I. Course Description

Political Communication (ADV 6315) offers a graduate level introduction to the expanding role of media in politics, focusing on the related processes of message framing, communication strategy, and political learning and persuasion. Evolving conceptions of citizenship and journalistic truth are also reviewed. The opening weeks of the seminar reviews role conceptions that journalists embrace while reporting on politics and structural influences on the news, including media norms and regulations. Models of political persuasion in relation to campaign advertising and message strategies, including visual framing practices, are next reviewed. The prevalence of negativity in mediated—including recent attacks on the press—is weighed as well. Definitions of news and the broader role of the media in democratic processes is also examined, with a contrast made between political science and communication approaches to research questions at the media/politics interface. Throughout the term the course takes a broad view of civic participation and the democratic process, focusing on the impact and intersection of emerging media with politics. Of particular interest is the rise of social media platforms and entertainment formats that facilitate increased citizen interest and involvement (sometimes inadvertently) in public affairs. Although the primary focus is on the contemporary political scene, the seminar also examines historical transformations to the press and how changes in the political process have given the media an ever-expanding role in civic life.

II. Expected Outcomes

- Develop a conceptual understanding of the effects of media coverage on political audiences as well as political processes;
- Learn to critically analyze media practices considered problematic and explore potential remedies;
- Examine new developments at the media/politics interface, particularly campaigning and civic participation through online and social media;
- Develop an understanding of modern campaign practices, especially political advertising, campaign communication, and voter targeting strategies—and their effects on audiences;
• Trace the relationship between media institutions and political institutions, placing them in historical context; and,
• Read, critique, and apply major political communication concepts to research questions at the intersection of media and politics.

**III. Methods of Assessment**

Expected learning outcomes will be assessed through class discussion/participation, written assignments, a take-home midterm exam, an original focus group analysis and analytical paper, a peer review assignment, in-class presentation, and final strategic insights essay.

**IV. Required Readings**


- Additional readings, including book chapters and journal articles, will be available through a Course Dropbox folder, which can be joined from a link sent to the class list by e-mail. For a list of specific readings by week, see section VII below.

**V. Course Assignments and Grading** *(details on all assignments will be distributed)*

**Political Rally Analysis (10%)**

This assignment requires each student to review original footage of the historic Woman’s March on Washington from Jan. 21, 2017 and identify visual trends, points of difference, or themes within the footage that could be tested with a focus group for viewer response. A short, 2-3 pg. memo discussing your approach and proposed focus group test is due on Feb. 1.

**Seminar Facilitation (5%)**

During the semester (from Jan. 30–May 3) each student will be required to lead the class in a Facilitation, engaging the seminar in a 15-20 minute overview and discussion of a reading for a particular day. Facilitations must be completed by May 3, so be sure to look ahead and select a reading that interests you.

**Take-home Midterm (15%)**

There will be a take-home midterm exam about halfway through the course, due on March 6, that will cover material from the readings, lectures, and discussions. Several questions will be posed, of which just one needs to be answered in a 5-6 pg., double-spaced response.

**Political Rally Focus Group Project (40%)**

For the Political Rally Focus Group Project each student will convene a group of 5 to 8 friends/family members to view and discuss a group of images or video clips from the Woman’s March on Washington identified in the earlier analysis assignment (subject to approval and modification). A 10-12 pg. paper based on a transcript of the recorded discussion and questionnaire responses is required, with the typed transcript attached. The paper and transcript are graded individually (10% for the questionnaires and transcript, 10% for the draft paper, 10% for the final paper, etc.)—but the paper should be based on the transcript and questionnaires.

The project is broken down into different parts, each due between March 27–April 26, consisting of a typewritten transcript and completed questionnaires, followed by a draft paper, peer review of someone else’s paper, and development of your final focus group paper. A
PowerPoint presentation based on your focus group findings is also required. Each element of the proposal will be graded separately, as indicated in the summary below.

**Take-Home Final (10%)**

In lieu of a final exam, students will write a 5-6 pg. take-home essay addressing the accusation of “fake news” against mainstream media by the Trump Administration and what the implications are for the healthy functioning of a free press in the world’s leading democracy. This is an unprecedented moment in modern American history and should be cause for reflection and analysis among thoughtful citizens—particularly in the context of a seminar in political communication. Use citations where necessary and literature to justify your positions but articulate the scope of the problem and what implications you think it has for democratic functioning. Due **May 11** by 5pm.

**Seminar Participation (10%)**

Unlike undergraduate classes, graduate seminars require the *active involvement* of each seminar participant. Active participation entails asking questions, responding to questions posed, integrating readings and commenting on what you’ve learned, presenting when assigned, and contributing meaningfully to seminar discussions throughout the semester. Active participation also entails regular attendance. In a graduate seminar, 3 or more absences over the semester are a cause for concern and will result in at least half a letter grade deduction from your final grade.

