

# Media & Politics 46.210.201

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**Office:** Coburn 400  
**Office Hours:** On campus: TBD (or by appointment) Online: Fridays, 7:00-10:00pm  
**Course page:** [http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher/media\\_politics.htm](http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher/media_politics.htm)

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 general 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.

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/Web Assignments** You will be required to complete 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.

Instead of meeting face-to-face, we will have one web-based session each week that will require you to complete a web-based assignment such as searching the Internet for specific types of political news or engaging in specific exercises in media analysis. These assignments can be completed any time during the week, but must be emailed to me by the deadlines provided.

Late assignments will not be accepted without a valid excuse.

**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 exams must be free of grammatical and spelling errors, carefully organized, thoughtfully argued, and factually correct.

**Final Paper (Exam)** 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 well in advance of the due date for final papers.
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 well in advance of the due date for final papers.
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 well in advance of the deadline. 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 approximately three weeks before the last class.** 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 first draft. Then, after you revise your work in response to the corrections and editorial suggestions that I will send back ASAP, you will be able to submit a final paper that reflects your full potential at the end of the term.

**Grade Formula:**

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

<b>Assignment Schedule for Media &amp; Politics</b>	<b>Assignment due date</b>
Welcome to Media & Politics	(no assignment)
<b>Week 1:</b> Basic Themes in Media Studies	tbd
<b>Week 2:</b> Mass Media: The Rise of the Popular Press	tbd
<b>Week 3:</b> The Age of Screens	tbd
<b>Week 4:</b> Distortion & Spin	tbd
<b>Week 5:</b> The Decline of Newspapers	tbd
<b>Week 6:</b> Write and revise midterm exam	tbd
<b>Week 7: Midterm Due</b>	<b>tbd</b>
<b>Week 9:</b> Major Stories: The Beecher-Tilton Scandal	tbd
<b>Week 10:</b> Major Stories: TBA	tbd
<b>Week 11:</b> Major Stories: Choose Your Own Story. Thesis Statement/Outline for Final Assignment Due	tbd
<b>Week 12:</b> First Draft of Final Assignment Due	tbd
<b>Week 13: Revised Final Paper Due</b>	tbd