Political Science 365  
Government & Mass Media  
Spring, 2010

MW 2:45-4:05  
151 Chemistry

class web page: http://www.albany.edu/~jb893967/media/index.html

Prof: Joel D. Bloom  
Office Hours Thur. 9:00-12:00 & by Appointment  
Office Location: 101 UAB  
Phone: 437-4891  
E-mail: jbloom@albany.edu

Course Description:

This is an upper-division undergraduate course on the variety of roles played by mass media in American political life. In addition to covering nuts-and-bolts topics related to how the media work, we will make a special point of focusing on broader normative questions related to the role mass media are expected to play in a democratic society and whether our media live up to those expectations. Important questions include: * Do the media simply report on what is happening, or do they also decide what is important and what is not? * Is their coverage unbiased, or is it tainted by a pro-establishment, pro-power position derived from their corporate ownership or a liberal bias derived from the views of reporters? * How does media coverage affect the way the public views public policy debates, public officials, and candidates for office? * Do our mass media merely inform a docile populace, or do they engage an active citizenry? Throughout, we will look both at different views of how the media actually behave (empirical assessments) and compare and contrast that with different views of how media should behave (normative assessments) in a democratic society. We will also spend some time looking at the recent growth of web-based media such as blogs, twitter, and facebook, and examine whether they are beginning to play important roles related to media and political agendas, and whether they increase citizen engagement.

Course Requirements:

1) Attendance and Participation. The most basic requirements for this course are attendance at all class meetings and participation in discussions, debates and interactive exercises. Lectures, videos and guest lectures will include information not contained in the readings, so you will miss important material if you do not attend. Participation in in-class discussions is not a formal requirement in the course; however constructive, informed, respectful participation that contributes to conversations about the course material will help raise borderline grades and consistently disruptive participation may lower borderline grades. Overall, excellent attendance and participation can raise your course grade up to a full part of a letter grade and poor attendance and participation can lower your grade up to a full part of a grade.

2) Reading. I expect that you will come to each class meeting fully prepared, having done all the required reading. Required reading includes the main text, supplementary books that are lengthy, but are much lighter reading, plus additional on-line readings, including current news stories. Additional required readings on current topics will be added throughout the term, as indicated in the syllabus.

Since this is a class on media and politics, you will need to do additional reading of current newspaper, magazine and weblog sources to keep up, and you will be expected to watch television news and talk shows as well. In particular, you will need to read Howard Kurtz’s “Media Notes” column for the Washington Post, the ABC News Political Unit’s daily column, “The Note,” NYU Journalism Professor Jay Rosen’s twitter feed, and “Romenesko,” from Poynter Online (links below and on the class web page). Some current articles may be linked to individually on the class web or Blackboard page and marked as required, but in general, you will be responsible for doing your own media observation throughout the quarter.

All readings are required, including on-line readings, and readings from the class web page or Blackboard page (possibly including some added during the quarter). If it becomes necessary, I may drop specific readings for purposes of time, but I will not drop entire topics.
3) **Short Blackboard Postings.** (20%; 5*4 points each) Every third week you will write a short (2-3 paragraph) posting on a designated discussion board on the class Blackboard page. Postings will be due the Fridays of weeks 2, 5, 8, 11, and 14, by 4:00 PM. These discussion boards will be clearly marked by week, and will be open to any topic from the readings or current news events.

4) **Quizzes.** (20%; 4*5 points each). These quizzes will either be conducted at pre-announced times and taken on Blackboard, or at semi-random times in class throughout the term (or a combination of the two methods). They are designed primarily to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings and coming to class.

5) **Content Analysis Project.** (40%) The largest part of the course grade will be based on a project in which each student in the class carefully watches one television news or commentary show every day for a week, takes careful notes on the content of the show, and analyzes the content. I will provide you with the necessary templates, guidelines and lists of approved shows. This assignment will be due on Wednesday, March 24th in class – Week 10 of the quarter.

6) **Final Examination.** (20%) The final examination for the class will be Wednesday, May 12th, 10:30-12:30, in class. The exam will include a variety of formats, including multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank; short identifications of key terms; and essays.

**Required Readings:**

All books are available at the UAlbany Bookstore. The bookstore was able to obtain used copies of the books by Alterman, Coulter or Goldberg; you may be able to find lower prices online.

**Books**

1) *Mass Media and American Politics*, (8th Edition), by Doris A. Graber. (*Previous editions are very out of date; it is very important that you have the new 8th Edition.*)
5) *Bias* (any edition), by Bernard Goldberg.

