

UMBC UGC New Course Request: POLI 326/MCS 326: Media & Politics

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COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number(s)	MCS 326; POLI 326
Formal Title	Media & Politics
Transcript Title (≤30c)	Media & Politics
Recommended Course Preparation	
Prerequisite NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a "D" or better.	
Credits	3
Repeatable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Max. Total Credits	3 This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.
Grading Method(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reg (A-F) <input type="checkbox"/> Audit <input type="checkbox"/> Pass-Fail

PROPOSED CATALOG DESCRIPTION (no longer than 75 words):

In this course, students examine the ways in which 21st-Century media institutions have transformed—and been transformed by—contemporary American politics. Subjects of study include theories of the press as they relate to the effective functioning of modern democracy. Students examine changes in the organizational structures and functions of media institutions and political institutions over time, and trace the effects of these developments to changes in the substance of contemporary political media content.

RATIONALE FOR NEW COURSE:

a) Why is there a need for this course at this time?

This course is currently being offered as a special topics course in MCS and POLI, in a crosslisted fashion as POLI 309 / MCS 370. Dr. Ian Anson will be offering the course regularly, meaning that it should no longer be treated as a repeatable special topic. Instead, a new course listing should be created which provides students with a description of the subject matter.

b) How often is the course likely to be taught?

The course is to be taught every fourth semester.

c) How does this course fit into your department's curriculum?

This course expands both the POLI and MCS departments' curricula in line with the thrust of recent scholarly research, by giving students an opportunity to learn about media politics through a broad survey of topics in institutions and political behavior. Currently, neither department offers courses that principally address the political behavior, psychology, and institutional evolution of media organizations. This course works to fill this important gap by examining the longstanding and central literature on political communication. In addition, this regularly-offered special topics course is always crosslisted with POLI. Establishing the course as a permanent offering with the same number reduces confusion while helping both majors to expand their regular catalog.

d) What primary student population will the course serve?

This course is intended primarily for upper-level MCS and POLI majors, and majors in related fields. The course subject matter connects nicely with the curricula of students majoring in other disciplines, such as public policy, sociology, psychology, and English.

e) Why is the course offered at the level (ie. 100, 200, 300, or 400 level) chosen?

Because this course is a reading- and writing-focused course which asks students to produce a volume of written work across the semester, it is inappropriate for the 100- or 200-level. The course is not suitable for the 400 level, because the reading and writing expectations of the course have been adjusted to accommodate juniors and advanced sophomores.

f) Explain the appropriateness of the recommended course preparation(s) and prerequisite(s).

n/a

g) Explain the reasoning behind the P/F or regular grading method.

This course should have a regular grading method, given that it is a seminar with a variety of assignments and requirements. The syllabus outlines expectations which are commensurate with an A-F grading scale.

h) Provide a justification for the repeatability of the course.

This course should not be repeated for credit, as its core subject matter will not greatly change from semester to semester. Therefore, students who wish to repeat the course should be able to do so only for the original 3 credits, not to add another 3 credits to their course history.

ATTACH COURSE OUTLINE (mandatory)

POLI 309 [326]/MCS 370 [326]: Media & Politics

Wednesday, 4:30PM-7:00PM | Physics 201

Professor Ian G. Anson

Office Location: PUP 305

Office Hours: W 1pm-4pm

iganson@umbc.edu

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

In American cultural discourse, we are frequently reminded that “image is everything.” When it comes to the spectacle of contemporary American politics, this conventional wisdom deserves a thorough critical examination. In this course, we will examine the ways in which 21st-Century media institutions have transformed—and been transformed by—the contours of contemporary American politics. We will explore theories of the press as they relate to the effective functioning of modern democracy, and compare how theorists’ expectations square with the empirical realities of today’s era of “media politics.” We will examine changes in the organizational structures and functions of media institutions and political institutions over time, and trace the effects of these developments to changes in the substance of contemporary political media content. We will investigate patterns of media consumption, and interrogate the implications of media exposure for public opinion and political behavior. By grounding ourselves in the scholarly literature on these subjects, we will position ourselves to critically analyze present and future developments in media institutions and political communication. And by performing original research on media, we will also try our hand at such analysis. By the end of this course, my hope is that students will have experienced significant improvement in their ability to do the following:

- Gain a deep theoretical understanding of the functions, principles, and conventions of media **institutions** in mass democracy
- Develop detailed knowledge of how political communication can (and cannot) shape individual political **behavior**
- Gain an appreciation of, and skills pertaining to, the **empirical study** of political communication
- **Critically** assess the state of American democracy through the lens of political communication research
- Perform **original research** on a subject pertaining to political communication that is interesting to the student and to a broader audience
- Gain **skills** in research design, problem-solving, and multimodal communication

ASSESSMENT AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Note: specific grading rubrics are accessible through Blackboard.

