Political Communication

Communication 250, Spring 2021

This course considers the determinants of media content and the degree to which Americans’ political opinions and actions are influenced by that content. Specific topics include:

- the history of the news media
- recent media trends
- theories of attitude formation and change
- media bias
- the role of sources in the construction of the news
- the economics of news production and consumption
- the ways in which media shape public perceptions of the political world
- campaign communication, and
- the general role of the mass media in the democratic process.

Learning objectives for this class include:

- a broad understanding of the major issues in the political communication concentration,
- the ability to think critically and lead discussions, and
- identifying a novel question and writing a journal-style research paper.

Assigned Work and Grading

Your grade is based on in class-participation (50%) and a final paper (50%).

Participation
Readings: Active participation in this class is essential. Please complete all readings assigned for a given week prior to that week’s seminar. The reading assignments for each week range from ~100 to 500 pages, depending on the difficulty of the work. You are welcome to skim some of the readings if you can gather the core information that way (research question, hypothesis, data collection, independent and dependent variables, analyses, conclusions, limitations).

Reading Responses. Each week you will be asked to upload to CCLE a one-page (max), single-spaced response to the readings by noon on the day prior to class. In the reading response, you should present an analytical discussion about the readings. You may raise questions with the authors’ arguments, measurement, or case selection and/or provide further support for the argument. You may focus on one reading in your response, or you may synthesize the set of readings.
In addition, throughout the course you will be asked to make in-class presentations on the reading that week. Instructions for these will be discussed on the first day. When you are presenting a reading you will be in charge of leading the discussion using a slide deck, synthesizing the related literature, and generating discussion questions. Your class participation grade is based upon how well you contribute to all of these discussions.

**Final Paper**
The paper for this class is a 20-25 page double-spaced original research paper, which is due on Monday, June 7 at noon. We will discuss the paper regularly, and many weeks we will hold “writing workshops,” in which everyone works on their paper for part of the seminar in small groups. You have the option (i.e. it’s not required) to hand in one draft of this paper early at any point prior to June 1 to receive my feedback. (Give me 72 hours to respond.) The paper requires that you identify an original research question, formulate a hypothesis and causal argument, propose a methodology for collecting and analyzing data to test your hypothesis, and discuss the potential implications of your findings. Note that this is a proposal rather than a full research project. However, if you would like to collect and analyze data, you are welcome to do so. On the last day of class students will present their paper topics in a conference-style fashion.

**Academic Integrity**
Both UCLA, the Department of Communication, and I myself, take academic integrity very seriously. Students (including graduate students) have received suspensions and academic probation for cheating in my class. Students have been expelled from UCLA for cheating in other Communication classes. Please read information on UCLA’s academic integrity policy here: [http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Portals/16/Documents/StudentGuide.pdf](http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Portals/16/Documents/StudentGuide.pdf). I reserve the right to upload your work to turnitin (plagiarism detection software).

**Attendance:**
Your participation grade is affected by attendance. Please arrive on time for all classes. In the event of an unforeseen emergency, please let me know as soon as possible if you cannot/were not able to attend class and we will figure out a way for you to make up your participation that week.

**Other:**
All students with disabilities that may require special accommodations should contact the UCLA Center for Accessible Education (A255 Murphy Hall; 310-825-1501; 310-206-6083 [telephone device for the deaf]) as soon as possible.
Schedule

This list of readings is subject to change and will be updated in CCLE. Each week at the end of class, we as a group will select 6-8 readings to focus on for the next week.

April 1. Week 1. Introduction. Historical Perspective. News Crisis?

No readings this week.

April 8. Week 2. What makes the News?

Readings:


“The Facebook Dilemma” Part I from minutes 44:34-52:30, Part II all. (Note: this is about 65 minutes of video content.)

Pew Research Center. 2019. State of the News Media 2018. (Sisi has confirmed this is the most updated source.)


Guest: Lynn Vavreck.

Readings:


Listen to this Freakonomics podcast, “How Biased is Your Media?” (36min)


Political Advertising Lecture by Lynn Vavreck: https://www.dropbox.com/s/3gnk5f9dysqbtmd/GE60_Advertising_web.mp4?dl=0

April 22. Week 4. Campaigns and Elections


The Boys on the Bus. Timothy Crouse.


Lenz, Gabriel. Follow the Leader. [CCLE]


Listen to this Freakononics podcast, “How Biased is Your Media?” (36min)


Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2007. Talking about Race: Community Dialogues and the Politics of Difference. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Chapters 1 and 2 - available at UCLA library online.)


LaFleur Stephens-Dougan "White Americans' Reactions to Racial Disparities in COVID-19" Monday 12-1:30. Email will contain details.


Guest: Stuart Soroka.

Readings:


Hamilton All the News That's Fit to Sell Chapter 1

Soroka et al. 2015. "It’s (Change in) the (Future) Economy, Stupid." AJPS 59(2): 457-474.

(Also watch his nine minute talk (third video down) on this here: http://www.snsoroka.com/talksteaching/)


**May 20. Week 8. Speech and Debate. Framing.**


**May 27. Week 9. Deliberative Democracy and Conversation.**


**June 3. Week 10. Final Presentations.**

Everyone will present their work in a short conference-style format followed by Q&A. Georgia will moderate. Feel free to invite outside people (e.g., your advisor) to the mini conference.