

POLITICAL SCIENCE 290 *THE POLITICS OF AMERICAN POP CULTURE*

Professor David O'Connell
oconneld@dickinson.edu
717-254-8092
Denny Hall 13
Office Hours: M 4-5; F 2-4; By Appt.

Dickinson College
Spring 2017
TR 9:00 – 10:15
Denny Hall 311

Course Overview

The goal of this class is to examine how pop culture impacts American politics by using the tools and knowledge of modern political science. Over the course of the semester, we will explore topics like: the impact that hip hop music has on political behavior; the consequences that come from watching comedy programs like *The Daily Show*; the role that physical attractiveness plays in voting; the connection between political representation and sports mascots; and the impact that pop culture has had on the criminal justice system.

A key mechanism for studying these topics will be in-depth case studies, including discussions of: the political career of Arnold Schwarzenegger; the OJ Simpson trial; the music of Tupac Shakur; and the lack of activism by Michael Jordan, among others.

The course will have three units. First, we will consider the basics of pop culture's role in American politics, i.e. First Amendment law, the role of social networks, and the nature of celebrity. Next, we will turn to a study of the politics of different types of entertainment content, including music, movies and TV. Finally, we will study the politics of high profile pop culture events like sports, political scandals, and major trials.

Assignments

Celebrity Biography (15%) – Students will write a short paper reviewing the political involvement of a celebrity of their choosing. Instructions will be distributed on January 26. The paper will be due on **February 9**.

Censorship Assignment (15%) – Students will be asked to research the debate about government regulation of violent video games, and to conduct a series of live interviews in order to understand the dynamics behind the controversy. Instructions will be distributed on February 16. The assignment will be due on **March 9**.

Music Content Analysis (15%) – Students will address a research question by performing a content analysis of the music of an artist or artists of their choosing. Instructions will be distributed on March 23. The analysis will be due on **April 11**.

Scandal Case Study (15%) – Students will be expected to identify the factors that explain the recent rise in the number of political scandals. Then, the assignment will ask for a case study of a scandal of your choosing where you illustrate how each of these factors helps us to understand the emergence of that particular scandal. Instructions will be distributed on April 13. The case study is due on **May 2**.

Presentation (5%) – Each student will be asked to deliver a ten minute PowerPoint presentation on one of their four written assignments. Students will be randomly assigned to present on either February 9, March 9, April 11, or May 2. A grading rubric for the presentation will be distributed in advance.

Final Exam (20%) – A final exam will be administered during the College’s exam days. The exam is scheduled for **May 8 at 2:00 PM**. The exam will be cumulative, but a review sheet will be provided. A make-up will only be offered in the event of a family or medical emergency.

Participation and Attendance (15%) – This part of your grade will be calculated as follows: First, your participation will be judged as to whether it is of excellent, above average, average, below average, or low quality. Note, *quality* does not necessarily mean *quantity*. Excellent participation is worth 15 points, above average participation is worth 14 points, average participation is worth 13 points, below average participation is worth 12 points, and low quality participation is worth 11 points.

Attendance will also be taken at the start of each class by means of a sign-in sheet. It is your responsibility to sign-in. This is the official record of your attendance. Absences will be excused only in the event of my prior approval or a family or medical emergency. Two (2) unexcused absences will be forgiven over the course of the semester. After that, each additional absence will result in a 1 point deduction.

For example, consider a student whose participation is above average but who has four unexcused absences. This student will receive 12 points for participation and attendance (14 for participation and a 2 point deduction for the four absences).

Learning Goals

After completing this course, students should:

- Have a greater awareness of the way in which entertainment products impact political behavior and opinions.
- Know more about the role that actors, musicians, athletes and other celebrities have played in American political history.
- Be more familiar with key areas of constitutional law and public policy.
- Have gained experience using different research tools and strategies like interviewing and content analysis.

Accommodations for Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded an equal opportunity to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would impact your educational experience in this class, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to schedule a meeting with Director Marni Jones. She will confidentially discuss your needs, review your documentation, and determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn

more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ODS, email DisabilityServices@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734, or go to ODS in 106 Dana Hall.

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can meet to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your "Blue Form" Implementation Plan. If you will need test proctoring from ODS, remember that you will need to provide them with at least one week's notice.

