

RPOS 365: Government and Mass Media
Spring 2019: Media and Political and Governmental Power
(9770)

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T/TH 4:15-5:35pm (3 Credits)
Social Sciences 255
Office Hours: T/TH 2:45-3:45 (HU 016)

Course Description

We hear a lot about “The Media” in our contemporary political discourse, and everyone has an opinion on the media: “it is too biased,” “it is too shallow,” “it is the bedrock of free speech,” “it keeps politicians honest,” and the like. In this course, we will dig deeper than anecdotal evidence and personal experience to try to discover what media is really like and what role it plays in the political realm. We will view media through a variety of lenses to try to get a better understanding of how media works, how it exerts governmental and political power, and how governmental and political power is exerted through it. We will begin by studying it theoretically, conceptually, and historically before trying to get an understanding of the relationship between government and media and in particular democratic government and media. Along the way, we will examine inherent issues that media must contend with as well as discover how “media” (as the plural of “medium”) itself already communicates with us and so are politically relevant. At the end of the course, we should have a better understanding of the complexities of the various issues surrounding mass media, so that we can more intelligently engage with the rapidly changing nature of it.

Course Objectives

- 1) To read and understand a range of texts explaining what media is and how it both exerts political and governmental power and has political and governmental power exerted through it
- 2) To understand how the different writers of these texts uniquely conceptualized mass media and its consequences as well as to understand how these various conceptions compare to and contrast with each other
- 3) To connect these various concepts and ideas of mass media and its consequences to the contemporary political scene
- 4) To better learn how to read texts and to comprehend the nuances within and amongst these texts
- 5) To better learn how to communicate ideas and how to translate them into political practice

Course Requirements

- Arrive on time to all lectures.
- Complete all readings on time.
- Bring the assigned readings to class.
- Come to class ready to participate. This requires you to not only read the assigned readings but also to think about them in advance of the lecture. Be prepared to answer questions about the text and to ask questions of your own. It may help to

take notes while you are reading, to underline key passages of the text, or to write down questions that you still have about the text.

- Complete one midterm exam and one final exam.

Course Approach and Methodology

- This course is a hybrid of lecture and discussion. As you will see below, participation is a valuable component of this course, and we will rely heavily on it in this course. Though there will be complex parts of the readings that will require extra explication, I expect that you will be ready and able to discuss the required material for each day's class.
- I do not use PowerPoint. I do this by design. Active note taking is an important part of the learning process. Actively making decisions about what is important and how to structure the important material helps you to take charge of the material and to remember it better. I will, however, utilize the board to "write along with you."
- Reading is an essential part of this course as well. It is also a skill, like writing, that must be constantly developed. As such, throughout the course, we will discuss how to read better.
- Often, I have intentionally chosen thinkers whose readings disagree with, contradict, or modify each other. Additionally, in many cases, I have chosen readings that question commonly held assumptions that are often based on anecdotes and experience. It is important that we read each thinker with a fresh set of eyes and that we take each idea on its own terms. We will want these ideas to be the basis of our classroom discussions.
- This also means that these thinkers are often giving different answers to the same questions. While there is agreement on certain aspects of the media, at the end of the course, we will not always have a single answer as to what media is or how it functions, for example. We will want to see the multiple answers that are given, to see how they are different from each other and why those differences matter, and begin to make decisions about which answers are most convincing.
- As we do this, we should start questioning each of the thinker's ideas. However, we should also let each thinker interrogate us. Just as any idea could be wrong, our own thinking could be wrong. Before rejecting any idea, we should see if it is instead our own thinking that needs to be modified. My job is to make each idea sound as convincing as possible, but as we do this throughout the course, we will also begin to see how different thinkers question the thinking of the other thinkers.

