

GRANDE PRAIRIE REGIONAL COLLEGE

POLITICAL SCIENCE 3030 (UT 3)

POLITICS AND THE MEDIA

Winter, 2002

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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, Chomsky, political propaganda, the mass media and elections, opinion formation, and selected Canadian communications policies are among the topics studied.

The course was entirely re-written for 2000 and partially re-written for 2002 and is organized in three broad sections entailing an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the 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 concentrates on traditional and critical theories of the media in society. Section 2 is a more traditional description of media contexts and policy frameworks in Canada and requires a thorough understanding of section 1 to hold it together. Section 3 examines the ways in which the mass media can generate effects on the public, or more broadly, the techniques which may be used to manipulate or influence the public including the nature of certain effects of the mass media focussing on elections, opinion formation, 'spin doctors' and so on. The concluding section 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.

COURSE THEMES:

The Martin text most adequately sums up the thematic of the course in terms of "culture, domination, and opposition" which is the text's subtitle. Thus, we will focus on the macro and then the micro, insiders and outsiders, control and resistance. That media is essential to the functioning of democracy is, in many ways taken as a given. The question is whether or not the media is essentially undemocratic or anti-democratic in operation and strategies which can be utilized by the public to create a more democratic media and, by extension, society.

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:

Due dates are subject to change. Check with instructor.

Internet/Preliminary Assignment: January 30	10%
Term Paper Proposal: February 6	
Midterm Examination: February 20	25%
Term Paper/Research Project: March 13	30%
Final Exam: In Exam Week	35%

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. An alternative to the traditional library-based term paper is a paper based on either original research (content analysis of newspapers, etc.) or on the internet, etc. More will be said about this in class.

Papers and assignments are due 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.

TEXTS:

Required:

Arthur Siegel. Politics and the Media in Canada (2nd Ed.). (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1993)

Michele Martin with Graham Knight, Communication and Mass Media: Culture, Domination and Opposition. (Scarborough, Prentice-Hall, 1997).

Optional:

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

LECTURE OUTLINE AND READINGS LIST

Students are responsible for all lecture material and required readings as noted below. An **additional bibliography of selected resources will be distributed near the start of each section of this course.** Additional and/or replacement readings may, from time to time be assigned as materials become available. Lecture dates are approximate and these do not necessarily correspond to any single reading. Revision of the course outline (requirements, etc.) materials may be necessary depending on student interest, progress, and current events.

LECTURES, AS SUCH, WILL NOT NECESSARILY CONCENTRATE ON THE READINGS. RATHER, LECTURE SESSIONS WILL BE USED TO DISCUSS THE READINGS, CONCEPTS, AND THE MEDIA IN GENERAL. READINGS MUST BE DONE IN ADVANCE OF THE CLASS IF THERE IS TO BE ANY HOPE THAT YOU WILL KEEP UP WITH THE COURSE. ON OCCASSION, REQUIRED READINGS (LECTURES) MAY BE POSTED ON THE INTERNET.

I. INTRODUCTION AND THEORY:

3 sessions

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)

Martin, Chapter 1

Herman and Chomsky, Chapter 1

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

- psychological,
- functional
- technological determination: Innis and McLuhan
- formal structural determination: authoritarian and libertarian schools

Siegel, chapters 1, 2

Martin, Chapter 2, 3

3. CRITICAL APPROACHES:

- Marx
- Frankfurt School
- Culture and Ideology
- Capitalism, Power, and Patriarchy

Martin, Chapters 4, 5, 6

II. MEDIA AND CANADIAN SOCIETY:

3 sessions

This provides the history and relatively current policy framework within which media operates in Canadian society.

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

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

Siegel, chapters 3, 4

2. 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
- domestic geopolitics of continentalism and colonialism
- international geopolitics

Siegel, chapters 5, 6, 7, 9

2. THE PRESS AND POLITICS:

- overview
- news gathering structures

Seigel, chapter 8

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

Seigel, chapter 10

III: THE CREATION OF EFFECTS:

5 sessions

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

1. SOCIALIZATION, OPINION FORMATION, AND PROPAGANDA:

- models of socialization
- models of propaganda
- models of opinion formation

Dawson et. al., Political Socialization chapter 10 (to be distributed)
Other readings TBA

2. TELEVISION AND HOLLYWOOD ENTERTAINMENT

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

Martin Chapter 7

3. POPULAR PRINT TO MASS ADVERTISING: INDIRECT MEDIATION?

- Popular Fiction
- Children's Comics
- Mass Advertising
- Video Games
- Popular Music

Martin, Chapters 8, 9, 10

4. NEWS: PROPAGANDA, CONSENT, AND RESISTANCE

- National News
- International Monopolies
- Wag the Dog?

Martin, chapter 11
Herman and Chomsky, chapters 3, 4, 5, 6

5. POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND THE SPINDOCTORS

- Elections and Electoral Behaviour
- Leadership
- Campaign debates
- the 1984, 1988 and 1993, 1997, and 2000 general elections

IV: CONCLUSIONS: BACK TO THE FUTURE?:

2 sessions

1. GROUP MEDIATED POLITICS- STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE?:

- resistance as a democratic necessity
- interest groups and media
- media as an instrument of political change

Pross, "Interest Groups: Talking Chameleons" (to be distributed)
Seigel, chapter 10 (re-read)

2. TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS:

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