

**Comm. 413W Mass Media and the Public**

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**WF 10:10-12:05\***

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\*As listed – this will change to 75-minute slot after first day

**Course overview:** This class explores social-level and political theories of the relationships between media and public, media influences on public opinion, social pressure on the media and political communication.

**Objectives:** Students who successfully complete assigned coursework should develop the following skills:

- Familiarity with the basic theories linking media and public
- Ability to critique scholarly media research in this area
- Understanding of how media contribute to effective citizenship
- Increased skill with written argumentation

**Policies:** My guiding standard is that you are adults, with the rights and responsibilities that go along with that status. In particular, please note the following:

- All students should behave in a way that does not disrupt the ability of other students to learn. Activities such as talking, texting, reading or sleeping during class, arriving late or departing early are potentially disruptive. If you feel that another student is hindering your learning, please let me know.
- The use of electronic devices, including laptops, phones, and tablets, is not allowed during class time. Considerable research demonstrates that such devices, even when used for class-related purposes, pose too much of a distraction for both the user and those around the user. Students who persist in using such devices will be marked absent, and all aspects of the attendance policy will apply.
- Students are responsible for communicating any special circumstances or needs. This includes pre-arranged absences or potential absences.
- Note to students with disabilities: Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services, ODS located in room 116 Boucke Building at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit its website at [www.equity.psu.edu/ods/](http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/). Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.
- If you have any questions or concerns about grades or other course materials, please let me know. I'm happy to explain grades and consider rationales for grade changes provided the request is made in person or via University e-mail. *I will not discuss grades or any student-specific information with parents, due to federal privacy laws.*
- This syllabus and any other course materials, including grading policy, are subject to change if necessary. I will give you advance notice of any changes.

**Academic integrity:** Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of the College of Communications and the university. Cheating, including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else's work, or passively allowing others to copy your work, will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor, and may result in the grade of "XF" (failed for academic dishonesty) being put on your permanent transcript. In serious cases it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the university. As students studying communication, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own). A discussion of plagiarism, with examples, can be found at: <http://tlt.its.psu.edu/plagiarism/tutorial/>. The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at: [www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20](http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20), and in the College of Communications document, "Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures." Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with his or her instructor.

**Writing:** This is a writing-intensive class. Most of your grade is based upon written work. You will have the chance to write both formal and informal materials, and you will be able to revise some writing based upon feedback. However, this is not a class on grammar and punctuation. Our emphasis will be on using writing to construct an effective, evidence-driven argument. That said, part of your writing grade will depend upon appropriate use of the English language. If you feel uncomfortable with grammar and style issues or want advice about effective wording, you should consider visiting the writing center: <http://www.ulc.psu.edu/uwc.php>.

**Prerequisites:** Students are required to have completed Comm. 304, 420 or an equivalent research methods class prior to starting Comm. 413W. A major component of your grade in this class is based upon your ability to read, understand and critique scholarly research articles based upon quantitative data. Students can and should ask questions about individual articles as necessary, but in general you should be able to consistently do the following:

- Recognize the use and relative merits of experimental, survey, and content analytical research, with a particular emphasis on the ability of each to offer evidence of causality
- Identify the sample employed and the implications of such a sample for inferential purposes and external validity
- Identify and describe the measurement of key IVs and DVs, based upon both theoretical descriptions and method sections
- Correctly interpret reported statistical results from bivariate (e.g., t-tests, correlations) and multivariate (e.g., ANOVA, regression) analyses, including the implications of including multiple IVs in analysis
- Understand the meaning of moderation and be able to explain the implications of significant interaction results

**Grades:** Course grades are based on a point system. All work, including quizzes, written assignments, and the final paper, are worth a set number of points. Your overall grade is based on the total number of points accrued out of 100. In most categories of assignments it is possible to earn more than the "required" number of points listed below, and those additional points can be applied to make up for "deficits" in other areas. However, aside from extra credit, your total

points for all categories other than the final paper cannot total more than 80; any “bonus” points beyond that total will not affect your grade.