Required Readings

The following books are required for this course and are available at the University Bookstore or online (please be sure to get the correct edition so we are, literally, all on the same page):

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (MIT Press, Reprint Edition, 1994) 978-0262631594
- Timothy E. Cook, *Governing With the News: The News Media as a Political Institution, 2nd Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2005) 978-0226115016
- Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Picador, 2001) 978-0312420093

- John Street, *Music and Politics* (Polity, 2011) 978-0745635446
- Paul Grainge (ed.), *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester University Press, 2003) 978-0719063756

Additionally, the following books are required texts for the course that are available as free ebooks through the UAlbany University Library, but you may wish to purchase hard copies:

- Andrew Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power* (Oxford University Press, 2013) 978-0199759484
- Jason Gainous and Kevin M. Wagner, *Tweeting to Power: The Social Media Revolution in American Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2013) 978-0199965090

Additional readings will be made available online. They are marked with “*” in the “Schedule of Readings and Assignments” section of this syllabus.

Attendance Policy

The purpose of the class lectures and the resulting class discussions during our twice weekly meetings is to get you to actively engage with the material in the course. Interacting with the readings, with your classmates, and with me is crucial for understanding and remembering the material. I expect that you will regularly ask good questions and answer questions posed in class, even as you highlight important elements from our readings all along the way. Good participation will always deal with our course readings and materials in deep, nuanced, and connective ways. Our goal in class is to synthesize all that we have been reading throughout the semester. Consequently, if you miss class time, you will not be able to fully make up what you missed. *As such, missing more than 1 class or repeatedly coming late to class or leaving during class will result in a reduction of your overall grade.* (See below for the excused absences policy.)

Office Hours

Along those same lines, the conversations and musings do not need to stop in the classroom. I am always happy to further the discussion in my office hours, and, in fact, I encourage it. The more you can actively engage with the material, the better you will understand it. If your class schedule makes it impossible for you to meet with me during my regularly scheduled office hours, please send me an e-mail so that we can arrange a mutually convenient time to meet.

Excused Absences:

If you must miss more than one class or if you must miss a class with a scheduled exam, you must have documentation from the dean of undergraduate studies that details the reason for your absence and excuses you from that absence. Barring extraordinary circumstances (in which case you must notify me as soon as possible), you must notify me of your absence no later than 1 class after the exam was taken, and you must submit proper documentation to me within 1 week of the exam being taken. Absent this timely, proper documentation, you will not be allowed to take a makeup exam.

In addition, if you know that you will miss class time (for an athletic event, a religious holiday, or the like), please bring these to my attention (with proper and official

documentation) within the first 3 class meetings or, if that is not possible, as soon as you become aware of them.

Grading

Midterm: 35%

Final Exam: 40%

Participation: 25%

This course is graded on a scale of A-E. Please note that you cannot pass the course if you do not take all exams.

Exams:

This class will have one midterm exam and one final exam. Both exams will be essay exams. Each exam will consist of one or two essay questions. Prior to each exam, I will distribute a sheet of paper that includes all possible exam questions. While the exam will not allow you to choose which question(s) you would like to answer, you will have every possible exam question available to you about one week before the exam is scheduled.

The final exam will be either explicitly or implicitly cumulative. In other words, the questions will either ask you to talk about earlier thinkers from the course or they will require you to have knowledge of those earlier thinkers' ideas in order to properly contextualize and answer the questions being asked.

As per the "Excused Absence" policy outlined above, make-up examinations, early examinations, or incomplete grades will be given only in the event of serious personal or family illness or other unusual circumstances as they are approved by the dean of undergraduate studies. You are required to take both exams. For the university's full incomplete grades policy, please refer to:

<https://www.albany.edu/undergraduateeducation/grading.php>.

Participation:

As I have already tried to make clear, participation is an important element of learning. To emphasize this point, participation is worth 25% of your final grade.

You cannot receive full credit for participation if you do not come to class (see the unexcused and excused absences policies above), but attendance alone is not participation. You must contribute to the class discussion on a regular basis throughout the entirety of the semester. Participation includes asking questions that further the conversation, answering instructor or classmate questions, and offering appropriate comments to advance the classroom discussion. Though participation must be ongoing, I value quality participation over quantity alone.

While participation is a classroom activity, good participation starts before class begins. In order to actively engage with the readings, you must have carefully done the readings

before class and thought about how the material relates to our previous readings and to the big picture of the course.

