate the Code of Student Conduct will be referred to the Office of Student Life as the instructor deems appropriate.

Class-specific Policies:

- **Do not attempt to communicate with the professor through the Blackboard mail function.** I do not check it and I will not respond. Communicate through my official university e-mail listed at the top of this syllabus. I communicate with you by responding to whatever e-mail address you use to send your message. General notices are posted as announcements on Blackboard and/or as email to your official university address. Failure to check your email is no excuse for missing changes in test dates or assignments.
- **Students are expected to attend class**, since much of the material is not drawn from the text or readings. The university wants instructors to take attendance (see above), so you are required to sign an attendance sheet, at least for the first five weeks of the course. At that time, those students who have missed two classes will be contacted by Student Services about those absences. Attendance does not enhance your grade, but failure to attend will lead to lower grades as much of the course material is not in the books. Missing class will also mean missing pop quizzes based on the readings.
- Entering class late is sometimes unavoidable. **If you enter late, you are expected to do so as unobtrusively and quietly as possible.** Please take a seat on the fringes of the class and do not disrupt the lecture by taking a front row seat. Do not attempt to hand in homework while the lecture is going on. If you must leave class, do so quietly.
- **Cell phones must be turned off unless they are being used to record the class or presentations.** Texting, tweeting and other uses are not permitted. If I determine you are using your phone for purposes other than class, you will be required to keep the phone turned off for all future classes. See below.
- **Computers are a useful tool for taking notes in class, but these machines are often used for a number of other purposes such as emailing, web-surfing, game-playing etc. Note-taking on a computer is permitted in class, but secondary uses are not. See above. Students who are found to be using their computers for activities other than note-taking will be banned from using the computer in class for any purpose. If we should have a guest speaker, everyone will go computer-free for that session.**
- Students are expected to have **read the assigned material before class.**
- Students are encouraged to participate frequently in discussions in class. Participation will make the instructor's calls on borderline grades easier to make.
- **There are no 'right' answers to many of the issues we will discuss**, and you will not be graded on your opinions. However, please take into account that opinions supported by facts are more persuasive than opinions supported by more opinions. Make your arguments accordingly.
- Students are expected to be considerate of others. This means silencing cell phones, arriving on time, not leaving early and being respectful of others during discussion and debate. **Flaming or intimidating fellow students will not be tolerated.** Opinions and arguments are fair game; the speaker is not. Listening courteously is a real world skill, and I have a commitment to civil discourse that I will enforce.
- I support my classes with PowerPoint presentations. However, **you will not have access to these presentations outside of class.** There are several reasons for this:
 - 1) One-time use of images and charts for teaching is fair use under current legal rulings, but were I to allow you permanent access to those images, I would have to secure formal permission from the owner of every image.

2) Some students substitute post-lecture PowerPoint downloads for attending class or note-taking. Others substitute verbatim regurgitation of PwrPt material on tests and quizzes for the thoughtful analysis that earns high grades. Studies show that note-taking does enhance student performance, so please develop that skill.

3) There is potential for an ownership dispute over course content posted online. The presentations constitute my work product, virtually all of which was assembled before I began teaching at UNTD. Many universities are now enamored with online courses, and some attempt to claim legal ownership of work prepared by individuals employed at the school or posted on university websites, whether or not the content was compiled on university time or published during university employment. My lecture material and formats were compiled by me outside the UNTD environment after years of study, reading and research. The knowledge and formats in the PowerPoints existed before I began teaching these courses. Previous presentations were adjusted to fit UNT course requirements and mandated texts.

APPENDIX – Following the news

As noted above, I am requiring students in this class to become conversant on the national and state level policy issues of the day. This requires students to listen, view and read articles, video and sound bites from news organizations.

Following the news is a skill that is acquired through practice. To meet the requirements of this course:

1) students should follow the news daily through radio, TV, newspapers and internet news sources. At least one sources should be checked daily, but it would be wise to read or listen to a number of sources that cover the news from different perspectives. That means you may want to check out Fox News or MSNBC occasionally, even though most of us would consider these to have evident biases in their presentation of the news.

2) students should understand the difference between reporting and punditry. Reporting is essentially the gathering and presentation of new information in cultural and political contexts. Punditry is analysis and interpretation based on preferences and political perspectives in order to achieve ideological or entertainment purposes. Many people choose their news sources because the source reinforces the person's preferences and prejudices. Students in this course will do better to look at sources that get the facts right rather than share the student's political perspective. Students should not substitute punditry for reporting as a source of information.

3) students should understand the difference between lucrative entertainment and costly coverage. Many talk show hosts and pundits would rather be controversial than thoughtful or perceptive. Drama and controversy attract a larger audience, and thus bring in more advertising dollars for the media business. Students may wonder why 'analysts' on shows and the internet often seem to find no agreement on the way forward. This is because they are chosen to contradict and yell at each other without listening in order to increase ratings and readership. Similarly, Lindsey Lohan's latest escapade or interview is of no value to this class.. Focus on the biggest political and policy stories.

With these ideas in mind, here are some premier news organizations you may want to follow. All have websites. Those with limited free access are starred (*).

RADIO

National Public Radio (NPR)

TV and VIDEO

CBS (national and local)

NBC (national and local)

ABC (national and local)

Fox (national and local)

PBS (national only)

CNN (national only)

MSNBC (national only)

CSPAN 1 and 2 (Congress)

NEWSPAPERS/INTERNET

New York Times* (5 articles a month/ front page headline view is free)

Washington Post* (20 articles a month/ front page headline view is free)

The Guardian – USA edition (this UK newspaper website often puts its American competitors to shame)

The Texas Tribune (online state news – this is the best single source for Texas news, with links to local coverage)

The Associated Press (the free Android cell phone app will give you breaking news, but little analysis)

Reuters (economic news)

National TV networks maintain websites but do not cover complex stories or those with weak video potential. For the purposes of this class, the major stories we are interested in should be reported on these sites.