

## POLITICAL SCIENCE 290    *THE POLITICS OF AMERICAN POP CULTURE*

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Office Hours: W 10:30 – 11:30; F 2-4; By Appt.

Dickinson College  
Spring 2019  
MR 3:00 – 4:15  
Denny Hall 304

### 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.

This course meets the political science department's major research methods requirement. As such, students will be exposed to a number of methodologies used to study the impact of pop culture on American politics, and students will gain experience designing original research projects that apply some of these methodologies first hand.

### Assignments

**Celebrity Case Study (15%)** – Students will write a short paper reviewing the political involvement of a celebrity of their choosing. Instructions will be distributed on January 24. The paper will be due on **February 7**.

**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 14. The assignment will be due on **March 7**.

**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 21. The analysis will be due on **April 8**.

**Group Experiment (15%)** – Students will be assigned to groups of about four students for this assignment. This assignment will require each group to develop a simple experiment whereby some participants will be exposed to a type of entertainment content (a song, a cartoon, a YouTube clip, etc.) and then the group will assess whether exposure to this content might have an impact on an individual's political opinions or behavior. More detailed instructions will be distributed on April 11. The experiment results are due on **April 29**.

**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 7, March 7, April 8, or April 29. 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 10 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.

## Clarke Forum Event

Students are required to attend this year's The Bruce R. Andrews Lecture.

### *Why People Believe Conspiracy Theories*

Joanne M. Miller, Associate Professor of Political Science and Associate Professor of Psychology and Brain Sciences at the University of Delaware

Monday, February 4, 2019

Anita Tuvin Schlechter Auditorium, 7 p.m.

Attendance at this event is mandatory, and an absence will be counted as if a student had missed a normal class meeting. We will discuss conspiracy theories in class later that month.

## Accommodating Students With Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access 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 hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to [www.dickinson.edu/access](http://www.dickinson.edu/access), email [access@dickinson.edu](mailto:access@dickinson.edu), call (717) 245-1734, or go to ADS in the Lower Level of Old West, Room 5.

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

## Take a Dickinsonian to Lunch Program

In an effort to encourage small group interaction between students and college faculty/staff, students and college employees can request vouchers to take each other out to lunch at various local restaurants, the Union Station or the college cafeteria. This program is funded by the Student Senate and administered by the Office of Leadership & Campus Engagement. 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 \$10 per person.

Participating restaurants include: Grazery, Dickinson College Cafeteria, Dickinson College Union Station, Helena's Chocolate Cafe, Market Cross Pub, Miseno's II, Mt. Fuji, North Hanover Grill, Redd's Smokehouse, Spoons Cafe, Carlisle Thai, Denim Coffee, PB's Italian Kitchen, and Pizza Grille.

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 21

#### *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 24

#### **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, Appearance, and Dating

January 28

- Nicholson, Stephen P., Chelsea M. Coe, Jason Emory, and Anna V. Song. 2016. "The Politics of Beauty: The Effects of Partisan Bias on Physical Attractiveness." *Political Behavior* 38 (December): 883-898.
- Robinson, Eugene. 2011. "Chris Christie's Big Problem." *Washington Post*, September 29
- Chait, Jonathan. 2014. "Confessions of a 'Partyist.'" *New York Magazine*, October 30

### But First, Let Me Take a Selfie: The New Politics of Social Media

January 31

- 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 4

- Davis, Richard. 2009. *Typing Politics: The Role of Blogs in American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press (56-81)
- **Bruce R. Andrews Lecture at 7:00 PM**

### Presentations

February 7

#### **Celebrity Biographies Are Due**

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

February 11

- 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 14

**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 18

- 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 21

- 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 25

- Bode, Leticia and Amy B. Becker. 2018. "Go Fix It: Comedy as an Agent of Political Activation." *Social Science Quarterly* 99 (November): 1572-1584
- 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)
- Hart, Roderick P. and E. Johanna Hartelius. 2007. "The Political Sins of Jon Stewart." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (August):263-272

February 28

- 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 4

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

**Presentations**

March 7

**Censorship Assignment is Due**

March 11, 14

**Spring Break Forever!**

### **Fight the Power: The Political Impact of Music**

- March 18
- 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 21 **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 25
- 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 28
- 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 1
- Fox, Richard L., Robert W. Van Sickel and Thomas L. Steiger. 2007. *Tabloid Justice: Criminal Justice in an Age of Media Frenzy*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner (1-7, 135-164)
- April 4 **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 8 **Music Content Analysis Assignment is Due**

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

- April 11 **Instructions for Group Experiment Are Distributed**
- Lewinsky, Monica. 2014. "Shame and Survival." *Vanity Fair*, June

- April 15
- 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 18
- 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 22
- 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 25
- Branch, Taylor. 2011. "The Shame of College Sports." *The Atlantic*, October

### **Presentations**

- April 29                      **Group Experiment Assignment is Due**
- May 2                              **Last Class**
- May 10                            **Final Exam at 2:00 PM**