

GPRC PO3030/AU POLI303
Politics and the Media
Winter 2009
University Transfer
(AU, UA, UC, CUC, KUC, UL)

Instructor: Tom Enders, PhD

Office: C303

Telephone: 539-2996

E-mail: tenders@gprc.ab.ca

Office hours: W 1-2 p.m.; Th 1:45-3:15 p.m., and by appointment

Room: B201

Time: T, Th 11:30-12:50 p.m.

College Calendar Course Description:

This is a critical examination of the roles and behaviour of the mass media in the political process with primary 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.

Introduction to PO3030 January 2009:

We may well have more political information today than ever before and yet we may know – and care - less about politics than previous generations. Are we facing a crisis of disinterest and disengagement from shared public discussion and decision making? Or are we on the verge of a new golden era of citizen awareness and empowerment?

The authors of the two books for this course both maintain that news media today are serving us poorly, focusing on personalities and images, the amusing and entertaining.

This course is intended to provide an investigation of the selection and presentation of political news as well as the adequacy of the treatment of important political matters of our time. We will explore a number of central questions. Are people getting the information they need as well as want? Are news media providing an accurate reflection of social and political realities? Whose interests are and are not being well served? Which standards should we use to evaluate the performance of the media? Many learned people believe we need the media to perform a whole set of functions to enable democracy to exist in a meaningful way. What, in addition to enhancing democracy, is it important for the news media to contribute to public life here and in non-democratic countries? If the media are not serving us well, who or what is to blame? Corporations and capitalism? Politicians and other people in government? Technology? The public itself?

By the end of this course, you should have some initial answers to these questions, answers which may well differ for different media of communication. You should also have an increased ability to assess, in a scholarly manner, news media coverage of individual politicians, political events, political issues, and the political process.

Prerequisite:

- There is no course prerequisite.
- You do need to have, or be interested in developing, a keen interest in communication of political information as well as the information itself, an interest in the style and the substance, the packaging and the content.
- If you have not taken an introductory Political Studies course such as GRPC's PO1010, 1020 or 2220, you would be well advised to seek relevant basic information about Canadian and American political institutions, political ideologies and parties, and elections, whether using the internet or more conveniently a good textbook – with the proviso that applies to using news media as well: use of more than one resource is always advisable.

Required Reading Material:

- David Taras, Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media, updated edition. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001.
- Jeremy Mayer, American Media Politics in Transition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.
- Assigned internet and database readings, course handouts, and Blackboard postings.

Course Requirements:

- Test on Topic I 10%
- Midterm Exam 20%
- Final Exam 30%
- First media journal.....20%
- Second media journal 20%

Conversion table:

A+ 90 - 100	B+ 76 - 79	C+ 67 - 69	D+ 55 - 59
A 85 - 89	B 73 - 75	C 64 - 66	D 50 - 54
A- 80 - 84	B- 70 - 72	C- 60 - 63	F 0 - 49

For conversion of letter grades to the four-point scale, see Calendar, p. 41.

The date of the final exam will be scheduled by the College. You are required to write the exam on that date. Take this into account when making any plans.

Students who miss an excessive number of classes may be denied the opportunity to write the final exam, as stated in the Calendar on p. 44.

For information on key dates and other important matters, see the Calendar as well.

Proposed Schedule of Classes and Topics

- I. Introduction. Some basics about the Canadian and American political systems. Democracy. Democratic functions of the media. Other functions.
- II. The politician-journalist relationship. Adversarial journalism. Elections and Election coverage. Negative advertising.
- III. History of the mass media in Canada and the United States. The partisan press, objectivity and other topics.
- IV. Significance of the technology of the means of communication. Print vs. audio vs. visual media. McLuhan and Postman.
- V. Influence of the media. Theories of the press.
- VI. Class, ideology and bias.
- VII. Convergence. Of ownership, of modes of communication, of news and entertainment.
- VIII. Public Broadcasting.
 - IX. Role of the media and Canadian national unity.
 - X. Portrayal of women, aboriginal peoples, racial and ethnic minorities.
- XI. Americanization of Canadian media.
- XII. News media and the World.
 - A. American and Western dominance. Challenges to the existing information and communication order.
 - B. Press freedom and restrictions.
- XIII. Reporting on war and national security issues.
- XIV. New media and the future.