



POLITICS, MEDIA, AND CULTURE

PSC 201, SPRING 2025

INSTRUCTOR: DR. JESS MORRISSETTE

MEETINGS: TU/TH 9:30-10:45, SMITH HALL 433

OFFICE HOURS: M 2-5, AND BY APPOINTMENT

OFFICE LOCATION: SMITH HALL 706

MORRISSETTE@MARSHALL.EDU | (304) 696-2760

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 seventeenth 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 critique, "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 critique, 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 critique, "framing the news" essay, midterm exam

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

Your course grade is calculated based on the following assignments.

5%	Participation	A =	90%-100%
15%	"Framing the News" Essay	B =	80-89%
30%	Midterm Exam	C =	70-79%
20%	Media Critique	D =	60-69%
30%	Final Exam	F ≤	59%

Note that failure to complete any assignment will result in a failing grade for the semester, regardless of the missing assignment's point value.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Iyengar, *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide* (5th edition).
- Weinstock, *Pop Culture for Beginners*.

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

Please silence your cell phone prior to the start of class.

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 supports and respects all gender expressions and identities. If you use a name different than what is listed on the class roster, please let me know and I will gladly refer to you by your correct 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.**

GENERATIVE AI

Students are prohibited from using generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, etc.) in any way on any assignment in this course. The use of generative AI in this course will be considered a violation of both Marshall's Academic Dishonesty Policy and the Student Code of Conduct. As noted above, **the penalty for academic dishonesty is a failing grade for the course.**

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

There is a 24-hour grace period on all written assignments. Assignments submitted within 24 hours of the deadline will not receive a late penalty. This grace period allows flexibility in case of minor delays or technical difficulties.

After the 24-hour grace period, a late penalty of 10% per week will apply to all late submissions. The maximum penalty is 30%. Please note that **the final deadline for submitting any missing assignments is Friday, May 2.** After this date, no further submissions will be accepted.

To ensure your assignment is considered "submitted," you must upload a proper document file to Blackboard that is accessible to the instructor. Missing or corrupt files, as well as links to cloud-based services like OneDrive or Microsoft 365, will not be accepted and will be considered late until a valid file is uploaded. To avoid unnecessary penalties, double-check your file after uploading to confirm it is complete, functional, and visible in Blackboard.

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.

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

All members of the Marshall University community are expected to always observe health and safety protocols. This includes general health and safety protocols as well as specific protocols that might emerge in response to community and campus health conditions.

CAMPUS CARRY POLICY

University Policy, UPGA-12 (Campus Carry Policy) derives its authority from West Virginia State law, including the Campus Self-defense Act (W. Va. Code § 18B-4-5b). It pertains to the exercise of Concealed Carry on Marshall University's campus, except in designated areas, by individuals with a valid permit to Conceal Carry.

Individuals who choose to Conceal Carry are responsible for knowing and understanding all applicable federal, state, and local laws and Marshall University Board of Governors Rules, University Policies, and

Administrative Procedures. University Policy, UPGA-12 applies to areas of campus and buildings that are directly under the possession or control of Marshall University.

Concealed Handguns are not observable to others and must be holstered and concealed on the body of the permit holder or in a personal carrier, such as a backpack, purse, or other bag that remains under the exclusive and uninterrupted control of the permit holder. This includes wearing the personal carrier with a strap, carrying or holding the personal carrier, or setting the personal carrier next to or within your immediate reach at all times. If your participation in class activities impedes your ability to maintain constant control of your Handgun, please make alternate arrangements prior to coming to class.

OTHER UNIVERSITY POLICIES

By enrolling in this course, you agree to the following University Policies. Please read the full text of each policy by going to <https://www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs/policies/>.