I reserve the right to give pop quizzes. These pop quizzes will be factored into your participation grade. Any pop quiz given will account for 5% of your participation grade (or 1.25% of your overall grade). If a pop quiz is given on a day that you have an excused absence (with proper documentation) or on your first absence (i.e., your 1 allowed unexcused absence), then you will be exempted from that pop quiz grade. This does not apply to tardiness unless you provide proper documentation excusing your tardiness.

Disruptive Behavior:

Participation includes not only actively adding to the academic discourse of the classroom, but it also includes not engaging in activity that is disruptive of that discourse. This behavior includes, but is not limited to, making loud or distracting noises, visually distracting students or the instructor, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom, persisting in speaking without being recognized, consistently making comments that distract from or destroy proper academic discourse of our course materials, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults. Behavior of this kind will result in a deduction of your participation grade.

Laptops and Electronic Devices:

All cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices must be silenced and stored out of sight for the duration of class time. Usage of laptops, iPads, or the like for any activity other than note taking is prohibited and will result in a deduction of your participation grade. Please see me after the first class if you anticipate taking notes on a laptop or similar device.

Grade Appeals:

In order to appeal a midterm exam grade, you should see me during office hours within 1 week of the class receiving back the exam and submit a 1-2 page typewritten explanation of your reasons for believing that the grade should be changed. A grade appeal may result in the grade being raised, lowered, or left unaltered. After 1 week, grade complaints will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances such as a serious illness.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Under no circumstances should you submit someone else's work as your own. This includes, but is not limited to: copying text from another student on tests or papers, copying text from internet sites (e.g. Wikipedia, Sparknotes) or other sources without quotation marks and full citations, or submitting your own work from another course.

Cheating on an exam or plagiarizing written work will result in course failure and referral of the case to a university committee. For more information, please see the undergraduate bulletin: http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html. For more information, see: <https://library.albany.edu/infolit/integrity>.

Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of the Disability Resource Center (Campus Center 130, 518-442-5490, DRC@albany.edu). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations (<http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml>).

If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course, for the above reasons or other cases including religious holidays, inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and are rarely granted retroactively.

Writing Center (Humanities 140)

The writing center provides tutorials on writing essays and improving language skills (ESL). Visit their website at: <http://www.albany.edu/writing/>.

Academic Support Services (Library Room 94)

Academic support services arrange individual and group tutorials as well as study skills workshops on time management, how to improve your concentration, essay exam skills, listening skills, and overcoming procrastination. Visit their website: <http://www.albany.edu/oaee/index.shtml>.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Reading selections not from required books will be made available online.

** This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class. **

Jan. 24 Introduction

I. Mass Media Theory

Jan. 29 Mass Media and Democracy
Tocqueville *Democracy in America*: vol. 1, part 2, ch. 3* and vol. 2, part 2, ch. 2-8*

Jan. 31 Mass Media and Totalitarianism
Adorno "Culture Industry Reconsidered"* and "The Schema of Mass Culture"*

II. Mass Media Definitions

Feb. 5 Media as Mediate: Process of Mediation and Reality?
Silverstone "Mediation"*
Bolter and Grusin "Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation"* and "Mediation and Remediation"*

Feb. 7 Media as Mediator: Arena of Power
Chadwick *Hybrid Media System*: Introduction, ch. 1, 2, pg. 49-59, and Conclusion

Feb. 12 Media as Medium: Extending Ourselves
McLuhan *Understanding Media*: Introduction, ch. 1, 7-9, and 15

Feb. 14 Media as Medium: Rebalancing Ourselves
McLuhan *Understanding Media*: ch. 2-3, and 33

III. Mass Media Varieties

Feb. 19 Mass Media Varieties: Photography, Part I
Sontag *On Photography*: ch. 1, 3-4, and pg. 153-161

Feb. 21 Mass Media Varieties: Photography, Part II
MacDonald "The Lying Eye Photography, Propaganda and Deception"*
Barthes "The Photographic Message"*
Azoulay "Philosophizing Photography/Photographing Philosophy"*
Mass Media Varieties: Music, Part I
Zuckerandl "The Meaning of Song"*
Gable "Mother and Father"* (skim)

Drake “‘Mortgaged to music’: new retro movies in 1990s Hollywood cinema” (from *Memory and Popular Film*)

