This course focuses on the multiple roles media, opinion leaders and the public play in democratic politics. During this semester, we will pay particular attention to the coverage of scandal in American democracy. What becomes a scandal and why? We will consider political and personal scandals to analyze the nature of politics and power through communication. This is also a course on understanding data and research. Students will work in teams to collect, analyze and report on data about political scandals as the major written assignment for the class.

News and other forms of political communication are products of a struggle for control over information among participants in the democratic process and are central to understanding politics. During the first part of the class, we will examine the news: how it is created and possible biases. We will analyze how journalists, politicians, other opinion leaders and the public work to construct meaning about political issues, people and events. What are the effects of media messages and how might people learn from these different sources? During the second part of the course, we will discuss the coverage of scandals and learn content analysis research methods to advance your research projects. The final section of the course moves beyond scandal to examine how political leaders communicate with the public with or without news coverage. We will consider elections and political advertising and the emotional power of non-verbal communications. The course concludes with student presentations of the team research projects.

**Goals of the Course:**

- To think critically about the role that media and political communication play in democratic societies.
- To conduct original empirical research on media coverage of political scandals.
- To work collaboratively, as well as independently.
- To present your data and ideas convincingly both orally and in writing.
- To become familiar with data collection, analysis and presentation.

**Assignments and Grading:**

Class attendance and informed participation are important for a lively class. Each student is expected to keep up with the assignments, to follow media coverage of current events, and to participate regularly in discussions. Assignments are as follows:
A. Participation: Your participation will guide our class discussion and is made up of three components. (30% total)

- Leading Class (each student will sign up for leading 2 weeks (20%)
- Participating in Class Discussions each week (10%)
- Peer Assessments

B. Research Project: This is the major written assignment for the course. It is a team project in which 2-4 students will work collaboratively to study the coverage of political scandals in different media. Helpful tips on successful teamwork are available at: http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=1486574. This is a term research paper, so you will need to start thinking about your research topic now. To guide your writing, the research project is divided into four assignments: 1) research topic, 2) literature review, 3) hypotheses and methods section, and 4) final research paper and presentation.

1) Research Topic, Annotated Bibliography and Plan: Each team submits a one page description of the scandal topic and sources you propose to analyze (e.g. Benghazi, Snowden and NSA, Governor Christie’s “Bridgegate”, etc.). Why is this a scandal worth analyzing? Over what time period will you conduct the analysis? Include three appendices. Appendix One: each student submits an annotated bibliography of 5 scholarly sources relevant to your paper. Provide full Chicago format citation for each item along with a 2-3 sentence description of the main arguments of the scholarly source. Appendix Two: include one article on your scandal from each media source. Appendix Three: include a schedule describing who will be responsible for completing each research task by what date. All coding and other tasks should be shared so each student contributes equally. Due: February 9 (2 p.m.) (10%);

2) Individual Literature Review: Each student will submit a 2-3 page review of relevant literature on your team’s scandal. This should include scholarly readings that discuss coverage of scandal in general, as well as readings that provide background on your selected scandal, examine different political actors’ and journalists’ efforts to control its spread, and analyze media coverage. Explain how you will build on what is already known with your analysis of the media coverage of the scandal. Team members should coordinate so you are reviewing different resources. (Aim for a total of approximately 20 sources altogether, including core readings on media coverage of scandal). Submit your review to me and to each team member so that when combined, your team will have a well-developed bibliography. Teams will meet in class to revise and edit your final literature review, start developing your research hypotheses and plan the appropriate content analysis methods. Due: February 23 (2 p.m.) (10%);

3) Team Literature Review with Hypotheses and Methods Section: Each team will submit a compiled and edited version of the literature review along with a statement of the team’s hypotheses and a detailed description of the methods. In an appendix, include a content analysis code sheet with instructions explaining how the coding will be conducted. Once approved, the code sheet will be used to analyze the media content on the scandal. Due: March 9 (2 p.m.) (10%);

3a) Completed coding of scandal coverage is due on March 30 (2:00 p.m.).
4) **Oral Reports and Final Research Paper:** a 15-20 page final research paper and 15 minute oral presentation. Each team will present the findings of their studies in an oral presentation to the class on April 28. The final paper will report the findings of your study. Final papers may be written individually or as a group by dividing and sharing tasks. Due: **April 27** (2:00 p.m.) (40%).

