

Mauro P. Porto  
Department of Communication  
Tulane University  
mporto@tulane.edu

Office: 219 Newcomb Hall  
Office hours: Wed and Fri, 10:30-11:30 am. or  
by appointment  
Phone: 862.3037

## **POLITICAL COMMUNICATION**

### COMM 230 - Spring 2008

#### **Course Description**

This course examines several aspects of political communication processes in the United States. Special attention will be given to how the mass media, particularly television, frame political realities in specific ways and influence public perceptions and attitudes. Specific topics include the role of the media in shaping electoral campaigns, strategies of presidential communication, and public perceptions of international conflicts, especially the current War in Iraq. News coverage of social movements and political protest will also be discussed. The analysis focuses on traditional communication genres and formats (news coverage, political advertising, etc.), but also considers non-traditional forms of political communication (political cartoons, soft news, the Internet, etc.).

One of the central goals of the course is to enhance students' ability to develop a critical and comprehensive analysis of media messages and to understand their central role in the mediation of power relations in the United States. To this purpose, the course will introduce the method of content analysis and students will be required to apply this research technique and to develop a systematic analysis of communication texts for their final papers.

#### **Course Texts**

Doris Graber (Ed.), *Media Power in Politics*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2007 (5th edition only!).

W. Lance Bennett, Regina Lawrence, and Steven Livingston, *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Both books available through Tulane Bookstore.

#### **Blackboard**

Blackboard will be used for posting announcements, assignments, and other information. It will also be used for online discussions. The system can be accessed at < <http://mytulane.blackboard.com> >. If you have problems using the system, you can call the help desk: 862.8888.

#### **Required texts**

Besides the two textbooks, we will also work with several articles and book chapters which will be available online at Blackboard. Assigned readings should be completed prior to the classes for which they are listed in the syllabus. All students should have hard copies of the texts and bring them to the respective sessions. Failure to do so will affect your participation grade.

## Attendance

Regular attendance is required and attendance will be taken in every class meeting. You can miss three class sessions without penalty in your participation grade. Seven unexcused absences will result in the final grade recommendation of a “WF.”

## Evaluation

Your final evaluation will be based on the following:

1) Midterm exam: Students will take an in-class midterm exam which will cover the first two units (Parts I and II). A list of possible questions will be delivered to students in advance and two of the questions will be on the exam. The midterm is a closed book exam. Students should bring a pen and a blank blue book on the scheduled dates for the exam;

2) Final paper: Students will be required to write a 12-page final paper. The paper will be based on a content analysis of news coverage about a particular topic. The content analysis will be carried out by groups of three students, but each student will chose a specific topic and write a specific paper. More specific guidelines for the paper will be given later;

3) Participation: Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions. To have an effective participation, students should complete the assigned readings prior to the sessions for which they are listed in the syllabus and be ready to discuss them. Attendance will also be considered when assessing participation;

4) Readings summaries: Students should bring a one-page summary of the reading/s assigned for each session. Summaries should include the author/s’ main arguments and will be due in the beginning of class. Summaries can be typed or hand-written, and should include the student’s full name and the date of the session. Summaries will be graded as “sufficient” and “insufficient” and only the former will satisfy the requirement. If you deliver all summaries and they are graded “sufficient,” you will receive full credit for this portion of your grade (you can miss up to three summaries without penalty). If you do not, your grade will be proportionally lowered down to a possible “F” (50 points);

5) Discussion board: Students will be evaluated for their participation in the “Discussion Board” area of Blackboard. This is where our online discussions will take place. There will be one forum for each part of the course. Students should use the online board to engage with issues related to the readings or class discussions. There are no major restrictions on the postings, but students should be cordial and respectful when discussing classmates’ arguments. Failure to do so will disqualify the respective postings and may result in other penalties.

How to post to a discussion board: 1) click on the discussion board button; 2) click on the respective “forum” (Part I, II, etc.); 3) add a new “thread” (a new topic, with a new subject title) to the discussion or post a message (response or comment) to an existing thread. Click "add a new thread" to create a heading or click “reply” to comment on someone’s posting.

You will be expected to post at least one message (an original thread or a response to a classmate’s posting) in each of the 11 designated weeks for online discussions (listed below). Of the 11 required messages, 4 of them need to be original threads, which should include specific question/s to stimulate the debate. Whether you post more than these 11 messages is entirely up to you. As long as you complete the 11 minimum posts (four threads and seven messages in all designated weeks) with serious and thoughtful contributions, you will receive full credit for this portion of your grade. If you do not post all required messages, your grade will be proportionally lowered down to a possible “F” (50 points).