- Feb. 26 Mass Media Varieties: Music, Part II
 Street *Music and Politics*: “Introduction,” ch. 3-6, and ch. 8-9
- Feb. 28 Mass Media Varieties: Entertainment News
 Hess and Northrop Introduction to *American Political Cartoons**
 Postman “The Medium is the Metaphor”*
 Baym “The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism”*
 Parkin Conclusion to *Talk Show Campaigns**
- Mar. 5 Mass Media Varieties: TV and Movies, Part I
 From *Memory and Popular Film*
 Grainge “Introduction: memory and popular film”
 Storey “The articulation of memory and desire: from Vietnam to the war in the Persian Gulf”
 Landsberg “Prosthetic memory: the ethics and politics of memory in an age of mass culture”
 Burgoyne “Memory, history and digital imagery in contemporary film”
- Mar. 7 Mass Media Varieties: TV and Movies, Part II
 Badiou “Cinema as Philosophical Experimentation”*
 Ross Introduction to *Hollywood Left and Right**
 Francia “A Culture War in TV Land? The Sitcom Viewing Habits of Bush and Kerry Voters”* (skim)
- Mar. 12 NO CLASS (USE THIS TIME TO REVIEW)**
- Mar. 14 Midterm Exam
- Mar. 19 NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)**
- Mar. 21 NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)**

IV. Mass Media History

- Mar. 26 Standard History
 Jillson “The Mass Media and the Political Agenda” pg. 102-112*
 Hargreaves “Born Free: A Brief History of News Media”*
- Mar. 28 Political History
 Cook *Governing with the News*: Part I

V. Issues in Mass Media

- Apr. 2 Partisan Bias
 Ladd "Why Is Everyone Mad at the Mainstream Media?"*
 Groeling "Media Bias by the Numbers"*
 Greenblatt and Kleba "Media Bias"*
- Apr. 4 Varieties of Bias
 Wolfsfeld Introduction to *Making Sense of Media and Politics**
 Graber and Dunaway "Ownership, Regulation, and Guidance of
 Media"*
- Apr. 9 On-the-Ground Bias
 Wright "The Documentary Photograph"*
 Darnton "Writing News and Telling Stories"*

VI. Mass Media and Government

- Apr. 11 Mass Media as Political Institution?
 Cook *Governing with the News*: "Introduction," ch. 5, pg 61-62, and pg.
 117-119
- Apr. 16 Mass Media's Governmental Power
 Graber and Dunaway "The Media as Policy Makers"*
 Iyengar "News and Public Opinion"* (skip "The Choice of Methods")
 McLuhan *Understanding Media*: ch. 10
- Apr. 18 Mass Media and Political Education
 Graber "Media Influence on Attitudes and Behaviors"*
 Stromer-Galley Introduction to *Presidential Campaigning in the
 Internet Age**
- Apr. 23 Mass Media and the President, Congress, and Courts
 Graber "The Struggle for Control: News from the Presidency and
 Congress"*
 Gainous and Wagner *Tweeting to Power*: pg. 15-19 and ch. 4-5, and 9
 Postman and Powers "Television in the Courtroom"*

VII. Mass Media and Democracy

- Apr. 25 Mass Media and Democracy Creation
 Dahlberg "Re-constructing digital democracy: An outline of four
 'positions'"*
 Gainous and Wagner *Tweeting to Power*: pg. 7-15 and ch. 6

- Apr. 30 Mass Media and Democracy Destruction?: Outrage and Polarization
 Prior "Media and Political Polarization"*
 Berry and Sobieraj "Outrage"*
- May 2 Mass Media and Democracy Destruction?: Algorithms and Institutional
 Dilemmas
 Bucher "Programming the News: When Algorithms Come to Matter"*
 Ellul "The Socio-Political Effects: 4. Propaganda and Democracy"*
 Melencha and Reagan "Thinking Constitutionally: Challenges of
 Deliberating While Turned Inside Out"*
- May 7 Mass Media and Democracy: An Alternative Synthesis
 Graber "The Media and Democracy: Beyond Myths and Stereotypes"*

Final Exam: Monday, May 13, 2019 10:30am-12:30pm