The final research paper should include the following sections which may be drawn from previous assignments:

- **Introduction:** a description of the project and its significance,
- Literature Review: a review of the existing literature and discussion of what your research will contribute to this literature,
- **Hypotheses:** (based on what you might expect to find given what past research has found),
- Research Methods: a detailed explanation of the research methods and protocol you used to conduct the research. (Include an explanation of the trade-offs you had to make in the design of your study. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the research design?) Provide a copy of the Qualtrics code sheet, instructions for coding and your inter-coder reliability results in an appendix.
- Analysis: analysis of the data, reporting of findings (What did you find in your data? Are the hypotheses supported or not?)
- Discussion: what your findings mean and how they compare/contribute to past literature. What could have been done better or still needs further research?
- **Conclusion:** what your research concludes about the role of journalists, politicians and the public in the construction of meaning about the scandal. How does this affect the practice of democracy?

This is a research paper, so assigned readings and additional scholarly books and articles need to be used to develop the arguments. These materials, as well as all electronic resources, must be cited in the text where appropriate and listed in the bibliography using University of Chicago or APA format. I encourage students to consult with me at any stage of the process.

All written assignments must be double-spaced with regular fonts and margins, proofread, spell-checked, and paginated. **All written assignments are due electronically AND in hard copy at the beginning of class on the assigned dates.** Any unexcused late assignments (if they are accepted) will be graded down one full grade per day. Missing assignments will be counted as zero points.

**Grades will be based on the following percentages:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation (every class period)</th>
<th>30%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading 2 classes (20%), Participation and peer assessment (10%)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Topic, Annotated Bibliography and Plan (1 page, due February 9)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Literature Review (2-3 pages, due February 23)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Lit. Review, Hypotheses and Methods (5-7 pages, due March 9)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Presentation (10%) and Paper (15-20 pages, due April 27; 30%)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Academic Integrity:

All assignments are expected to reflect your careful research and original thinking and writing. Citations must be provided for ideas, content, or other materials that originate with another author or authors. University guidelines on academic integrity are available at http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/tio/pdf and a guide for undergraduate students is available at http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/tig/pdf. If you have any questions, please see me or the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards.

Disability Services:

Please note: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open 8:30am – 5:00pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Readings and Schedule of Classes:

The following books have been ordered through the bookstore or can be purchased online. Additional readings are available through the USC libraries or blackboard.


January 12  Introduction
No Required reading.

January 19  Martin Luther King Holiday. No class meeting.

January 26  Constructing the News  (Guest: Dr. Robert Labaree, VKC Library)

What are the appropriate roles of public opinion, government officials and mass media in the democracy? During this section, we will consider the process of newsgathering and the constraints on constructing political messages in an increasingly fragmented media environment. Why are some stories covered and others ignored? What are the criteria for newsworthiness and how have they changed with social media? Who has control over the news that we see? What makes some stories scandalous and why is this important for the practice of democracy?

Required Reading:

Lippmann, Walter. Public Opinion, Chapter 1-Section 7; Ch. 2-Section 3; Ch. 5 section 6; Ch. 6.


Guidelines for Writing Research Paper: http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide
Finding Sources: http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=616086
Forming Research Question: http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=618412
Literature Review: http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/literaturereview

February 2 Bias in the News: Framing an Objective Story?
Arguments have been raised from the right and the left that the news media are biased and nothing but “nattering nabobs of negativism.” What constitutes bias? What are the possible sources, manifestations, and ramifications of bias in news coverage? Should objectivity be a goal for news? How are scandals framed? We will examine how news stories are framed in the struggle to control the way a story is “spun.”

Required Reading:
Lippmann, Walter. (1922). Public Opinion, Ch. 23 (Section 5 only) and Ch. 24.

Suggested reading:

February 9 Media Effects and the Construction of Scandal
During this session, we will introduce several theories of media effects: bullet theory, minimal effects, agenda-setting, priming, and social constructionism. Scandals are an excellent example of the contest among politicians, journalists and the public. How are stories transformed
from potential scandals to full-blown scandals?

Required Reading:

DUE: RESEARCH TOPIC, ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND PLAN (2:00 pm)

February 16  Presidents’ Day. No class meeting.

February 23  Political Power Scandals
Seeking and protecting power are central to politics and may become precursors to scandals. Watergate has often been seen as the quintessential political power scandal. What role did the press and competing governmental elites play in the events leading up to the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon? Who was responsible for the story becoming a “scandal”? National security issues are increasingly at the root of political scandals especially as the lines between politics and the military blur. Iran-Contra, Benghazi, Abu Ghraib, NSA/Snowden are some American examples. This week, we will define scandal and consider what makes a story scandal material or not.

