Media & Politics
Spring 2014

Class Time: Monday 10:00AM-12:40PM
Class Location: SCI 304
Instructor: Prof. Lauren Feldman (Rogers)
Email: lauren.feldman@rutgers.edu
Office Hours: Mon & Wed 1pm-2pm and by appointment in SC&I Annex B (Annex Addition), Room 253; to book an office hours appointment, visit http://laurenfeldman.youcanbook.me/

CATALOG DESCRIPTION
Theories and research relating old and new media to political decision-making. Topics include public attitudes and opinion, media policy, interest articulation, political culture, ideology, rhetoric and content analysis, framing, agenda-setting.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES
This doctoral-level seminar will cover research and theory regarding the role of media and communication in the political process, with particular attention to how media help to create or inhibit active, informed and critical citizenship in the United States. We will consider such questions as: What role should the media play in a well-functioning democracy, and does our contemporary media system fulfill that role? How are politics covered in the media, and what norms and practices govern this coverage? What is public opinion, how is it constructed, and how does it influence political behavior and decision-making? How do news and entertainment media shape what people know and how they think about politics? How do political actors use media strategically and with what effect on citizens? What are the political implications of our changing media environment? How do the Internet and digital media affect how citizens gather, discuss and make sense of political information; how citizens organize politically; and how citizens conceptualize their role in the democratic process?

The aim of the course is to offer a broad overview of the state of the field of political communication and help students identify topics and methods for future independent research projects concerning media and politics. Political communication is an interdisciplinary field that resides at the intersections of communication, journalism and media studies, political science, sociology, and psychology, among other disciplines. We will consider a wide range of theories and methods, and classic as well as contemporary works, but the breadth and diversity of political communication make it difficult to achieve any kind of comprehensiveness. Thus, the topics covered in the course necessarily reflect the interests and expertise of the instructor.
SAKAI COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

I will be using Sakai to post course materials, including the syllabus, most readings, discussion questions, and other resources. You will also submit all assignments online using Sakai. If you have not used Sakai before, you should log in and become familiar with this system during the first week of class.

Use the following URL to log into Sakai: http://sakai.rutgers.edu
- Enter your Net ID and Net ID Password.
- 16:194:665:01 S14 should appear at the top near the “My Workspace” tab.

If you have any problems with Sakai, contact the Sakai helpdesk at 848-445-8721 (Mon-Fri 8am-6pm) or at sakai@rutgers.edu.

READINGS

There are three required books for the course, listed below. All other readings will be available on Sakai or on the Web.


COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Course grades will be determined on the basis of seminar participation (20%), short writing assignments (25%), discussion leadership (10%), and a final paper (45%) and presentation (5%).

Attendance and Active Participation (20%): As a graduate seminar, the focus of the class will be on discussion and debate and less so on lecture. You will be expected to keep up with the readings and come to class prepared to actively engage with the material. Because this is a discussion-based learning environment, attendance is required. If you must miss class, please email me in advance. In case of severe illness or other extraordinary events that necessitate repeated absences, you must provide documentation. Please let me know in advance if you have religious observances that conflict with class; you will not be penalized for these absences.

Weekly Response Papers (25%): Discussion questions covering the assigned readings for each class will be posted at least a week in advance on Sakai. Your weekly response papers should address one of these questions, or you may pose your own question and answer that question. Papers should be approximately two-pages double-spaced. These papers will be graded, although they are intended primarily to encourage focused reading, discussion, and to help you generate ideas. Papers should be submitted to Sakai by 9am on the morning of class. You do not need to submit a response paper on the days that you are a discussion leader, and you may opt out of this assignment two additional times over the course of the semester. Thus, you will write eight response papers in total.
Discussion Leadership (10%): Each student will have the opportunity to lead a class discussion twice during the semester. This will typically take place during the last 30-45 minutes of class. The use of PowerPoint (or other visual presentation aid) is welcome but not required. Sign-up for presentation dates will take place on Sakai during the first week of class. Discussion leaders will choose from one of the following two options:

“State of the field” presentation. Students choosing this option will select a recent article (published in 2012-2014) not on the syllabus that builds on the literature and themes of the week’s readings (note that you may select an article from those listed for “further reading,” as long as it meets the date requirement). You will have 10-15 minutes to present the article, which will be followed by questions and discussion—similar to a conference presentation, but presenting another’s work. In your presentation, you should summarize the theoretical and empirical advancements made in the article, provide a critique of the article’s arguments and methods, connect the article to the ideas in the week’s readings, and then lead a class discussion on general ideas that emerged from the article.

--AND/OR--

“Research idea” presentation. Students choosing this option will present an original research idea to the class. In a 10-15 minute presentation, you should demonstrate how the research idea is connected to and advances beyond the readings for that week, formulate research questions or hypotheses developed as a result of the readings, and propose a methodology for answering the research questions or hypotheses. Your ideas should be doable. The presentation will be followed by class discussion and reflection about your ideas. Note that although you have the option of using the research idea you present as the basis for your final paper, you are not obligated to do so.