Quizzes.....	20
Assignments.....	60
Basic writing.....	20
Advanced topics.....	40
Final paper.....	20
Postings (extra credit).....	up to 5

**Grading scale:** Final grades are assigned based on point totals using this scale:

93-100+.....	A
90-92.9.....	A-
87-89.9.....	B+
83-86.9.....	B
80-82.9.....	B-
77-79.9.....	C+
70-76.9.....	C
60-69.9.....	D
0-59.9.....	F

**Quizzes:** We will have a quiz on the day’s reading and previously covered course material nearly every day, for a total of 25 such quizzes. Each quiz is worth 1 point, meaning the maximum possible total quiz score is 25. (Typical quizzes will have 5 multiple choice questions worth one-fifth of a point each, but some quizzes may employ different scoring schemes.) “Extra” points from quizzes will be applied to the quiz/assignment total and can make up for lower scores in other areas, to a maximum of 80 points for the combined quiz and readings score.

You can replace low or missing quiz scores by summarizing the assigned article for the day of the quiz. More details about summary formatting and submission are posted in a separate document on ANGEL. Summaries will also receive up to 1 point and are graded, so simply submitting a summary is no guarantee of a high score. Summaries must be submitted within one week of the absence/quiz and no later than the regularly scheduled time for the start of class (even on ANGEL days).

**Assignments:** Throughout the semester you will have the opportunity to complete a number of written assignments. In general, these assignments will require 2-3 pages of thoughtful writing. Some assignments will be related to specific readings or in-class activities. Others will allow you to choose which reading or topic or focus on. Some will simply require responses to the reading itself, while others will challenge you to apply material from the reading to additional material you locate on your own.

Assignments are divided by topic area. In total, there are six topics we will address this semester. Each topic spans either four or five classes, with one reading assigned each day. For each topic, you will be able to choose from four possible assignments (a complete list of assignments,

grading standards and other information for each topic is posted separately on ANGEL). Students may submit 14 assignments — 3 for each of the first two topics, and 2 for each remaining topic. Each assignment is graded on a five-point scale, and your *highest 12* assignments will count (meaning students with consistently high scores on early assignments may consider taking a 0 on one or two late assignments — there is no penalty for not turning in a particular assignment beyond receiving a 0 for that assignment, which can be dropped). Thus, the goal for the assignments category is 60 points. Extra credit on assignments (described below) and points beyond the goal of 20 on quizzes can both offset low assignment scores to help you hit this goal.

Assignments must be submitted by the topic assignment deadline, and each assignment is graded on a specific set of criteria, some of which are shared across assignments and some of which are specific to a given assignment or type of assignment. Assignments scoring less than full credit (5) can be revised and resubmitted by the revision deadline, and the revised grade will count. Assignments scoring a 3 or below for the initial submission *must* be *meaningfully* revised and resubmitted, or they will be recorded with a 1-point penalty (for example an assignment that earned a 3 on a draft would only count as 2 points in the book). Meaningful revision requires making substantive changes to the paper; small copy-editing changes are not sufficient.

Prior to the regular assignment deadline is an early submission deadline. Work submitted by this date will receive early feedback to give you extra time with revisions. In addition, any assignment submitted early and scoring full credit (5) will receive a one-point bonus, making the total assignment score a 6. Only assignments earning full credit on initial submission are eligible for this bonus.

Assignments are divided into two broad categories. The assignments for the first two topics focus on basic writing and argumentation, and serve as a foundation for moving on to the more advanced assignments linked to the remaining four topics, which add material related to the integration and application of the concepts in the readings. For basic writing assignments, you may select up to three of the four options, and there are no restrictions on which you select.

Because these assignments reflect basic composition and comprehension skills that students are generally expected to bring to the class, rather than developing over the semester, your score on these initial assignments determines whether you will be required to take additional steps to ensure successful completion of the remaining topics. Students earning less than an 18 after all revision opportunities for topics 1 and 2 will be *required* to follow the guidelines described below regarding *extra attention*. Students may also be expected to follow the extra attention guidelines if subsequent work suggests it is warranted.

Assignments from topics 3 through 6 will reflect either the *integration* or *application* categories — each option is labeled to reflect the category it represents. You may complete no more than *one* assignment in a given category for each topic, for a maximum of two assignments per topic. The reduced number of allowable topics reflects the increased complexity of these assignments and the additional work you will be doing crafting your final paper.