SHORT READING RESPONSES (Deadlines Unannounced)

Occasionally, and without advance notice, students will be asked to write a short (no more than 3-4 sentences) response to a question pertaining to the subject of the week's reading. These informal, in-class quizzes count towards the participation grade.

CONTRIBUTION TO A CLASS 'WIKI' (Deadline Varies)

Students will be expected to make contributions to the course Wiki, a page that functions like Wikipedia but can only be accessed and edited by the students in the course. Each student's wiki should summarize and critically evaluate one of the readings for the course; a schedule will be distributed to the class on the first day so that no more than two students will create wiki pages for each reading. Students' summaries and critical analyses will be open to the class so that others may add to or edit the information available. The wiki project will be used by students as a collective study guide for the midterm exam and beyond.

MIDTERM (Due 3/14)

The midterm exam will be an in-class, open-note, five-question essay exam. Full points will be awarded for completeness, concision, and critical thinking.

MULTIMEDIA PROJECT (Due 4/11; Storyboard due 2/28)

In this course we will not only scrutinize the practices of political journalists: we will also try our hand at producing a piece of political journalism ourselves. In this project, students can choose to craft one of several different products:

- A magazine-style print article that reports on a political topic **or** an interview
- A podcast-style report that discusses a political topic **or** an interview

If students choose to perform a political interview, they can interview each other, or find an individual or individuals outside of the class that would be willing and interested in participating in the project. Students will be evaluated on stylistics and production quality, as well as the content of the interview itself. Reports should be thematic, ask interesting and relevant questions, and draw on relevant course material to inform the project's angle.

FINAL PROJECT (Due 5/16)

Our final project will be discussed in greater detail in class, and relevant information will be provided on the Blackboard site. It will consist of original research on an aspect of political communication that is of interest to the student. The project will incorporate research into the secondary literature on the subject, an analysis and interpretation of existing **media content** through a methodologically-rigorous *content analysis*, and a theoretically-motivated discussion of the findings. A successful project will use a strong understanding of the subjects discussed in the seminar to examine developments in the student's chosen topic. The assignment will consist of a research paper of roughly 10 pages in length. The project will both summarize scholarly understanding of the topic and present new information related to recent (or historical)

developments in media presentations of the chosen subject. More information can be obtained by viewing the final project rubric on Blackboard.

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:

Class participation is a very important requirement of this seminar, as the ideas we discuss are often subjective and will require active discussion in order to foster productive debate regarding the issues at hand. Students will be expected to come to class ready to contribute to our discussions. Full participation credit will be awarded as a product of active discussion, attendance, and the completion of in-class exercises.

My attendance policy is **excuse agnostic**. This means that you will not be excused from any missed classes for any reason besides a family/medical emergency, or religious observance (see me if this is the case). However, having an absence struck from the record is simple. To be absolved of an absence, write a **two-page reflection paper** on a reading of your choice from the week of your absence. Note that because of the one-day-per-week seminar style of this course, this policy applies to a maximum of **two class meetings**.

GRADING:

The grading breakdown is as follows:

CLASS EXERCISES, ATTENDANCE, READING RESPONSES, WIKI	200 points (20%)
MIDTERM	200 points (20%)
MULTIMEDIA PROJECT	250 points (25%)
FINAL PROJECT	350 points (35%)
TOTAL:	1000 points (100%)

LETTER GRADE SCALE:

A:	90%-100%	<i>Demonstrates mastery of the material and exceptional performance</i>
B:	80%-89.9%	<i>Demonstrates above-average effort, performance and comprehension</i>
C:	70%-79.9%	<i>Demonstrates average effort, performance and comprehension</i>
D:	65%-69.9%	<i>Clear deficiencies in effort and understanding of course material</i>
F:	< 65%	<i>Unacceptable levels of effort and comprehension</i>

COURSE & UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

Late Work

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day they are due. All assignments should be submitted **online** using the Blackboard site. For each day that an assignment is late, **one letter grade will be deducted**. This deduction goes into effect immediately after the start of

class on the due date. Assignments handed in more than three days late (including weekends) will be assigned a grade of F.

Make-up exams will only be given in advance. The exam must be made up within 3 days of the scheduled exam. Failure to reschedule make-up exams **in advance of the exam day** will result in a grade of F for that exam.

