

GRANDE PRAIRIE REGIONAL COLLEGE

POLITICAL SCIENCE 3030

POLITICS AND THE MEDIA

Winter 1996
Instructor: Scott McAlpine
OH: TBA

Wednesday 6:30 - 9:20 pm
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BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an examination of the roles and behaviour of the mass media in the political process with particular emphasis on the Canadian experience. Communications theories such as those of Innis and McLuhan, political propaganda, the mass media and elections, opinion formation, and selected Canadian communications policies are among the topics studied.

The course is organized in four broad sections and entails an interdisciplinary approach to the study of media with reference to the 'political' where the 'political' is broadly understood to include societal values as well as particular policy frameworks and effects of the media. Section 1 outlines the context of media within society and develops the major theories of the role of the media in society. Section 2 examines the ways in which the mass media can generate effects on the public, or more broadly, the techniques which may be used to impact the public. Section 3 examines the nature of certain effects of the mass media focussing on elections, opinion formation, 'spin doctors' and so on. Section 4 examines the future of the media and its impact on politics and finally, examines the degree to which the media in society can be seen as or used as an instrument of change toward democracy, freedom, and/or expression of those groups lacking a means of communication in current democratic societies.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The following are the major objectives of this course:

1. The gaining of fundamental theories and generalizations about the media in society
2. The acquisition of specific factual knowledge about the media, its operations in Canada, and the ways that the media can be used to create effects.

PRE-REQUISITE:

There is **no formal pre-requisite** to this course. However, the course requires three main things from students:

1. An interest in the area
2. A willingness to critically analyze the mass media from a variety of perspectives
3. A willingness to engage in some degree of speculation and imagination.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

Preliminary Assignment:	10%	Due January 31
Midterm Test:	25 to 30%*	February 14
Term Paper/Research Project:	25 to 30%*	Due March 27
Final Examination:	35%	Exam Week

*Grades will automatically be redistributed between the Midterm and the Paper where the 30% will apply to the **highest** of the two grades and the 25% to the **lowest** of the two grades.

A NOTE ON TERM PAPERS AND DUE DATES:

Papers in this course are normally in the 12-15 page range (typed, double spaced) and represent a significant research effort. Papers **must** be in proper academic style. Suggested topics will be distributed in class. An alternative to the traditional library-based term paper is a paper based on either original research (content analysis of newspapers, etc.) or a paper based on existing data from one the various data bases available for this course. More will be said about this in class.

Papers and assignments are due at the start of class on the date indicated. Late papers may be accepted but at a penalty of 1/2 grade point per 24 hour period or portion thereof (including weekends and holidays). This late penalty may be waived in unusual circumstances.

E-mail and/or faxes will be accepted in preference to snail mail for students outside of Grande Prairie. In addition to paper/electronic transfers, students are encouraged to submit papers on disk (1.44mb/DOS format) written on **any** currently available word processor. The advantage of this is that students will get both the normal term paper as well as a computer corrected version of the paper back. The computer correction checks for spelling, grammar, and composition style using Gramatik 5.0. In the event that you are a MAC user, Information Systems at GPRC can translate your paper to DOS. On site students should do this themselves and regional students should simply submit the disk to the instructor being sure to note that it is MAC format. We currently do not support OS/2 or UNIX operating system.

TEXTS:**Required:**

David Taras, The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics, (Scarborough: Nelson, 1990).

Dan Nimmo and James E. Combs, Mediated Political Realities (2nd edition), (White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 1990).

Dean E. Alger, The Media and Politics (2nd ed.) (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1996).

Suggested:

D. Hacker, A Canadian Writer's Guide, (Scarborough: Nelson, 1992).

Students **must** be sure to obtain the **correct edition** of each of the texts. Regional students wishing a copy of Hacker should have their site administrators contact the GPRC bookstore.

LECTURE OUTLINE AND READINGS LIST

Students are responsible for all lecture material and required readings as noted below. At the start of each unit, a selected bibliography of additional readings will be distributed. A selection of these readings will be placed on reserve at the GPRC library. At the time of writing, mechanisms to link to regional sites for this are still being explored. Additional and/or replacement readings may, from time to time be assigned as materials become available. Lecture dates are approximate and text readings should, if possible, be completed prior to the lecture. Since lectures differ in content substantially from the texts, do **not** expect the lecture and discussion to be a substitute for reading.

I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT:

4 weeks

This section examines the societal context within which media operates and invites critical analysis of the nature of the media in society drawing on several major theories of the role and function of the media in a broader societal context.

1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW:

- course design and requirements
- a basic model of communications
- a basic model of propaganda
- from context to effects (course overview)

*Alger, ch. 1

*NC pp. xi - xiii

*Taras, preface

2. THEORIES OF THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN SOCIETY:

- technological determination: Innis and McLuhan
- market determinism: capitalist and Marxist models
- formal structural determination: authoritarian and libertarian schools
- cultural determinism: structural functionalism and post-modernism
- neo-colonialism: the NWIO and developmental theories

*Alger, ch. 4

*NC chapter 1

*Taras chapter 1

3. **POLICY FRAMEWORKS: THE 'FREE PRESS' IN CANADA (?):**

- Charter of Rights
- regulatory agencies
- freedom of information and the press

*Taras, chapter 2.

4. **MEDIA STRUCTURES AND CONCENTRATION:**

- audience attention: what is (not) political content
- structure and concentration of ownership and control
- foreign ownership
- continentalism and the protection of Canadian identity

*Alger, chapter 5

II: THE CREATION OF EFFECTS:

4 weeks

The focus of this section is on the ways in which media effects can (presumably be created with particular emphasis on 'democratic' societies.

1. **MEDIA AND CULTURE:**

- the centrality of language
- typologies of political culture
- media, political culture and "truth"
- the design of information and reality

*Alger, chapter 3

2. **SOCIALIZATION, OPINION FORMATION, AND PROPAGANDA:**

- models of socialization
- models of propaganda
- political functions of media professionals

Alger, chapters 2, 9

3. **INDIRECT MEDIATION AND SILENCES:**

- Hollywood
- Professional Sports
- Women's Representation
- Minority Representation

*NC chapters 5, 6, 4

4. **DIRECT MEDIATION: THE PRESS AND POLITICS**

- overview
- news gathering structures

*Taras, chapters 2, 3 4

*Alger, chapters 6, 8

III: MEDIA EFFECTS:

3 weeks

This section examines the political impact of mass medias in several specific cases.

1. **ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR:**

- general overview
- leadership
- campaign debates
- the 1984, 1988 and 1993 general elections

*Alger, chapters 10, 11, 12, 13

*Taras, chapters 5, 6, 7, 8

2. **GROUP MEDIATED POLITICS:**

- interest groups and media
- media as an instrument of political change

*NC chapters 9, 10

3. MEDIA AND CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY:

- domestic geopolitics of continentalism and colonialism
- international geopolitics

*Alger, chapter 7

IV: THE FUTURE:**2 weeks****1. TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS:**

- the shrinking world
- CATV, satellite, and technological frontiers
- the emergence of the information economy
- the internet

*Alger, chapters 14, 7

2. THE MEDIA AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND EXPRESSION:

- *NC conclusion
- *Alger, chapter 15
- *Taras, chapter 9