*Extra attention.* Students earning less than the required number of points in the first two units or otherwise placed in the extra attention category will have to follow specific additional requirements on all remaining assignments or until satisfactory progress is made (as determined by the instructor). These requirements include:

- All assignments must be submitted by the early submission deadline. Assignments not submitted by the early deadline will not be accepted.
- Students must schedule a conference with the instructor to discuss their performance on the early submission assignments. Ideally, this meeting would be prior to the regular submission deadline, allowing for optimal revision. If not, students may still submit revisions for the regular deadline, but the meeting must take place prior to revision deadline submission or the further revised work will not be accepted. (This requirement is waived if the early work receives at least a 4 out of 5. That is, submit early and earn a 4 or 5, and you don't need to schedule a meeting. Submit early and earn a 3 or less, and you *may* resubmit by the regular deadline, but you must meet with me to be able to submit any other revisions. Papers not submitted early earn a 0 for those on the *extra attention* plan.)

***Final paper:*** While the individual assignments focus on specific, narrow topics, the final paper challenges you to develop a longer, more complex argument. In this paper, you will integrate several articles from the class and your own library work and apply this material to a context of your choosing. The actual final paper is worth 15 points, while the initial topic proposal is worth 1, a preliminary annotated bibliography 2, and a preliminary outline and updated bibliography 2 more. A full description of the assignment is posted separately to ANGEL.

***Extra credit postings:*** Some of your individual assignments will be posted to our class blog, giving you a chance to see examples of strong work. (Only passing assignments will be posted, and not all assignments will automatically be posted, depending on the number of assignments submitted.) Sometimes additional links or examples will also be posted. By submitting comments about these postings, you can earn extra credit. Comments must be submitted within a week of a post going up, and you may submit only one comment per post and three per week. (Note: Not all weeks will necessarily have three posts to respond to. Plan accordingly.) Coherent, thoughtful comments — that is, comments that reflect upon the substance of the argument and that meaningfully extend discussion of that argument — earn extra credit worth .25. Comments should represent a coherent paragraph, and do more than simply express generic praise. (Praise that highlights specific strengths and explains why they are strengths is fine.) You may earn up to five points of extra credit in this fashion. This extra credit counts toward your overall grade, allowing you to offset low scores in either the quiz/assignments category or the final paper category.

***Readings:*** Each day we will have one required reading, posted as a PDF to ANGEL and listed on the syllabus. Assigned readings should be completed by the start of that class; you will be quizzed on your understanding of the readings, so process them carefully. As noted above, readings are linked by shared topic areas, and generally represent empirical studies related to that topic. The readings will provide us with examples of work dealing with a range of important theories and demonstrating a variety of methodologies. As such, the most critical aspect of most

readings is the study method and results; make sure you are able to explain the findings, and ask questions about any aspects of this material that you find confusing. Reading the literature review and discussion, and skimming the remaining elements, is not adequate and will lead to poor quiz and paper scores.

**Participation and attendance:** Students are expected to attend class and actively participate in discussion and group activities. Unexcused absences will adversely affect your grades. Specifically, you will lose 1 point from the broad quizzes/assignments category for each unexcused absence. You can offset these lost points by earning additional points in any of the relevant categories. For example, if your point total for all quizzes and assignments was an 82, but you had two unexcused absences, you would still earn the maximum of 80 points. Students who are extremely tardy or disruptive or who are unable to contribute to class discussion because they did not complete the reading or were not paying attention will be counted as being absent.

Absences are excused only if the following conditions are met: a) you must contact me regarding your absence, either prior to a planned absence or prior to returning to class in the case of a legitimate unexpected absence such as illness, and b) you must complete a summary of that day's reading and earn at least a .75 on the summary. Summaries must be submitted within one week of the absence — see the quizzes section for more detail. Non-passing summaries may be resubmitted to provide an excused absence, but the original score will be recorded for quiz-replacement purposes.

Students who miss a quiz due to tardiness or unexcused absences may still submit a summary, and this score will replace the 0 for the quiz, but submitting a summary by itself does not mean an absence is excused. The 1-point penalty will still apply to all non-excused absences, regardless of summary scores.

**ANGEL days:** A small number of class days are designated “ANGEL days,” listed as such on the schedule. For these classes, we will not meet face-to-face. Instead, students will complete the quiz online and post a designated assignment to a discussion board created for that purpose. This allows occasional practice with informal, written discussion to complement our in-class activities, which do not involve writing. Specific directions for each designated day are posted to ANGEL.

