



MEDIA, CULTURE, AND POLITICS

PSC 201, SPRING 2024

INSTRUCTOR: DR. JESS MORRISSETTE

MEETINGS: TU/TH 11:00-12:15, SMITH HALL 433

OFFICE HOURS: M 1-4, TH 2-4, AND BY APPOINTMENT

OFFICE LOCATION: SMITH HALL 706

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introductory survey of how the media and popular culture both reflect and shape political values (3 credit hours).

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

My name is Dr. Jess Morrisette; I'm a Professor in the Department of Political Science, and this is my fourteenth year here at Marshall University. I earned my MA from Virginia Tech and my Ph.D. from the University of Georgia, where I wrote my dissertation about interstate conflict driven by water scarcity in the Middle East and North Africa. My areas of specialization are International Relations and Comparative Politics, and I have published on topics ranging from resource-based conflict to Russian foreign policy to the rise of extremist movements. In recent years, my research has focused increasingly on exploring the politics of popular culture and, more specifically, video games.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students should be able to...	How we will practice this outcome...	How we will assess this outcome...
<i>Critically appraise the power dynamics and politics in news media and popular culture.</i>	Discussions, in-class group activities, low-stakes writing assignments, media analysis exercises	Media critiques, "framing the news" essay, midterm exam
<i>Demonstrate how popular culture can contribute to the study of political science.</i>	Discussions, in-class group activities, low-stakes writing assignments, media analysis, exercises	Media critiques, midterm exam
<i>Analyze the media's role in shaping the public's perception of politics.</i>	Discussions, in-class group activities, low-stakes writing assignments, media analysis, exercises	"Framing the news" essay, midterm exam
<i>Construct novel arguments about how news media and popular culture shape political values and vice versa.</i>	Discussions, in-class group activities, low-stakes writing assignments, media analysis, exercises	Media critiques, "framing the news" essay, midterm exam

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

Your course grade is calculated based on three papers, a midterm exam, and class participation. Your final grade is determined as follows:

5%	Participation	A =	90%-100%
25%	"Framing the News" Essay	B =	80-89%
30%	Midterm Exam	C =	70-79%
20%	Media Critique 1	D =	60-69%
20%	Book Review	F ≤	59%

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Brandt and Clare, *An Introduction to Popular Culture in the US: People, Politics, and Power*.
- Iyengar, *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide* (5th edition).
- Jenkins and Secker, *Superheroes, Movies, and the State: How the US Government Shapes Cinematic Universes*.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance is required in this class, and students are expected to have read and be ready to discuss all assigned readings prior to class. Students will also be graded based on their class participation—engaging in discussion of the readings and current political events, asking questions, and so forth. Once again, attendance is clearly important; if you aren't in class, you can't participate.

The participation grade will be determined as follows: 5 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and make valuable contributions to class discussion on a regular basis; 4 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and contribute to discussions occasionally; 3 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently, but seldom participate in class discussions. Attendance grades of 2, 1, and 0 points are reserved for those students who fail to attend class regularly and therefore cannot participate meaningfully in class discussions.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

Classroom discussions will be conducted in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect. Differences of opinion and the challenging of viewpoints—including those of the instructor—are part of the learning experience, but they should occur in a manner that opens up dialogue without being disrespectful, hostile, or threatening toward others.

Unwelcome conduct directed toward another person based upon that person's actual or perceived race, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, political affiliation, disability, age, or veteran status will not be permitted. Failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in dismissal from class.

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you go by a different name than what is listed on the class roster, please let me know and I will gladly refer to you by your preferred name and pronouns.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students are expected to adhere to the University's policies concerning academic honesty. Cheating or plagiarism on any exam, quiz, or assignment will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent under University policies. **The penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a failing grade for the course.**

CHATGPT AND OTHER AI TOOLS

Students are expected to engage critically and creatively with course materials, and while external resources can be valuable, the use of ChatGPT or similar language models for assignments must be approached with caution. When incorporating information generated by AI language models, proper citation is crucial, and students are required to adhere to established citation formats. All submissions should include a clear indication of any content sourced from such models, and students must provide appropriate references for any information obtained through these tools. Moreover, it is essential to recognize the limitations of AI-generated content, and students are responsible for fact-checking statements composed by AI language models to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Plagiarism, whether from AI-generated content or other sources, is strictly prohibited. Violations of this policy will be subject to academic consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity guidelines. Students are encouraged to seek clarification from the instructor if they have questions about the appropriate use of external resources in the context of specific assignments.

