Course Objectives

The goal of this class is to provide students with a framework for analyzing the role the media play in their lives and how media help shape reality. While researchers have long understood that media are not all-powerful, it is generally recognized that media do play some role in shaping societal attitudes and beliefs. That role is reflected in the questions that are part of public life: Are police officers helping or hurting society? Is terrorism a threat to domestic life? Is the economy strong or weak? Are pit bulls really a threat to children? Is Green Bay Packers’ quarterback Aaron Rodgers underpaid? Are video games destroying the attention spans of children? Is the newest iPhone essential to live in modern society? These and many other questions fill our daily lives.

This class will examine the media’s role in shaping answers to those types of questions by looking at two related concepts: the social construction of reality and media framing. The social construction of reality suggests that our reality is something that is shaped through our joint experiences and beliefs. Rather than reality being something that exists independent of citizens, the social construction of reality sees reality as something citizens create. Media framing is one of many factors that contributes to that construction. The way that media present or cover an issue helps shapes perceptions.

Traditionally, much of media research focused on how journalism framed issues and in turn constructed reality. With the decline of large journalistic organizations, however, researchers have looked at how different media play a role in framing reality. Everything from entertainment media to advertising has joined journalism in the study of media framing. As a result, this class will examine a range of media in the attempt to better understand how media frames influence the construction of reality.

With those general parameters in mind, this course has several objectives: (1) introduce students to the theoretical construct of the social construction of reality, (2)
help students understand how media framing influences the social construction of reality, (3) produce and present original student media-framing research on a topic of the student’s choice, (4) and to begin considering how we, as members of "the public" and creators of content, rethink the role media ought to play in a democratic society.

Texts and Readings

There is no required text for this class. There are a number of required readings and all are available on the course D2L site. They are:


1 The average student should expect to devote about 145 hours during the semester to this class. Please note that some students might need to devote more than that average to meet the learning outcomes. This total includes about 30 hours attending class and taking the exam, 30 hours reading and preparing for class discussions, and about 85 hours completing writing assignments and the final presentation.


**Examinations**

There will be one exam. The exam will be a combination of short-answer and essay questions. (For the exam date, see the attached schedule.) *No make-up exams will be allowed unless approved and scheduled prior to the announced exam dates.*

**Writing Assignments**

**Undergraduates**

Students will be required to produce a research paper (about 15 double-spaced pages) during the semester and then share their findings with the class. More information will be distributed at a later date, but the research paper must be a paper that examines how some part of the media frames an issue in an attempt to construct reality. We will approach the research paper as a process, producing pieces of the paper throughout the semester. The various writing projects that will be due during the semester are: a description of the project (introduction), a review of relevant literature and research, a description of the methodology you will use, and a final paper containing your findings. (See the attached schedule for due dates.) Following this process will allow me the opportunity to provide you with feedback at every stage of the project, which I hope will result in a much stronger final product. As you can see from the attached schedule, I have also scheduled time during the semester to meet with you individually to work on your research project.

Please note that I consider deadlines to be just that--deadlines! It is imperative that papers be turned in by the announced deadline, unless I have approved a delay. *No late assignments will be accepted unless approved prior to the due date.*

**Graduate Students**

Graduate students taking this course for graduate credit are also required to complete a research paper. The graduate-student paper will differ from the undergraduate paper in length and level of analysis. Graduate students will be expected to produce a paper that is about 25 double-spaced pages. Graduate students should meet with the instructor early in the semester to identify a research topic and readings.
Class Discussions

One of the primary objectives of this class is to provide you with a framework for critiquing the media. Rarely, however, is an adequate critique achieved in isolation. The exchange of ideas and views is essential if we are to understand the role the media play in the construction of reality. Generally, we will try to concentrate on one topic a week. (See attached schedule.) It may be necessary to adjust the schedule as the semester progresses. It is assumed that students will have read the week’s assigned readings prior to class meetings. Students will be responsible for information contained in the readings and class lectures.

One of the goals of this class is to move the discussion of media theory from the abstract to the practical. For us to achieve that goal, class discussion is essential. That means I expect more from you than questions, although questions are welcome at anytime. I want your opinions, your ideas, and your comments. I expect you to bring possible discussion topics to class. As you interact with media, look for examples that link your experiences with what we are discussing in class.

To better prepare you for class discussion and to aid your understanding of the readings, I will ask all students to post at least one discussion question about each reading. These discussion questions will be due in D2L by 9:30 a.m. each Tuesday during weeks when there are assigned readings. Each post will be worth 5 points. These posts will be graded on your ability to develop questions that emerge from your reading of the article. You must demonstrate that you have done more than simply read the title or the beginning of an article. For example, the following is not an acceptable question: “What does the author mean by framing?” The following would be an acceptable question: “The author suggests that media framing has a powerful influence on the attitudes citizens have about politics. Wouldn’t the attitudes citizens already hold help shape how they interpret media messages?” To post a question, go to the “Quizzes” section of D2L and find the quiz linked to the appropriate reading.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken on a daily basis. If you are not in class at the beginning of class when attendance is taken, it is the responsibility of the student to make sure that his or her attendance has been recorded.