ANGEL-day quizzes will be available for 24 hours, on the designated day. They are open book, but consultation with other students is not permitted. Quizzes are timed, and in general you will not have time to look up answers, so while consultation with the text is permitted you should prepare for the quiz as if they are an in-class, closed-book exercise.

Exercises will generally be due no later than 11:59 p.m. on the designated ANGEL day. Most exercises also require a follow-up set of posts in response to other student responses, the deadline for which will be specified in the directions and will vary by assignment.

**Course schedule:** The following grid lists course topics and reading assignments by date.

Jan. 11 Intro/course outline	Jan. 13 Economic trends <i>McChesney</i>
Jan. 18 Economic trends <i>Yanich</i>	Jan. 20 Economic trends <i>Dunaway</i>
Jan. 25 Economic trends <i>Beam, Weaver &amp; Brownlee</i> <b>Topic 1 early submission deadline</b>	Jan. 27 <b>No class (work on first papers)</b> <b>Topic 1 regular deadline</b>
Feb. 1 Bias and selective exposure <i>D'Alessio &amp; Allen</i>	Feb. 3 Bias and selective exposure <i>Morris &amp; Francia</i> <b>Topic 1 revision deadline</b>
Feb. 8 <b>ANGEL day — no face-to-face meeting</b> Bias and selective exposure <i>Goldman &amp; Mutz</i> <b>Topic 2 early submission deadline</b>	Feb. 10 Bias and selective exposure <i>Garrett</i> <b>Topic 2 regular deadline Sunday, Feb. 12</b>
Feb. 15 Gay rights & public opinion <i>Hester &amp; Gibson</i>	Feb. 17 Gay rights & public opinion <i>Brewer</i> <b>Topic 2 revision deadline Sunday, Feb. 19</b>
Feb. 22 Gay rights & public opinion <i>Moscowitz</i> <b>Topic 3 early submission deadline</b>	Feb. 24 Gay rights & public opinion <i>Cazlo &amp; Ward</i> <b>Topic 3 regular deadline Sunday, Feb. 26</b>
Feb. 29 Internet <i>Xenos &amp; Moy</i>	March 2 <b>Final paper topic proposal due by start of class (no reading)</b>
March 7 <b>No class — Spring Break</b>	March 9 <b>No class — Spring Break</b>
March 14 <b>ANGEL day — no face-to-face meeting</b> Internet <i>Ellison, Steinfeld, &amp; Lampe</i> <b>Topic 3 revision deadline</b>	March 16 Internet <i>Brundidge</i>
March 21 Internet <i>Ho &amp; McLeod</i> <b>Topic 4 early submission deadline</b>	March 23 Internet <i>Wei &amp; Blanks Hindman</i> <b>Topic 4 regular deadline Sunday, March 25</b>
March 28 Colbert/Daily Show <i>Cao</i>	March 30 Colbert/Daily Show <i>Hmielowski, Holbert &amp; Lee</i> <b>Topic 4 revision deadline Sunday, April 1</b>
April 4 <b>ANGEL day — no face-to-face meeting</b> Colbert/Daily Show	April 6 <b>Initial annotated bibliography due by start of class (no reading)</b>

<i>Baumgartner &amp; Morris</i>	<b>Topic 5 early submission deadline Sunday, April 8</b>
April 11 Colbert/Daily Show <i>Lamarre, Landreville &amp; Beam</i>	April 13 Campaign ads <i>Lau &amp; Rovner</i> <b>Topic 5 regular deadline (Friday)</b>
April 18 <b>ANGEL day — no face-to-face meeting</b> Campaign ads <i>Brader</i>	April 20 Campaign ads <i>Sides, Lipsitz &amp; Grossman</i> <b>Topic 5 revision deadline (Friday)</b> <b>Topic 6 early submission deadline Sunday, April 22</b>
April 25 <b>Final paper outline due by start of class (no reading)</b>	April 27 Campaign ads <i>Lovejoy, Cheng &amp; Riffe</i> <b>Topic 6 regular submission deadline (Friday)</b>
<b>Final paper deadline Wednesday, May 2; Topic 6 revision deadline Thursday, May 3</b>	

Unless noted, due dates are generally 11:59 p.m. on the listed day. Additional details about deadlines and submissions can be found on the relevant assignment sheets.