(This section of the syllabus was written by ChatGPT.)

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments submitted more than one week after the deadline will receive a 10% late penalty). **The final day to submit missing assignments for the semester is Friday, April 19.**

EMAIL POLICY

Please check your Marshall email account regularly. Articles, assignments, and other important announcements may be sent to your "@marshall.edu" email address during the course of the semester. If you prefer to use a different email service, please contact Computing Services for assistance with forwarding your Marshall email to your preferred address.

OTHER UNIVERSITY POLICIES

By enrolling in this course, you agree to the University Policies listed below. Please read the full text of each policy by going to www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs and clicking on "Marshall University Policies." Or, you can access the policies directly by going to <http://www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs/policies/>.

- Academic Dishonesty, Excused Absence Policy for Undergraduates, Computing Services Acceptable Use, Inclement Weather, Dead Week, Students with Disabilities, Academic Forgiveness, Academic Probation and Suspension, Academic Rights and Responsibilities of Students, Affirmative Action, Sexual Harassment

ASSIGNMENTS

- **"Framing the News" Essay:** Students will choose an event covered by the news media during the current semester and write a **4-page** essay comparing how two media outlets covered the same story. Your essay should provide a summary of the event in question and then analyze the similarities and differences in how different media outlets framed their coverage, citing specific articles and/or video segments where appropriate. What are the political implications of these decisions?

Your analysis should offer insights into how media coverage may influence public opinion or political discourse. Support your arguments with specific examples from media sources, integrating quotations and paraphrases where appropriate.

- **Midterm Exam:** The midterm exam is a take-home exam. Approximately one week prior to the due-date, I will distribute a set of essay questions. Students will submit the completed exam on the date specified in the course schedule.
- **Media Critique:** For this essay, students will choose a piece of contemporary popular culture—a film, TV show, video game, song, meme, viral video, et cetera—and present a critique that highlights the political themes and/or values embedded in that work. Be sure to apply course concepts where appropriate! Your media critique should be approximately **3 pages** long, double-spaced.
- **Book Review:** For this assignment, you will write a **3-page** critique of Jenkins and Secker's *Superheroes, Movies, and the State*. Your critique should address the following questions:
 - What is the main argument or focus of the book?
 - How does the book contribute to our understanding of not only superhero movies but also politics and pop culture in general? What are the most important takeaways?
 - What are the strengths of the book? What are the weaknesses of the book? Do you agree with the arguments presented in the book? Why or why not? Don't just give your opinion; be sure to support it with reasoning, evidence, and specific examples from the text!

The goal of the assignment is analysis, not summary. As a rule of thumb, I recommend devoting no more than one-third of your review to summarizing the book under consideration. The rest should be your own analysis and critique.

GENERAL WRITING TIPS

- You will submit all assignments via MUOnline.
- When writing your essays, be sure to include a brief introduction that states the essay's purpose, as well as a concise conclusion that sums up what you have written. (This is not necessary, however, for the midterm and final exam questions.)
- Cite your sources! You can choose any widely used citation style (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago), but stay consistent. Also, be sure to make it clear where you found any "outside" information in your essay. This includes not only citing direct quotations, **but also any paraphrased material or statistics**. As a rule of thumb, any information those you decide to include in the paper and didn't know before you began working on the project merits a citation. Also, include a "works cited" page at the end of your essays and exams. Failure to properly cite your sources constitutes ~~PLAGIARISM~~.
- Be judicious in choosing your online sources, and **do not cite Wikipedia or other online encyclopedias**. Articles from major media outlets and official organizational websites are safe bets. On the other hand, if it's a website you've never heard of prior to it popping up in a Google search, that's probably a good sign that it's not an appropriate academic source.
- Write your papers in 12-point Times/Times New Roman, double-spaced with 1" margins and page numbers in the upper right-hand corner. Title pages and works cited pages do not count toward the suggested page length.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week of January 8: Introduction

- Iyengar, Chapter 1

Week of January 15: Press Freedom, Government Control, and Democracy

- Iyengar, Chapters 2 and 3

Week of January 22: Who Makes the News and How Do We Consume It?

