

Media & Politics 46.201.301

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Time: Tuesday, Thursday, 2:00-3:15
Office: Coburn 106
Office Hours: On campus: Thurs, 1:00–2:00 (or by appointment)
Online: Friday, 7:00-10:00pm

This course explores the role of the media in American politics and the role of politics in the American media. We will begin with a survey of theoretical approaches to media analysis and mass communications. Then we will focus on the historical evolution of newspapers, radio, and television as vehicles of political news reporting. Next, we will look at instances of journalistic bias and distortion in order to explore how corporate consolidation and commercial competition have affected the news industry. Finally, by studying a selection of major stories in depth, we will try to gain a better understanding of the factors involved in the conversion of events and developments into seemingly significant news.

All assignments will be graded according to your ability to write college-level prose. If you have writing problems, I will do my best to help you solve them, but please be aware that you must submit thoughtful, grammatically correct, factually accurate, and polished work in order to earn a high grade in this course. Students who avoid repeating the same mistakes in homework assignments and exams will be rewarded for making progress; students who repeat the same errors will be penalized with lower grades. Throughout the semester, you will receive specific tips on exactly what you need to improve in order to earn the highest marks.

Course Requirements

You do not have to purchase any books for this course. All required materials will be accessible via the course web page, and all of the materials that you need to complete assignments will be available long before the work is due.

Weekly Reading Questions

The readings for the course are divided into six units. Before the start of each unit, students will be selected to summarize the main points of the required readings for that section. If you are assigned this task, you need not provide an exhaustive analysis, but should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the materials.

You will be required to write short answers to questions on the readings each week. The questions are designed to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings and to promote informed discussion. Consequently, your answers should be brief and focused on the content of the materials. In some cases, you will be instructed to print your answers and bring them to class. In others, you will be required to submit them via e-mail. Please follow the instructions included with each set of reading questions.

Late assignments will not be accepted without a valid excuse.

All assignments for this course must be written in complete sentences, free of spelling errors, properly punctuated, and grammatically correct. Do not submit gibberish! Remember that you will be evaluated according to your ability to convey accurate information in college-level prose. Consequently, if you have writing problems, it would be a good idea to run all of your

assignments through a grammar-checking program before you submit them. An easy way to take this route would be to open the reading questions in Microsoft Word; then, after you type in your answers, run the Grammar Check and Spell Check program that is available under the Review tab at the top of the screen. If you have any questions about this procedure, please let me know.

Plagiarism Policy

If you copy any of your work from outside sources without attribution and/or proper citation, you will receive an "F" for the assignment. If you include any plagiarized materials in either the midterm or the final, you will automatically fail the entire course.

Midterm Exam

For your midterm exam, you will be required to write two two-page summaries of two different news stories. You must choose the stories from a list that I will provide well in advance.

Your midterm summaries should not contain any opinion or undocumented assertions. Instead, your job is simply to recount the facts of a specific story as reported by the media. You will have to summarize more than one article on a specific topic or event, but you do not need to include every detail of the complete story. You only need to summarize major developments.

Exams must be submitted as an attachment to an email and must be formatted in Microsoft Word. If your exam is not formatted in Word (with a ".doc" or ".docx" extension), I might not be able to open it.

Each of your midterm summaries must be at least two pages long (double spaced, one-inch margins, eleven or twelve-point type). Please include both of your midterm summaries in one Microsoft Word document (at least four pages total). Remember to include your name on the first page of the exam.

You will be evaluated according to your ability to write college-level prose. Consequently, your summaries must be free of grammatical and spelling errors, carefully organized, thoughtfully argued, and factually correct.

Final Paper (Exam) Due on 12/17/09

Your final exam will require you to choose among three options:

1. You may write an op-ed essay or opinion piece on a specific news story (2400 words) related to media issues. If you choose this option, you must demonstrate a high level of expertise related to your chosen topic, and you must present a creative approach to the issues involved. You must also provide me with a thesis statement, an outline, and working links to all of the sources that you plan to use by 12/3/09.
2. You may summarize and analyze a major news story either of your own choosing or selected from a list of media-related topics that I will supply well in advance of the due date. Your summary and analysis should be at least five pages long. I will provide most of the news articles you will need to complete the final paper if you choose one of the topics that I have provided. However, you must also use at least one additional source located on your own. You may draw your paper entirely from sources of your own choosing if you supply me with working links to full texts of any articles that you plan to

use. You must submit a thesis statement, an outline, and working links to all of the sources that you plan to use by 12/3/09.

3. You may create a web site on a media-related topic. In order to fulfill this option, you must already possess the skills required to develop an attractive and readable web site. Please do not choose this option if you have never created a web site before. Although you should include multimedia materials such as images and video files, you must also include a detailed summary of your topic on your site. Also, you must submit a thesis statement, a list of links to sources, and a detailed project description by 12/3/09. As with your other assignments, your grade in this case will hinge on your ability convey accurate information in college-level prose.

No matter which of these options you choose, you must submit a complete first draft of the final assignment on 12/10/09. Your first draft should not be a rough draft, that is, it should not contain any incomplete sentences, grammatical errors, or informal notes. Instead, since the purpose of the final assignment is to encourage you to write at your highest level, you should turn in a carefully proofread and polished draft on 12/10. Then, after you revise your work in response to the corrections and editorial suggestions that I will send back by 12/13, you will be able to submit an assignment that reflects your full potential on 12/17.

Grade Formula:

Reading questions, presentations, and participation in class discussion = 25%
Midterm = 35% Final = 40%

Note: If you copy any of your work from outside sources without attribution, you will receive an "F" for the assignment. If you include any plagiarized materials in either the midterm or the final, you will automatically fail the entire course.

Assignment Schedule for Media & Politics	Assignment due date
Welcome to Media & Politics	9/3 (no assignment)
Week 1: Basic Themes in Media Studies	9/10
Week 2: Mass Media: The Rise of the Popular Press	9/17
Week 3: Privacy, Publicity, and Politics	9/24
Week 4: Consolidation, Competition, and Careerism	10/1
Week 5: Political Advertising in the Age of Screens	10/8

Week 6: The Decline of Newspapers	10/15
Week 7: Write and revise midterm exam	10/22 (no assignment)
Week 8: Midterm Due	10/29
Week 9: Major Stories: The Beecher-Tilton Scandal	11/5
Week 10: Major Stories: TBA	11/12
Week 11: Major Stories: Choose Your Own Story	11/19
Week 12: Thanksgiving	11/26 (no assignment)
Week 13: Student Presentations Thesis Statement/Outline for Final Assignment Due	12/3
Week 14: Student Presentations First Draft of Final Assignment Due	12/10
Revised Final Assignment Due	12/17