Take a Dickinsonian to Lunch and Food for Thought Programs

In an effort to encourage interaction between students and college faculty, the Office of Leadership & Campus Engagement and the Student Senate have made vouchers available for use at various local restaurants. Vouchers can be picked up in the Student Life Office on the lower level of the HUB, weekdays from 8:30am - 4:30pm and are valued at \$8 per person. Participating restaurants include: Back Door Cafe, Dickinson College Cafeteria, Dickinson College Union Station, Issei Noodle, Market Cross Pub, Miseno's II, Mt. Fuji, North Hanover Grill, Redd's Smokehouse, and the White Elephant.

Additionally, the Food for Thought program provides faculty with tickets to share breakfast, lunch or dinner with students in the Dining Hall.

I make an effort to get to know each student who takes a class with me. I encourage you to take advantage of one of these initiatives, or at the very least to make use of my office hours at some point this semester.

Course Outline

No book purchases are required. All readings will be found in PDF format on the class' Moodle website.

Students are expected to complete all readings prior to the class for which they are assigned.

Introduction

January 24

Part 1: The Basics of Pop Culture and American Politics

And I'm Bigger Than the City Lights Down in Times Square: Celebrity Politics

January 26

Instructions for Celebrity Biography Assignment Are Distributed

- Hatfield, Elizabeth. 2013. "The Checkout Line Perspective: Presidential Politics as Celebrity Popular Culture in *People*." In *Women and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture and Presidential Politics*, eds. Justin S. Vaughn and Lilly J. Goren. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky

I'm Hot Cause I'm Fly, You Ain't Cause You Not: The Politics of Fashion and Appearance

January 31

- Rosenberg, Shawn W., Lisa Bohan, Patrick McCafferty, and Kevin Harris. 1986. "The Image and the Vote: The Effect of Candidate Presentation on Voter Preference." *American Journal of Political Science* 30 (Feb.): 108-127

- Robinson, Eugene. 2011. "Chris Christie's Big Problem." *Washington Post*, September 29
- Chait, Jonathan. 2014. "Confessions of a 'Partyist.'" *New York Magazine*, October 30

#Selfie: The New Politics of Social Media

- February 2
- Lawless, Jennifer L. 2012. "Twitter and Facebook: New Ways for Members of Congress to Send the Same Old Messages?" In *iPolitics: Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era*, eds. Richard L. Fox and Jennifer M. Ramos. New York: Cambridge University Press (206-232)
 - Thorson, Kjerstin, Emily K. Vraga and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik. 2014. "Don't Push Your Opinions on Me: Young Citizens and Political Etiquette on Facebook." In *Presidential Campaigning and Social Media*, eds. John Allen Hendricks and Dan Schill. New York: Oxford University Press (74-93)

- February 7
- Davis, Richard. 2009. *Typing Politics: The Role of Blogs in American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press (56-81)

Presentations

February 9 **Celebrity Biographies Are Due**

So The FCC Won't Let Me Be: Government Regulation and Censorship of Entertainment

- February 14
- Silverman, David S. *You Can't Air That: Four Cases of Controversy and Censorship in American Television Programming*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press (132-145)
 - Cogan, Marin. 2014. "In the Beginning, There Was a Nipple." *ESPN the Magazine*, February 3

February 16 **Instructions for Censorship Assignment are Distributed**

- Citron, Danielle Keats. 2014. *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (35-55; 190-225)

Part II: The Politics of What We Watch, Read, and Listen To

Total Recall: Movies and American Politics

- February 21
- Adams, William C... 1985. "The Power of *The Right Stuff*." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49 (Autumn): 330-339
 - Butler, Lisa D., Cheryl Koopman, and Philip Zimbardo. 1995. "The Psychological Impact of Viewing the Film 'JFK': Emotions, Beliefs, and Political Behavioral Intentions." *Political Psychology* 16 (June): 237-257
- February 23
- Ross, Steven J. 2011. *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press (363-407)