- Iyengar, Chapters 3 and 4
- Jones, “*Fox and Friends*: Political Talk” (online)

Week of January 29: New Media — Like and Subscribe to Save Democracy

- Iyengar, Chapter 5
- Otis, excerpts from *True or False: A CIA Analyst’s Guide to Spotting Fake News* (online)

Week of February 5: That’s News to Me — The Media and Public Opinion

- Iyengar, Chapter 8

**“Framing the News” Essay Due
Friday, February 9**

Week of February 12: The Art of Going Public

- Iyengar, Chapter 9

Week of February 19: Campaigns and Media

- Iyengar, Chapters 6 and 7

Week of February 26: The Politics of Popular Culture

- Brandt and Clare, Chapters 1-4
- Smith and Smith, “Defining Pop Culture” (online)
- Levi, “Why It Mattered: Wrestling Dramaturgy in the 2016 Presidential Election” (online)
- Uscinski, “*Star Wars* and the Executive Branch” (online)
- Watkins, excerpt from *Hip Hop Matters* (online)
- Garafalo, “U.S. Popular Music after 9/11” (online)

**Midterm Exam Due
Friday, March 1**

Week of March 4: More Politics and Pop Culture

- Brandt and Clare, Chapters 5-7
- Emery and Evans, “‘We Shall Overcome’: Identity Politics in *The Hunger Games*” (online)
- Leonard, “*The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*: Franchising Femininity” (online)
- Gray, “*The Amazing Race*: Global Othering” (online)
- Klein, “*Buckwild*: Performing Whiteness” (online)

Week of March 11: Superheroes and the Military-Entertainment Complex

- Brandt and Clare, Chapters 8-10
- Jenkins and Secker, Introduction and Chapters 1-2
- Jenkins, “‘What Else Can You Do with Them?’ Superheroes and the Civic Imagination” (online)

Week of March 18: Spring Break!

Week of March 25: Class Cancelled for PCA Conference!

- Jenkins and Secker, Introduction and Chapters 3-4

**Media Critique Due
Friday, March 29**

Week of April 1: Superheroes and Military-Entertainment Complex (continued)

- Jenkins and Secker, Chapter 5 and Conclusion
- Bainbridge, “‘This Land Is Mine!’ Understanding the Function of Supervillains” (online)

Week of April 8: Politics and Video Games

- Flanagan and Nissenbaum, “Groundwork for Values in Games” (online)
- Peterson, et al., “Same River Twice: Exploring Historical Representation” (online)
- Nieborg, “Training Recruits and Conditioning Youth: Soft Power of Military Games” (online)
- Goldstein, “Immortal Kombat: War Toys and Violent Video Games” (online)
- Schreier, “The Horrible World of Video Game Crunch” (online)

Week of April 15: Politics and Video Games (continued)

- Shaw, “What is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies” (online)
- Chess, “Introduction: Contextualizing Player Two” (online)
- Lauteria, “Nintendo Censorship and the Regulation of Queer Sexuality and Gender” (online)
- Gray, “‘They’re Just Too Urban’: Black Gamers Streaming on Twitch” (online)

**Book Review Due
Friday, April 19**

**WANT A MINOR THAT REALLY
POPS?**

**AFTER COMPLETING
THIS COURSE,
YOU ONLY NEED
12 MORE
CREDIT HOURS
FOR A MINOR
IN POP CULTURE
STUDIES!**



CONTACT DR. MORRISSETTE FOR MORE INFORMATION!