Designated weeks for online discussions - Week 1: Jan 22-27; Week 2: Jan 28-Feb 3; Week 3: Feb 11-17; Week 4: Feb 18-24; Week 5: Feb 25-Mar 2; Week 6: Mar 3-9; Week 7: Mar 10-16; Week 8: Mar 31-Apr 6; Week 9: Apr 7-13; Week 10: Apr 14-20; Week 11: Apr 21-27.

Your final grade will be calculated in the following manner:

Midterm Exam	25 %	Participation	20 %	Readings summaries:	15 %
Final Paper	30 %	Discussion board:	10 %		

### Grading scale

A	94.0 to 100.0	B	84.0 to 86.9	C	74.0 to 76.9	D	64.0 to 66.9
A-	90.0 to 93.9	B-	80.0 to 83.9	C-	70.0 to 73.9	D-	60.0 to 63.9
B+	87.0 to 89.9	C+	77.0 to 79.9	D+	67.0 to 69.9	F	00.0 to 59.9

### Academic dishonesty

Remember that plagiarism is a form of cheating. Do not present someone else's ideas as yours, without citing the source. This course adheres strictly to the Code of Academic Conduct of the Newcomb-Tulane College, available at: < <http://college.tulane.edu/code.htm> >

### Course Schedule

#### PART I INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: THE QUESTION OF MEDIA EFFECTS

**Jan 14 (Mon) – Introduction to the procedures and contents of the course.**

**Jan 16 (Wed) – The field of political communication: definitions.**

\* Dominique Wolton, "Political communication: the construction of a model," *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 5, 1990, pp. 9-28.

**Jan 18 (Fri) – The press/government relationship.**

\* Bennett, Lawrence and Livingstone, Chap. 2, pp. 46-71.

**Jan 21 (Mon) – No class. Martin L. King Holiday.**

**Jan 23 (Wed) – The question of media effects.**

\* Denis McQuail, "The influence and effects of mass media," in Graber, chap. 2, pp. 19-35.

\* Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, "The reinforcement effect," in Ralph Negrine and James Stanier (Eds), *The Political Communication Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 159-163.

**Jan 25 (Fri) – The agenda-setting approach.**

\* Everett Rogers and James Dearing, "Agenda-setting research: where has it been, where is it going?," in Graber, chap. 7, pp. 80-97.

**Jan 28 (Mon) – Media frames and politics.**

\* Robert Entman, "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm," *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43, n. 4, 1993, pp. 51-58.

\* Karen Callaghan and Frauke Schnell, "Introduction: framing political issues in American politics," in Callaghan and Schnell (Eds.), *Framing American Politics*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005, pp. 1-15.

PART II  
MEDIA FRAMES, POLITICS, AND DEMOCRACY:  
NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE U.S. PRESS

**Jan 30 (Wed) – Lecture.**

No readings.

**Feb 1 (Fri) – Media frames: shaping attitudes about crime, race, and abortion.**

\* Frank Gilliam and Shanto Iyengar, "News coverage effects on public opinion about crime," in Graber, chap. 10, pp.127-137.

\* Neyda Terkidsen, Frauke Schnell, and Cristina Ling, "Interest groups, the media, and policy debate formation: an analysis of message structure, rhetoric, and sources cues," in Graber, chap. 30, pp. 349-360.

**Feb 4 (Mon) – No class. Mardi Gras break.**

**Feb 6 (Wed) – Media frames and civil society: the civil rights movement and the Anti-Vietnam war coalition.**

\* Doug McAdam, "Strategies of the American Civil Rights Movement," in Graber, chap. 23, pp. 270-277.

\* Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pp. 21-31, and pp. 109-123.

**Feb 8 (Fri) – Media frames: conclusion.**

No readings.

**Feb 11 (Mon) – Debate: Evaluating the political role of the U.S. media.**

\* Thomas Patterson, "The miscast institution," in Graber, chap. 16, pp. 202-210.

\* Michael Schudson, "Why democracies need an unlovable press," in Graber, chap. 3, pp. 36-47.

**Feb 13 (Wed) – Debate: the watchdog role of the press.**

\* John Zaller, "A new standard of news quality: burglar alarms for the monitorial citizen," *Political Communication*, Vol. 20, n. 2, 2003, pp. 109-130.

\* W. Lance Bennett and William Serrin, "The watchdog role of the press," in Graber, chap. 28, pp. 326-336.

**Feb 15 (Fri) – Frame diversity and democracy.**

Mauro Porto, "Frame diversity and citizen competence: towards a critical approach to news quality," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol. 24, n. 4, 2007, pp. 303-321.

**Feb 18 (Mon) – MIDTERM EXAM (Part I).**

**Feb 20 (Wed) – MIDTERM EXAM (Part II).**

PART III  
THE METHOD OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

**Feb 22 (Fri) – Introducing content analysis and the assignment for the final paper.**

No readings.

