



GPRC PO3030/AU POLI303
Politics and the Media
Winter 2012
University Transfer

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Room:
Time:

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 2012:

We may well have more political information today than ever before and yet we may know less 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 actually on the verge of a new golden era of citizen awareness and empowerment?

Many critics (including textbook authors) maintain that the old and conventional media are becoming increasingly superficial, focusing on personalities and images, the amusing and entertaining. The quality of their content may be less relevant than before, however, as they appear to be in decline. New media have been touted as vehicles for broader and deeper political discussion; that optimism, however, has begun to be questioned.

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 by media old and new. 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? 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:

- Jeremy Mayer, American Media Politics in Transition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.
- Shannon Sampert and Linda Trimble, editors. Mediating Canadian Politics. Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2010.
- Assigned internet and database readings, course handouts, and electronic postings.

Course Requirements:

- Test on Topic I 10%
- Midterm Exam 20%
- Final Exam 30%
- First assignment 15%
- Second assignment 25%

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. 43.

Transferability: UA, UC, CUC, KUC, UL

* The grade of D or D+ may not be accepted for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. Students are cautioned that it is their responsibility to contact the receiving institutions to ensure transferability.

Student Responsibilities:

* You are expected to devote time in the classroom to the class itself. Use of cell phones, and use of laptops for nonclass purposes, is unacceptable. It is also not acceptable to socialize or do work on other courses during the class.

* You are strongly advised to keep a copy of your own of any work you submit for grading at least until you have your work returned to you.

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

**You are expected to write the final exam when scheduled by the Registrar's Office - with possible exceptions in the case of compelling and urgent circumstances beyond your control. Also note and observe other key dates during the term as provided in the Calendar.

Statement on Plagiarism and Cheating:

* You are expected to reference sources fully and properly for written assignments. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with College Calendar information pertaining to cheating and plagiarism, for which there are various penalties depending on the severity of the offense. The Calendar information on student misconduct can be accessed at:

<http://www.gprc.ab.ca/downloads/documents/Student%20Misconduct%20Plagiarism%20and%20Cheating.pdf>

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.
 - A. Personal relationships, adversarial journalism, news management.
 - B. Elections and election coverage.
 - C. 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 ideological bias.
- VII. Concentration of ownership and convergence of modes of communication.
- VIII. Public Broadcasting.
 - IX. Portrayal of women in the news media.
 - X. Portrayal aboriginal peoples, and racial and ethnic minorities.
 - XI. Americanization of Canadian and world media.
 - XII. Reporting on war and national security issues.
 - XIII. New media and the future.