Required reading:
Thompson, John B. (2000). *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*. Ch. 1 pp. 11-25, Ch. 4 pp. 94-116, Ch. 5 pp. 119-124 and Ch.7 pp. 196-218 and 228-232.

Suggested reading:

DUE: INDIVIDUAL LITERATURE REVIEWS (2:00 p.m.)

March 2  Research Session I: Integrating Literature, Hypotheses and Methods
During this session, research teams will revise and edit their literature review and develop specific research hypotheses. We will also examine the basic principles of content analysis. Bring laptops and relevant materials to class.
Required reading:
Guidelines for Writing Research Paper: http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide
Methodology Section: http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=615865

DUE: OBTAIN QUALTRICS ACCOUNT http://dornsife.usc.edu/qualtrics-survey-tool/

March 9 Research Session II: Quantitative Content Analysis & Qualtrics
During this class, we will work collaboratively to learn content analysis coding, inter-coder reliability, Qualtrics and to create your content analysis code sheets. Bring research materials and laptops, so that by the end of class, each team should complete a draft of their content analysis code sheets.

Required reading:

Suggested reading:
Krippendorf, Klaus. (1989). “Content Analysis” in InternationalEncyclopedia of Communication edited by Erik Barnouw, George Gerbner, Wilbur Schramm, Tobia Worth and Larry Gross. New York: Oxford University Press, pages 402-407. Found online at: http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1232&context=asc_papers&sei-redir=1&referer=http%3A%2F%2Fscholar.google.com%2Fscholar_url%3Fhl%3Den%26q%3Dhttp%3A%2F%2Fcontentanalysis.sagepub.com%2Farticle%3D1232%26context%3Dasc_papers%26sa%3Dscisig%3DAAGBfm23DWQYw90MVEWhrc1TYXNPxYw%26oi%3Dscholarr#search%3Dhttp%3A%2F%2Frepository.upenn.edu%2Farticle%3D1232%26context%3Dasc_papers%22

DUE: TEAM LITERATURE REVIEW, HYPOTHESES AND METHODS SECTION (2:00 p.m.) (During class, each team will finalize their Content Analysis Code Sheet for the research project).
March 16  Spring Break -- No class meeting.

March 23  Financial and Sex Scandals in Politics (Guest: Professor Robert Shrum)

Scandals associated with personal behavior which transgresses certain values or norms are also prone to appear in the press. The personal scandals of political leaders may be sexual in nature, but can also include other stigmatized behaviors, such as mental health issues, bigotry or the misuse of funds. Why do some stories become “scandals” and others not?

Required reading:
Thompson, John B. (2000). *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*. Ch.5 pp. 129-137 (Profumo case) pp.143-158 (American cases), Ch. 6 pp. 159-162 and 176-195.

March 30  Elections and Political Advertising

Campaigns and elections are central to democracies. During this class, we will discuss how candidates and their campaigns communicate to potential voters through televised political advertising. What are the changing techniques of the ads, and their possible impact on voters and non-voters? How do negative ads work? How do the politically sophisticated or knowledgeable members of the public interpret ads compared to those who are less knowledgeable or committed? How do candidates use political ads to manage scandal?

Required reading:

Suggested reading:

DUE: ALL CONTENT CODING TO BE COMPLETED IN QUALTRICS (2:00 p.m.)

April 6  Research Session III: Preparing Data for Analysis (Guest: Professor Katharin Peter, VKC Library)
During this session, we will learn how to convert the content analysis data from Qualtrics to Excel and SPSS. In addition, we will clean and label variables and initiate analysis.

No required reading.

**April 13  Research Session IV: Analyzing and Presenting Data (Guest: Professor Katharin Peter, VKC Library)**

During this class, we will review the descriptive and analytical statistics you will need for your research papers and how to present the data effectively.

No required reading.

**April 20  Nonverbal Messages in Political Communication**

Political symbols, faces, sounds and other nonverbal messages are central to the ways in which we understand the political world. In scandals, visual images of politicians are often at the center of the coverage. How do these affect the public’s interpretations, preferences and motivations?

Required reading:

Suggested reading:

**April 27  Oral Presentations of Student Research**

**DUE: FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS.**