**Feb 25 (Mon) – The method of content analysis.**

\* Anders Hansen et al., *Mass Communication Research Methods*. New York: New York University Press, 1998 (Chapter 5, “Content Analysis”, pp. 91-129).

**Feb 27 (Wed) – Content analysis: in-class exercise.**

No readings.

PART IV – MEDIA AND ELECTIONS

**Feb 29 (Fri) – Horse-race coverage.**

\* Daniel Hallin, “Sound bite news: television coverage of elections: 1968-1988,” *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 42, n. 2, pp. 5-24.

**Mar 3 (Mon) – News coverage of the primaries.**

\* Kathleen E. Kendall, “Constructing the primary story: embedded with the media in New Hampshire,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 49, n. 1, 2005, pp. 157-172

**Mar 5 (Wed) – In-class analysis of news coverage of March 4 primaries.**

No readings.

**Mar 7 (Fri) – Attack journalism, cartoons, and elections.**

\* Larry Sabato, “Open season: how the news media cover presidential campaigns in the age of attack journalism,” in Graber, chap. 14, pp. 181-191.

\* Joan Conners, “Visual representations of the 2004 presidential campaign: political cartoons and popular culture references,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 49, n. 3, 2005, pp. 479-487.

**Mar 10 (Mon) – Political advertising and American politics.**

\* Linda Kaid, “Political advertising in the United States,” In: *The Sage Handbook of Political Advertising*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006, pp. 37-52.

\* Darrel West, “Learning about the candidates from television advertisements,” in Graber, chap. 13, pp. 169-180.

**Mar 12 (Wed) – Political advertising and American politics (cont.).**

No readings.

**Mar 14 (Fri) – New media, new campaigns? Cable TV, infotainment, and the Internet.**

\* Joseph Hayden, “Candidate Bill Clinton and the press,” in Graber, chap. 17, pp. 211-219.

\* Matthew Hindman, “Reflections on the first digital campaign,” in Graber, chap. 15, p. 192-201.

**March 17-24 – No classes. Spring break.**

**March 26 and March 28 – No Classes. Work on Final Paper outline.**

PART V  
PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

**Mar 31 (Mon) – Presidential uses of news.**

\* Timothy Cook, “The uses of news: theory and (Presidential) practice,” in Graber, chap. 19, pp. 231-242.

**April 2 (Wed) – Strategies of going public.**

\* Samuel Kernell, “The President and the press,” In *Going Public*, Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 1997, pp. 65-103.

**To be scheduled – Documentary screening: *Television and the Presidency*.**

**April 4 (Fri) – Presidential scandals and the press.**

\* Michael Schudson, “Notes on scandal and the Watergate legacy,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 47, n. 9, 2004, pp. 1231-1238.

\* Stephen Farnsworth and Robert Lichter, “The struggle over shaping the news,” in Graber, chap. 20, pp. 243-251.

**April 7 (Mon) – Soft news, political information, and presidential accountability.**

\* Matthew Baum, “How soft news brings policy issues to the inattentive public,” in Graber, chap. 11, pp.138-153.

\* Geoffrey Baym, “The Daily Show: discursive integration and the reinvention of political journalism”. *Political Communication*, Vol. 22, 2005, pp. 259-276.

**April 9 (Wed) – Soft news, political information, and presidential accountability (cont.).**

No readings.

PART VI  
MEDIA, POLITICAL POWER, AND WAR COVERAGE:  
THE CASE OF THE IRAQ WAR

**April 11 (Fri) – Information wars: misconception and censorship.**

\* Doris Graber, “Terrorism, censorship and the First Amendment,” in Graber, chap. 33, pp. 390-402.

\* Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, “Misperceptions, the media, and the Iraq War,” in Graber, chap. 9, pp 114-126.

**April 14 (Mon) – Images of war.**

\* William Hachten, “Reporting the Gulf war,” in Graber, chap. 27, pp.317-325.

\* Sean Aday, “The real war will never get on television: an analysis of casualty imagery,” in Graber, chap. 5, pp. 56-65.

**April 16 (Wed) – Images of war (cont.).**

No readings.

**April 18 (Fri) – Press politics in the Iraq War.**

\* Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, chap. 1, pp. 13-45.

**April 21 (Mon) - News coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal.**

\* Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, chap. 3, pp. 72-107.

**April 23 (Wed) – News management during the Iraq War.**

\* Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, chap. 5, pp. 131-164.

**April 25 (Fri) – War Coverage and political accountability.**

\* Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, chap. 6, pp. 165-198.

**April 28 (Mon) – Conclusions. Course evaluation.**

**FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 8, THURSDAY, 10:00 a.m. – noon.** Papers should be delivered at the instructor's office: 219 Newcomb Hall. Late papers will not be received.