Missing too many classes will have consequences. Points will be deducted based on the following:

- 0-4 classes missed = 0 points
- 5-8 classes missed = -20 points
- 9-12 classes missed = -40 points
- 13-16 classes missed = -60 points
- 17 or more classes missed = -80 points

As you can see, you are allowed to miss up to four classes with no consequences. Please use these wisely. Appropriate documentation will be required to excuse any
absences after four missed classes. Please talk with me about what constitutes appropriate documentation.

**Special Accommodations**

Students who need special accommodations are encouraged to talk with me as soon as possible. They should also contact the Student Accessibility Center. More information is available at this link: [http://www4.uwm.edu/sac/](http://www4.uwm.edu/sac/).

Students will be permitted to make up assignments missed because of religious observances when (a) there is a scheduling conflict between the student's sincerely held religious beliefs and taking the examination or meeting the academic requirements; and (b) the student has notified the instructor, within the first three weeks of the beginning of classes of the specific days or dates on which he or she will request relief from an examination or academic requirement.

**Academic Misconduct**

It is essential that all work submitted for this class is your own and/or contains proper attribution. UWM’s academic misconduct policy is as follows: “The university has a responsibility to promote academic honesty and integrity and to develop procedures to deal effectively with instances of academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others’ academic endeavors.”

I will refer cases of academic misconduct to the College of Letters & Science with a recommendation for disciplinary action. A more detailed description of Student Academic Disciplinary Procedures can be found in Regents Policy, UWS Chapter 14 and UWM Faculty Document #1686. *Please do not let this happen.* If you have questions about this policy, please contact me.

**Incompletes**

A notation of "incomplete" may be given in lieu of a final grade to a student who has carried a subject successfully until the end of a semester but who, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond the student's control, has been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of term work. An incomplete will be granted only after the student and instructor have agreed upon a date by which the missing work will be completed.
Points

Points will be awarded based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Total points</th>
<th>Percent of final grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>100 points</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project description</td>
<td>20 points</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>100 points</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>50 points</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>200 points</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>20 points</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading discussion posts</td>
<td>80 points</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(16 posts/5 points each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>570 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Letter grades will be awarded based on final point totals. Grades will generally be awarded based on the following:

A = 100-95 percent
A- = 94-90 percent
B+ = 89-87 percent
B  = 86-83 percent
B- = 82-80 percent
C+ = 79-77 percent
C  = 76-73 percent
C- = 72-70 percent
D+ = 69-67 percent
D  = 66-63 percent
D- = 62-60 percent
F = 59 percent and below
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Subject and assignments</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-21</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>No assigned readings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-28</td>
<td>The social construction of reality and media theory</td>
<td>Berger &amp; Luckmann; Schudson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Understanding Media Framing</td>
<td>Gamson, et al.; Entman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-11</td>
<td>Framing as a methodology</td>
<td>Hertog and McLeod; Hallahan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>(Project descriptions due in class on Thursday, Feb. 13.)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-18</td>
<td>News and politics</td>
<td>Bennett, “New Stories”; Tuchman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-25</td>
<td>Media framing of fear and victimhood</td>
<td>Altheide; Iyengar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>(No class on Thursday, Feb. 27; I will meet with students individually to discuss the literature reviews.)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-3</td>
<td>Images and news frames</td>
<td>Griffin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>Advertising and framing</td>
<td>Goffman; Tucker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>(Literature reviews due in class on Thursday, Mar. 12.)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-17</td>
<td>Spring break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Subject and assignments</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-24</td>
<td>Public Relations and Framing</td>
<td>Bennett, “How Politicians Make the News”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-31</td>
<td>No class; work with students outside of class to refine research design and papers.</td>
<td>No assigned readings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>Entertainment and Games</td>
<td>Martins, et al., Rothmann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Methods papers due in class on Thursday, April 9.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-14</td>
<td>Review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exam on Thursday, April 16.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-21</td>
<td>No class; use time to finish research for final papers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-28</td>
<td>Research presentations</td>
<td>No assigned readings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-5</td>
<td>Research presentations</td>
<td>No assigned readings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Final papers due by noon, Monday, May 11**
**Media Work Reference List**

The following are some works that might be helpful in your projects and final papers. Feel free to make use of them.


Manoff, Robert Karl, and Michael Schudson, eds. *Reading the News*. New York:
Pantheon, 1986.