**In summary, course assignments, grading percentages, and due dates are as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Grade %</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Rally Analysis</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Feb. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Facilitation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Jan. 30 – May 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take-Home Midterm</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>March 6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Political Rally Focus Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>· Questionnaires + Transcript</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>March 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Draft Research Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>April 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Peer Review</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>April 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Research Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>April 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Final Research Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>April 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take-Home Final</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>May 11 (by 5pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>All semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total: 100%**

**A Note About Grading**

Each of the above assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale. The grading scale is as follows: A 94-100; A- 93-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-84; B- 83-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-74; C- 73-70; D+ 69-67; D 66-64; D- 63-60; F 59 & lower. Any grade in the A range represents outstanding or exceptional work; work in the B range represents competent, but not quite brilliant, effort in the course. A grade of B- or lower in this (or any) graduate-level course suggests that the student’s work is lacking in some important way. Although a C traditionally means satisfactory at the undergraduate level, the standards in graduate school are such that a C represents seriously flawed work, and thus a failing grade. In this seminar that would mean doing the assignments but misunderstanding basic concepts or presenting them in an unacceptable form and not
participating in seminar discussions. Any grade lower than C implies outright negligence of the course.

**VI. Additional Course Policies and Rules**

1. **Americans with Disabilities Act**
   Any student who has a disability that may affect his/her academic performance should contact the instructor as soon as possible so that necessary accommodations can be made. Students should present appropriate verification from Disabled Student Services in the Dean of Students Office (806) 742-2405.

2. **Attendance**
   Class attendance and active participation are expected in graduate school, and are a vital element of your individual success as a student. As mentioned above (p. 3) under Seminar Participation, 3 or more absences in this seminar will result in a lowering of your grade by at least half a letter grade. Absences will also lower your participation grade, and thus your overall grade. The instructor is not responsible for material missed due to an absence (PowerPoint notes, etc.). If you are having problems, let me know as soon as possible. I also don’t give automatic incompletes. If you have reasons for not meeting due dates, please contact me in advance.

3. **Academic Integrity**
   Cheating on exams or plagiarism or any form of violation of the University honor code is a serious offense and will receive a failing grade for that assignment. The work you turn in must be entirely your own. Do not submit the same paper to more than one class. All students are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars and professionals. If any questions ever arise as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, please visit me to discuss the situation or consult our College statement on graduate student conduct (http://www.depts.ttu.edu/comc/graduate/policieshandbook/studentconduct/), the Texas Tech Student Handbook (see http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentaffairs/), or the Academic Integrity section (OP 34.12) of the Texas Tech Operating Policies and Procedures website (http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/contents.php#34).

4. **Civility Policy**
   The University supports an environment of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. It does not tolerate statements, behavior, or tokens that deride or disparage an individual or group because of race, ethnicity, creed or personal lifestyle. In line with maintaining a professional learning environment, please be respectful of and attentive to fellow seminar participants. The quality of the class relies on engaged discussion and debate. Consequently, please turn off mobile devices while in class and use laptops or tablets for academic purposes only.

5. **Late Assignments**
   Late assignments will be accepted only under extreme circumstances on a case-by-case basis, and will be subject to a point deduction. No late work will be accepted a week past the due date.

6. **Incompletes**
   The only way to qualify for consideration of an incomplete is for extreme cause, to be determined on a case-by-case basis.
7. **Originality of Seminar Work**

Students should not submit work, even modified work, completed during a previous semester, whether at this institution or another university or college. Instances of “double dipping” will receive a zero. All seminar work is expected to be original, unique to this course, and the sole product of the individual seminar participant.

**VII. Course Schedule**

*Note:* This course schedule is not fixed in stone. The instructor reserves the right to adjust the readings, due dates, and topics as necessary as the course progresses.

**Week 1**

Jan. 18  Introduction & Overview: The Political Media Landscape  
*Readings*  Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 4

**Week 2**

Jan. 23  Media Biases and the Struggle for Control  
*Readings*  Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 7  
West (2001), “The Objective, Interpretive, & Fragmented Media”  
Bennett (2012), “Four Information Biases that Matter”

Jan. 25  Political Rally Visual Footage Workshop  
*Assignment*  Political Rally Analysis Guidelines Distributed (due Feb. 1)  
Seminar Facilitation Guidelines Distributed

**Week 3**

Jan. 30  Visual Framing and Image-Bite News: Seeing the News Analytically  
*Assignment*  Seminar Facilitations Begin

Feb. 1  Message Testing and Audience Research: The Use of Focus Groups and Dial Testing w/Guest Speaker Doug Wayne of Simple Opinions  
*Assignment*  Political Rally Analysis papers due