Live from New York, It's Saturday Night!: Television and Political Comedy

February 28

- Morris, Jonathan S. and Jody C. Baumgartner. 2008. "The Daily Show and Attitudes Toward the News Media." In *Laughing Matters: Humor and American Politics in the Media Age*, eds. Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris. New York: Routledge (315-331)
- Hardy, Bruce W., Jeffrey A. Gottfried, Kenneth M. Winneg, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 2014. "Stephen Colbert's Civics Lesson: How Colbert Super PAC Taught Viewers About Campaign Finance." *Mass Communication and Society* 17 (May): 329-353
- Hart, Roderick P. and E. Johanna Hartelius. 2007. "The Political Sins of Jon Stewart." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (August):263-272

March 2

- Baumgartner, Jody C., Jonathan S. Morris and Natasha L. Walth. 2012. "The Fey Effect: Young Adults, Political Humor, and Perceptions of Sarah Palin in the 2008 Presidential Election Campaign." *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring): 95-104

March 7

- Halloran, Fiona Deans. 2013. *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press (119-143)

Presentations

March 9

Censorship Assignment is Due

March 14, 16

Spring Break Forever!

Fight the Power: The Political Impact of Music

March 21

- Bonnette, Lakeyta M. 2015. *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press (103-139)
- McWhorter, John H. 2003. "How Hip-Hop Holds Blacks Back." *City Journal*, Summer
- Nielson, Erik and Killer Mike. 2014. "Rap's Poetic (In)justice." *USA Today*, December 1

March 23

Instructions for Music Content Analysis are Distributed

- Rogers, Jimmie N. and Stephen A. Smith. 1999. "Popular Populism: Political Messages in Country Music Lyrics." In *Mass Politics: The Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Daniel M. Shea. New York: St. Martin's (111-121)
- Sharp, Brett S. 2008. "Influencing American Foreign Policy Through Popular Music: All the World's a Stage." In *Homer Simpson Goes to Washington: American Politics Through Popular Culture*, ed. Joseph L. Foy. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky (199-216)

I'm As Mad as Hell and I'm Not Going to Take This Anymore!: Cable, Talk Radio and Incivility

- March 28
- Berry, Jeffrey M. and Sarah Sobieraj. 2014. *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility*. New York: Oxford University Press (126 – 155)
- March 30
- Maisel, L. Sandy. 2012. "The Negative Consequences of Uncivil Political Discourse." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45 (July): 405-411

Part III: Pop Culture Events and Their Political Implications

If It Doesn't Fit, You Must Acquit: Pop Culture's Impact on the Criminal Justice System

- April 4
- Fox, Richard L., Robert W. Van Sickle and Thomas L. Steiger. 2007. *Tabloid Justice: Criminal Justice in an Age of Media Frenzy*. 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner (1-7, 135-164)
- April 6
- In-Class Documentary: "Judging Jewell"**
- Raftery, Brian. 2016. "Making a Murderer Gives the Internet Its Hottest Case Yet." *Wired*, January 8
 - Kang, Jay Caspian. 2013. "Should Reddit Be Blamed for the Spreading of a Smear?" *New York Times Magazine*, July 25

Presentations

April 11 **Music Content Analysis Assignment is Due**

I Did Not Have Sex With That Woman: Scandal in American Politics

- April 13
- Instructions for Scandal Case Study Are Distributed**
- Lewinsky, Monica. 2014. "Shame and Survival." *Vanity Fair*, June
- April 18
- Sabato, Larry J., Mark Stencel, and S. Robert Lichter. 2000. *Peepshow: Media and Politics in an Age of Scandal*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield (xi-31)

Republicans Buy Shoes, Too: Sports and Politics

- April 20
- Rhoden, William C. 2006. *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete*. New York: Three Rivers Press (196-217)
- April 25
- Engelhart, Neil A. 1999. "Logo or Libel? Chief Wahoo, Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Sports Mascots." In *Mass Politics: The Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Daniel M. Shea. New York: St. Martin's (63-74)
 - Baade, Robert A. and Victor A. Matheson. 2012. "Financing Professional Sports Facilities." In *Financing Economic Development in the 21st Century*, eds. Sammis B. White and Zenia Kotval. New York: M.E. Sharpe
- April 27
- Branch, Taylor. 2011. "The Shame of College Sports." *The Atlantic*, October

Presentations

May 2 **Scandal Assignment is Due**

May 4 **Last Class**

May 8 **Final Exam at 2:00 PM**