Academic Honesty

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with and observe UMBC's policies against cheating and plagiarism. For more information visit the UMBC Office of Undergraduate Education website at http://www.umbc.edu/undergrad_ed/index.php. Academic Misconduct means: Cheating, Fabrication, Facilitating Academic Misconduct, Plagiarism, or Dishonesty by an undergraduate student.

- **Cheating** means using or attempting to use unauthorized material, information, study aids, or another person's work in any academic exercise.
- **Fabrication** means falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.
- **Facilitating** academic misconduct means helping ***or attempting to help*** another student commit an act of academic misconduct.
- **Plagiarism** means knowingly, ***or by carelessness or negligence***, representing as one's own, in any academic exercise, the intellectual or creative work of someone else.
- **Dishonesty** means lack of truthfulness or sincerity when interacting with the faculty member regarding an academic exercise.

Policy on Classroom Conduct

I will periodically request that students bring an electronic device with wireless functionality to class. This announcement will be made at the end of the preceding class, and will be reiterated via email before class. This will allow us to engage in classroom activities that require the use of specific websites or apps.

When we are **not** engaging in such activities, I give you the option of using a laptop to take notes during class. Smartphone devices are **not** permitted to be used during class, and disruptive smartphone use will merit deductions in class participation grades. Extreme disruptions, such as **watching video content or playing games**, will result in dismissal from the classroom environment and an F in classroom participation.

FYI: **I know** when you are using a smartphone or when you're surfing the web/otherwise zoning out during class. If we could switch places, you would be able to see just how obvious it is. It is **your decision** as to whether you want to engage in this kind of "multi-tasking." But let me just

warn you, the research on the subject strongly indicates that you will do worse in the class than you otherwise would.

- ["Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers"](#)
- ["In-class laptop use and its effect on student learning"](#)
- ["Higher media multitasking is associated with smaller gray-matter density in the anterior cingulate cortex"](#)
- ["Serial multitaskers worse at multitasking"](#)

Students with Disabilities

UMBC is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for eligible students with disabilities, including students who have learning disabilities, health impairments, psychiatric disabilities, and/or other disabilities. If you believe you have a disability which requires accommodation, please contact me **and** visit Student Support Services (Math/Psychology Building Room 213, 410-455-2459, sss@umbc.edu) so that the necessary arrangements can be made. **Please make every effort to pursue these arrangements at the beginning of the semester.**

REQUIRED BOOKS:

None. PDF versions of all articles and book chapters will be available on Blackboard under "Course Documents" at least one week before each reading is due.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS:

Date	Discussion Topic	Reading	Due Dates
31-Jan	Course Introduction: Press and the Democratic Process	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>
7-Feb	Models of the Press: Guard Dogs and Lapdogs	Herman; Donohue et al.; Peterson	<i>None</i>
14-Feb	Regulations, Norms, and Objectivity	Gans; Mindich; Black & Roberts	<i>None</i>
21-Feb	The Shifting Media Landscape (Or, Who and What is the Press?)	Pew Report; FCC Report (pp. 1-30)	<i>None</i>
28-Feb	Campaigns and the Media: Intermediary Institutions	Krupnikov & Easter; Hollihan; Evans & Clark	Multimedia Storyboard/Outline
7-Mar	Governing Through Media (Visit to Media Lab)	Block & Levine; Scacco & Coe; Kumar	<i>None</i>
14-Mar	Midterm	<i>None</i>	In-Class Midterm 4:30pm
21-Mar	<i>No Class: Enjoy a Well-Deserved Spring Break!</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>
28-Mar	It's All Biased!	Levendusky ch. 1-2; Aday; Coe et al.	<i>None</i>
4-Apr	Media Effects and How we Measure Them	Boydston; Semetko & Valkenburg; Scheufele & Tewksbury	<i>None</i>

11-Apr	Motivated Cognition and the News	Stroud; Arceneaux & Johnson; Prior (2013)	Multimedia Project Due 4:30 PM
18-Apr	News, Entertainment, and Technology	Mutz; Allcott & Gentzkow; Baum & Jamison	<i>None</i>
25-Apr	Media and Political Behavior: Votes, Protest, and Political Voice	Bucy & Gregson; Bimber	Final Project Phase I Draft Due 4:30pm
2-May	Season Finale: the Future of Political Communication	Forestal; Spaiser et al.; Fallows	<i>None</i>
9-May	<i>Project Workshop (optional)</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>
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16-May	Final Project Deadline		Final Project Due at 5pm
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No Final Exam

Bibliography

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Supplementary/Optional Reading

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