**Week 4**

Feb. 6  Watchdogs, Attack Dogs, or Lapdogs? Assessing the Texas News Environment w/Guest Speaker Brandon Formby of the Texas Tribune  
*Assignment*  Political Rally Analysis papers due
Readings
Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 9
Donohue et al. (1999), “A Guard Dog Perspective on the Media”

Feb. 8
Structural Influences on the News: Media Ownership and Regulation
Readings
Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 2
Assignment
Discuss Political Rally Analysis

Week 5

Feb. 13
Case Studies in Media Regulation: “Trump TV” and Net Neutrality
Readings
Sinclair Broadcasting, the FCC and “Trump TV”
- https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/10/ready-for-trump-tv-inside-sinclair-broadcastings-plot-to-take-over-your-local-news-
The Battle Over Net Neutrality
- https://www.npr.org/tags/132227849/net-neutrality

Feb. 15
The Press and Democracy
Readings

Week 6

Feb. 20
Analyzing Ads: History, Candidate Videostyle, Emotional Appeals
Readings
Assignment
Political Rally Focus Group Project Guidelines Distributed

Feb. 22
Negativity in Politics: Why So Much of It?
Readings
Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 13

Week 7

Feb. 27
Media Politics in an Accelerating News Landscape
Readings
Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 4
Ghosh & Scott (2018), “#digitaldeceit”
Assignment  Take-home Midterm Guidelines Distributed (due March 6)

March 1  Elections in the Digital Era

Readings  Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 12
           Nossiter et al. (2017), “Hackers Came, but the French Were Prepared”
           •  https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/world/europe/hackers-came-but-the-french-were-prepared.html

Week 8

March 6  Comp Prop, Fake News, and Covert Persuasion: The Basics

           Woolley & Guilbeault (2017), “Computational Propaganda in the USA”
           Bernstein (2017), “Here’s How Breitbart and Milo Smuggled Nazi...Ideas”
           •  https://www.buzzfeed.com/josephbernstein/heres-how-breitbart-and-milo-smuggled-white-nationalism

Assignment  Take-home Midterms Due

March 8  Media Participation: What Citizens Get from Political Engagement

Readings  Bucy & Gregson (2001), “Media Participation”
           Bode et al. (2014), “A New Space for Political Behavior”

Week 9

March 13 & 15  Spring break – no class

Week 10

March 20  Memorable Moments in Televised Politics

           Clayman & Whalen (1988), “When the Medium Becomes the Message”
           Gong & Bucy (2016), “When Style Obscures Substance”

March 22  Political Rally Workshop Day, with Readings

Readings  Bas & Grabe (2016), “Emotional Displays and Political Involvement”

Week 11

March 27  Focus Group Analysis

VAISMORADI ET AL. (2016), “THEME DEVELOPMENT”
FRANKLAND & BLOOR (1999), “SOME ISSUES ARISING IN ANALYSIS”
KRAUSE & BUCY (2018), “INTERPRETING IMAGES”

**Assignment**  Focus Group Transcripts + Questionnaires Due

**March 29**  Political Rally Focus Group Workshop

**Week 12**

**April 3**  Journalists as Political Actors

               Cook (2005), “Governing with the News”
               Ladd (2012), “Why Americans Hate the Media”

**April 5**  The Media as Policy Makers

**Readings**  Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 6

**Week 13**

**April 10**  Media Influence on Attitudes and Behaviors

**Readings**  Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 11

**Assignment**  Draft Focus Group Papers Due; Peer Review Guidelines Distributed

**April 12**  Learning from the News: The Role of Media Images

               Newhagen & Reeves (1992), “This Evening’s Bad News”
               Grabe et al. (2015), “Employing Images to Test Knowledge Gaps”

**Assignment**  Peer Reviews Due

**Week 14**

**April 17**  Shrinking Sound Bites and Media Manipulation: Who Gains, Who Loses?

               Grabe & Bucy (2009), “Image Bite News”

**April 19**  Political Rally Project Presentations

**Week 15**

**April 24**  Media Biopolitics: The Embodied View of Press/Politics

**Readings**  Bucy (2017), “The Emergence of a Subfield”
April 26  From Surveys and Self Reports to the Techniques of Media Neuroscience
w/Guest Speaker Rene Weber of UC Santa Barbara
• http://www.medianeuroscience.org/

Assignment Final Political Rally Research Papers Due

Week 16

May 1  Corporate Profit Logic, Fake News, and the Dumbing Down of Media Politics


Assignment Take-Home Final Guidelines Distributed

May 3  Evaluating Media Politics

Readings  Graber & Dunaway, Ch. 14
Bennett (2012), “The End of a Journalism Era”

Week 17

May 8  Preserving the ‘Iron Core’ of News

Readings  Jones (2009), “The Fragile First Amendment” + “Objectivity’s Last Stand”

May 11  Fake News Take-Home Final due (by 5pm)
VIII. References & Additional Readings