- Academic Dishonesty Policy
- Academic Dismissal Policy
- Academic Forgiveness Policy
- Academic Probation and Suspension Policy
- Affirmative Action Policy
- Pre-Finals Week Policy
- D/F Repeat Rule
- Excused Absence Policy for Undergraduates
- Inclement Weather Policy
- Sexual Harassment Policy- Title IX prohibits the harassment of students based on sex, which includes pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions. This includes that students will not be penalized for taking medically necessary leave related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related conditions. Marshall's Title IX Office may be contacted at TitleIX@marshall.edu.
- Students with Disabilities (Policies and Procedures)
- University Computing Services Acceptable Use Policy

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?

When selecting your news sources, keep in mind that this comparison will be more effective if you choose media outlets that cover the event differently. While some outlets may present the story in a similar way, contrasting perspectives—whether due to ideological differences, audience focus, or editorial priorities—will give you more material to analyze. If the coverage you choose is too similar, it will be challenging to highlight meaningful contrasts.

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.

- **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.

When writing your critique, be sure to identify the key political themes or values present in your chosen piece of media. Consider questions such as: What messages does this work convey about power, identity, or society? How does it reflect or challenge existing political norms or ideologies? Who is the intended audience for this media, and how might their perspectives shape the impact or interpretation of its political themes?

Use specific examples from the media to support your points, citing details like dialogue, visuals, or other relevant features. Where possible, connect your analysis to concepts discussed in class or in the readings.

- **Midterm and Final Exam:** You will complete take-home midterm and final exams this semester. Approximately one week prior to the respective due-dates, I will distribute a set of essay questions. In turn, students will submit the completed exams on the dates specified in the course schedule. Please note that while these are take-home exams, they are still exams. In other words, students are not allowed to collaborate with one another in the completion of the exams. I will provide more details as the exams approach.

GENERAL WRITING TIPS

- You will submit all assignments via Blackboard.
- 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 that 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 13: Introduction

- Iyengar, Chapter 1

Week of January 20: Press Freedom, Government Control, and Democracy

- Iyengar, Chapters 2 and 3
- Class cancelled on Thursday, January 23

Week of January 27: Who Makes the News and How Do We Consume It?

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

Week of February 3: 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 10: That’s News to Me — The Media and Public Opinion

- Iyengar, Chapter 8
- Class cancelled on Thursday, February 13.

**“Framing the News” Essay
Monday, February 17**

Week of February 17: The Art of Going Public

- Iyengar, Chapter 9

Week of February 24: Campaigns and Media

- Iyengar, Chapters 6 and 7

Week of March 3: The Politics of Popular Culture

- Weinstock, Chapter 1
- Levi, “Why It Mattered: Wrestling Dramaturgy in the 2016 Presidential Election” (online)
- Uscinski, “*Star Wars* and the Executive Branch” (online)

**Midterm Exam Due
Friday, March 7**

Week of March 10: Decoding Pop Culture

- Weinstock, Chapters 2-3
- Emery and Evans, “‘We Shall Overcome’: Identity Politics in *The Hunger Games*” (online)
- Leonard, “*The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*: Franchising Femininity” (online)
- Garafalo, “U.S. Popular Music after 9/11” (online)

Week of March 17: Spring Break!

Week of March 24: Pop Culture Pivot Points

- Weinstock, Chapter 4
- Gray, “*The Amazing Race: Global Othering*” (online)
- Klein, “*Buckwild: Performing Whiteness*” (online)

Week of March 31: Class Cancelled for SCMS Conference!

Week of April 7: The Politics of Superheroes

- Weinstock, Chapter 5-7

**Media Critique Due
Friday, April 11**

Week of April 14: Politics and Video Games

- Weinstock, Chapter 8
- Nieborg, “Training Recruits and Conditioning Youth: Soft Power of Military Games” (online)
- Schreier, “The Horrible World of Video Game Crunch” (online)

Week of April 21: Politics and Video Games (continued)

- 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)

Week of April 28: Social Media and Online Culture

- Weinstock, Chapters 9-11

**Final Exam Due
Friday, May 2**

**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!