Course Description:
This course examines the connection between mass media, citizens, and politics. We will begin by taking a decidedly social-psychological perspective on these issues, placing the individual and their place in society at the center of our inquiry, and then move toward a more sociological approach to questions of media influence over the course of the term. The seminar will focus on the complex interrelationships between consumption of various types of media content and the thoughts, judgments, and behaviors of citizens. We will consider political communication outside the U.S. — in Europe, Latin America, and China — and explore emerging computational approaches to understanding “life in the network.” Still, a majority of our efforts will focus on media effects research at the intersection of communication and politics in Western democracies.

The encapsulated aim of this course: To consider classics and controversies in the existing political communication literature and propose measurable concepts and testable theories that illuminate the relations between the consumption and content of the mass media in democratic societies and the political judgment, public opinion, and collective action of democratic citizens.

Course Requirements:
Grades in the class will be based on your performance on the following requirements: (1) final research paper — 50%, (2) review reports as class discussant — 20%, (3) weekly comment papers — 20%, and (4) participation in seminar discussion — 10%.
Research Paper

The major requirement for this course is an original research paper written individually by each student and presented to other seminar participants. The paper should grow out of one of the topics or theories covered in the course and contain the following sections: (1) brief introduction, (2) literature review, (3) statement of hypothesis or research model, (4) actual or proposed methodology, (5) results or proposed analysis, (6) concluding discussion about what was or will be learned. The methodology may be quantitative or qualitative. The goal of the paper is to contribute, however modestly, to research in the area of political communication. The paper can present findings based on existing and available data sets (e.g., National Election Study, Annenberg National Election Survey, General Social Survey, DDB Life Style Archive, The Pew Internet and American Life Project, the National Annenberg Election Study, the Mass Communication Research Center Archive, etc.) or the collection of original data. Some of you may wish to extend projects you have developed elsewhere or to refine ideas toward completion of Master’s or Doctoral theses; please consult with me if this is the case, and share your progress to date.

Your paper will be evaluated on whether it integrates the concepts encountered in class into coherent and testable propositions that have implications for theory in political communication. Your research paper should reflect an original extension of the ideas we have encountered in class, not a simple recapitulation of past work. A three-page prospectus for your seminar paper is due WEEK 8 (submit by email by Friday of that week). Seminar presentations will be held during the last class period (lunch will be served!). The final paper is due May 9th by 4:00 P.M. and should be between 20-25 pages of text, not including cover, bib, tables, and figures. This paper will be worth 50 percent of your final grade.

Review Reports

In addition, every student will be required to serve as a discussant for two class sessions. Discussants will write a 8 to 10 page summary and critique of the week’s readings (including recommended readings) and provide a brief list of questions to facilitate discussion. As a discussant, you will be responsible for spurring but not necessarily leading student discussion of the readings by pointing out what you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of the readings and encouraging debate about your reflections. Ideally, you will choose a week that coincides with your broader interests. That way, your review of the reading materials will be useful to you when preparing your paper. Review reports will be
sent to the class listserv as an .rtf or .pdf at least 6 hours before class. These reports will be graded by the next class period and will be worth 20 percent of your grade, 10% each.

Comment Papers:

Every week, with the exception of the weeks you prepare review reports, you will produce a brief set of written comments on the readings. You may miss 4 weekly comment papers (that is, you will complete six comment papers, omitting the two weeks you will be producing review reports). These comment papers should be 1-2 pages in length, though they may be shorter on weeks that are of less interest to you and longer on weeks that you feel inspired. Papers do not need to follow any particular format or necessarily cover all the readings, as long as they illustrate that you made an effort to process that week’s reading and have reflected on the research you encountered. Some of you may use these comment papers to summarize the key points of each of the readings into notes for their own future use. Others may organize their comments into critical essays or critiques on the general themes of the week. Yet others may focus on detailed reviews of a few readings or even a single reading, digging deeply into a topic of particular interest. Bring your comment papers to class and turn them in to me at the end. If you do not complete your comment paper for a particular week, do not avoid class. Come to seminar, listen and learn, and comment when you can. These six comment papers will be worth 20 percent of your final grade; evaluation will be based on the number completed; I will not be evaluating the content of these papers.

Seminar Participation:

The final 10 percent of your class grade will be based on participation in seminar discussion. It is not enough that you just come to class. You must actively discuss the readings and engage in discussion with other seminar participants. Your weekly comment paper should be the starting point for ideas you want to share with the class. I am hopeful that the discussion that ensues will lead to the development of a classroom environment where ideas are discussed and debated in an open, maybe even heated, yet respectful way.

Required Texts:


**Recommended Texts:**


Weekly Readings

(♦) Required Book; (*) Required Reading

(#) Recommended Book; (✝) Recommended Reading

Week 1, January 27:  Introduction

Week 2, February 3:  The nature of political communication and media effects

Discussants:


Week 3, February 10:  The construction and analysis of news discourse

Discussants:


**Week 4, February 17:** Agenda-setting and priming: Effects on social evaluations

**Discussants:**


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**Week 5, February 24:** News framing and political judgment

Discussants:


Week 6, March 3: Media cueing and opinion change

Discussants:


Week 7, March 10: Interpersonal “verses” mass influences: Network influence

Discussants:


** SPRING BREAK **

Week 8, March 24: No Class Meeting – Finalize and Submit Prospectus
Week 9, March 31: “Old” and “new”: Media, social capital, and civic engagement

Discussants:


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Week 10, April 7:  Digital media, information and socialization

Discussants:


Week 11, April 14:  Political campaigns, negativity, and (de)mobilizing the public

Discussant:

Chicago: University of Chicago Press.


**Week 12, April 21:** Hostile media, third-person effects, and censorship

**Discussant:**


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**Week 13, April 28:** Information and knowledge: Learning from the news

**Discussant:**


**Week 14, May 5:** Research presentations/end of term party