Final Paper (40%) and Presentation (5%): Students will write an original research paper (approx. 20-25 pages) on a topic of particular interest to them in the area of media and politics. The paper may take one of three forms: (1) a theoretical, argumentative essay reviewing and integrating research on some particular issue; (2) a proposal for an original research project; or (3) a report of an original, empirical research project. This original paper should be of high quality and ready for submission to a conference or journal. Students will submit a brief proposal (2 – 4 pages) on March 31 by 5pm. The proposal is not graded but required. You are also strongly encouraged to meet with me to discuss your ideas. On the last day of class (May 5), students will offer a 10-15 minute presentation of their research. The final papers are due on May 7 at 5pm.

For all assignments: Please submit assignments to Sakai as a Word document (no PDFs) using Assignments 2. This allows me to provide feedback electronically. It is not necessary to turn in a hard copy. Please save your document as LastName_AssignmentName (e.g., Smith_Week1Response). No late assignments will be accepted without permission.

All written assignments should be double-spaced, using a readable 11 or 12-point font and 1-inch margins, and include page numbers. Be sure to proofread! Papers should be formatted according to APA (American Psychological Association) guidelines. For guidance on APA style,
Human subjects and institutional review: If you plan to do a final paper that involves human subjects, you will need to submit your IRB (Institutional Review Board) application in time to get approval to do the research and analysis before the end of the semester. It generally takes 4-5 weeks to get approval through expedited review, and the deadline is the 12th of each month. Some types of human subjects research, such as online surveys and experiments, may qualify as exempt and use a rolling deadline. See: http://orsp.rutgers.edu/Humans/default.php

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity means, among other things, that you develop and write all of your own assignments, show where the materials you use in your papers come from using appropriate citations, and do not fabricate information or citations in your work. The consequences of scholastic dishonesty and academic plagiarism are very serious. You can find Rutgers’ academic integrity policy at http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/. If you have any questions as to what constitutes plagiarism or how to properly cite information and ideas used in your writing, see me and/or turn to these helpful online resources: http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml, http://cte.umdnj.edu/traditional_teaching/traditional_relations_plagiarism_studentguides.cfm, or http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Citations.html.

Student Writing Support: Plangere Writing Center: http://plangere.rutgers.edu/

COURSE CALENDAR AND READINGS
The following is a “working schedule.” While we will likely stick fairly closely to the syllabus, readings and other assignments are subject to change based on the interests, understanding, and general pace of the class. In the event of any changes, sufficient notice will be given to students in class and on Sakai.

*Readings denoted below with an asterisk are students’ responsibility to obtain (either via purchase or the library). All other required readings will be posted on Sakai. Required readings are listed in the order in which I recommend reading them. Sources for “further reading” will not be posted on Sakai.

Week 1 / Jan 27 Origins and Evolutions
**Week 2 / Feb 3**

**Press, Politics, & Power: The Failure of Accountability Journalism**


*Further reading:*


**Week 3 / Feb 10**

**Audience Preferences and the Economics of Political Media**


*Further reading:*


Entman, R. (1989). *Democracy without citizens: Media and the decay of*


**Week 4 / Feb 17**

**Blurred Boundaries: A New Paradigm of Political Media?**

*Baym, G. (2010). From Cronkite to Colbert. (Chs. 1-3, 6-9)*


*Further reading:*


**Week 5 / Feb 24**

**Media and Political Knowledge**

Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (read Intro, Ch. 1; optional Chs. 2, 4-5)


Further reading:


Week 6 / Mar 3

**Information Processing and Biases**


Further reading:


**Week 7 / Mar 10**  
**Audience Fragmentation and Partisan Selective Exposure**


Further reading:


**Week 8 / Mar 17**  
No class – spring break

**Week 9 / Mar 24**  
**Partisan Media and Polarized Politics**


Levendusky, M. S. (2013). Why do partisan media polarize voters?
American Journal of Political Science, 57(3), 611-623.


Further reading:

Week 10 / Mar 31  Agenda Setting and Priming


**Further reading:**


**Week 11 / Apr 7 Perspectives on Framing (**Paper Proposals due by 5pm**)**


**Further reading:**


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**Week 12 / Apr 14**

**Media and the Evolving Practice of Citizenship**


*Further reading:*


Zukin, C., Keeter, S., Andolina, M., Jenkins, K., & Delli Carpini, M. X.
Week 13 / Apr 21

The Internet and Democratic Discourse: An Online Public Sphere?


Further reading:


Wojcieszak, M. & Mutz, D. (2009). Online groups and political discourse: Do online discussion spaces facilitate exposure to political disagreement?

Week 14 / Apr 28

Digital Media and Collective Action

Information, Communication & Society, 15(5), 739-768.

Further reading:

Week 15 / May 5
Student Presentations

**Wed., May 7
Final papers due by 5pm