**Regular Online Columns**

6) “Romenesko,” The Poynter Institute’s daily media column:  
7) “Media Notes,” daily column by Howard Kurtz:  
8) NYU Journalism Professor Jay Rosen’s Twitter feed:  
   [http://twitter.com/jayrosen_nyu](http://twitter.com/jayrosen_nyu) or his list of last 40 links: [http://jay.40twits.com/](http://jay.40twits.com/)
9) “County Fair,” Media Matters’ media criticism from the left:  
   [http://mediamatters.org/blog/](http://mediamatters.org/blog/)
10) Media Research Center’s media criticism from the right:  
    [http://www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org)

**Other Readings**

11) Other readings on the class Blackboard page: [https://blackboard.uoregon.edu/webapps/login](https://blackboard.uoregon.edu/webapps/login)
12) Current news articles linked to on the class web site: [http://www.albany.edu/~jb893967/media/index.html](http://www.albany.edu/~jb893967/media/index.html)

**Students with disabilities:** If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon. Please request that the Disability Resource Center send a letter verifying your disability.
## COURSE CALENDAR

### Introduction to Media and Politics

**Weeks 1-2 (1/20; 1/25-27)**

- “Media Power and Government Control”  
  - Graber, Ch. 1 (1-26)
- “The News about Democracy”  
  - Bennett, Blackboard
- “Why We Hate the Media”  
  - Fallows, Blackboard
- “The Emperor is Naked”  
  - Goldberg, Ch. 3 (47-53)

*Other online readings to be selected*  
  - Blackboard or Class Web page

### The Business, Legal and Political Environment

**Week 3 (2/2-4)**

- “Ownership, Regulation, and Guidance of Media”  
  - Graber, Ch. 2 (27-48)
- “Press Freedom and the Law”  
  - Graber, Ch. 3 (49-74)
- “Creating the Psychological Climate”  
  - Coulter, Ch. 4 (71-93)
- “You’re Only As Liberal As the Man Who Owns You”  
  - Alterman, Ch. 2 (14-27)

*More Content on Media Ownership*  
  - [http://www.whatliberalmedia.com](http://www.whatliberalmedia.com)

### Reporting

**Weeks 4-5 (2/8-10; 2/17)**

- “News Making and News Reporting Routines”  
  - Graber, Ch. 4 (75-110)
- “Reporting Extraordinary Events”  
  - Graber, Ch. 5 (111-128)
- “The Media as Policy Makers”  
  - Graber, Ch. 6 (129-158)

*No class will be held on Monday, 2/15 in observance of Presidents’ Day.*

### Media Influence

**Week 6 (2/22-24)**

- “Media Influence on Attitudes and Behavior”  
  - Graber, Ch. 7 (159-192)
- “Elections in the Internet Age”  
  - Graber, Ch. 8 (193-224)
- “Overview of Ads” (From *Air Wars*)  
  - West, Blackboard
- “Advance As if Under Threat of Attack: Fox News Channel and the Election”  
  - Coulter, Ch. 5 (95-114)
- “Clever Is as Clever Does: The Liberal Dilemma”  
  - Alterman, Ch. 8 (191-209)
- “The 2000 Election”  
  - Alterman, Ch. 10 (148-174)
- “Florida”  
  - Alterman, Ch. 11 (175-191)

*More Content on Media Influence*  
  - Class Web Page and Blackboard

### Media Bias?

**Weeks 7-10 (3/1-3/25)**

- *Slander*  
  - Coulter*
- *Bias*  
  - Goldberg*
- *What Liberal Media?*  
  - Alterman*
- “Peroxide Paradox: The Blonde Misleading the Blind”  
  - Conason, Blackboard

*Exact chapters to be covered each day will be posted on the class web page.*

*More Content on Media Bias*  
  - Class Web Page and Blackboard

### Spring Break

**3/29-4/5**
# News Coverage of American Political Institutions

**Week 11 (4/7)**

**Read 2 of the 3 Chapters Below:**

- “The Struggle for Control: News from the Presidency and Congress”  
  Graber, Ch. 9 (225-258)
- “Covering the Justice System and State and Local News”  
  Graber, Ch. 10 (259-285)
- “Foreign Affairs Coverage”  
  Graber, Ch. 11 (286-315)

**More Content on News Coverage**  
Class Web Page and Blackboard

---

# Blogs, the Internet and Civic Engagement

**Weeks 12-13 (4/12-21)**

- “Road Kill on the Information Superhighway: The Defenestration of Trent Lott and Other Cautionary Tales from the Early Blogosphere”  
  Bloom & Kerbel, Blackboard
- “Blog Swarms and Opinion Storms,” from Blog  
  Hewitt, Blackboard
- “Blog for America and Civic Involvement”  
  Kerbel & Bloom, Blackboard
- “From Media to We-Dia” (from An Army of Davids)  
  Reynolds, Blackboard
- *Crashing the Gate*, selection  
  Moulitsas, Blackboard
- *Netroots*, selection  
  Kerbel, Blackboard
- *Blogging the Political*, selection  
  Pole, Blackboard
- Blogs  
  Under “Media Links,” Class Web Page

**More Content on Blogs & New Media**  
Class Web Page and Blackboard

---

# Conclusions

**Weeks 14-15 (4/26-28; 5/3)**

- “Current Trends and Future Directions in Media Policy”  
  Graber, Ch. 12 (316-348)
- “All the News that Fits Democracy”  
  Bennett, Blackboard
- “Conclusion: An Honorable Profession”  
  Alterman (262-267)
- “News and Democracy”  
  Fallows, Blackboard

**Additional Readings on Media and U.S. Politics & Society**  
Class Web Page and Blackboard

---

# Final Examination

**Wednesday, May 12th, 10:30-12:30**