

Political Science 321
The Media and American Politics
California State University, Long Beach

Spring, 2002
Wednesday 2:00-4:45pm, SPA 110
Course #16548

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Course Description

The purpose of this course is to explore the role of print and electronic media in American Politics and their relationship to the public, politicians, and ultimately, public policy. In doing so, we will assess the media's impact on government, policy making, election campaigning, and the prospects for democratic deliberation. Special attention will be paid to the portrayal of political issues, candidates and political themes in popular culture, including film, television, radio, music, the internet, billboards, bumper-stickers, and slogans.

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to understand many things about the interaction between the media and politics in America:

- You will be able to describe how the media function as the "Fourth Branch of Government."
- You will be able to understand how the media define, shape, reinforce, and transform Americans' political ideas, economic ideologies, and policy preferences.
- You will be able to uncover examples and sources of media bias in the presentation of political issues, candidates, and ideologies.
- You will be able to describe how public officials, candidates, political organizations and interest groups use the mass media to communicate with the public.
- You will be able to describe how the media uses stories related to politicians and political issues to increase circulation and to boost ratings.
- You will be able to compare and contrast the different strategies by which citizens can influence the mass media.
- You will be able to identify and critique how feature films and television programs "construct" political identities and set the groundwork for social, political and economic interaction.
- You will become familiar with "alternative" forms of media and their impact on politics.
- You will understand the constitutional, legal, and economic issues and conflicts raised by the existence of a free press in a democratic, corporate-dominated, capitalist society.
- You will be able to apply different theories that describe how people process information about politics and the effects of this processing on their attitudes, beliefs and behavior.
- You will understand how different media institutions have evolved over time and how their history has shaped their current operation and influence.
- You will become familiar with the occupational norms of journalism as a profession, and you will be able to explain how these norms shape the coverage of political news.
- You will be able to explain how commercial considerations affect the coverage and portrayal of politics in the news as well as television programming and print content.
- You will develop the analytic tools to critically assess the messages you encounter in the media.
- You will understand the ways in which you can take a more active part in learning and communicating about politics.

Required Texts

There is no general “textbook” for this course. Rather, the required readings will be drawn from the following books:

- Alger, Dean. 1998. *Megamedia: How Giant Corporations Dominate Mass Media, Distort Competition, and Endanger Democracy*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN# 0-8476-8389-3. Hardcover.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1997. *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*. Seven Stories Press. ISBN# 1-888363-49-5. Paperback.
- Graber, Doris A. 2000. *Media Power in Politics*, 4th ed. Congressional Quarterly. ISBN# 1-56802-416-9. Paperback.
- Herman, Edward S. and Noam Chomsky. 2002. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Media*. Pantheon. ISBN# 0-375-71449-9. Paperback.
- McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore. 2001. *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. Gingko Press. ISBN# 1-58423-070-3. Paperback.
- Nichols, John and Robert W. McChesney. 2000. *It's the Media, Stupid*. Seven Stories Press. ISBN# 1-58322-029-1. Paperback.
- Parenti, Michael. 1993. *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the News Media* 2nd ed. Bedford/St. Martin's. ISBN# 0-312-02013-9. Paperback.

You are required to read from the above texts as part of your coursework. All of the above listed books will be available for purchase in the Forty-Niner Bookstore. Most, if not all, will be placed on reserve in the University Library, so you need not necessarily purchase them. In addition, handouts distributed in class will be required reading, and students are required to follow the interaction of media and politics in a national newspaper such as *The New York Times* or *The Los Angeles Times* (both are available for delivery with a student discount and are also available on-line).

Course Requirements

There are four requirements for the course:

1. **Participation:** includes contributions to classroom discussion as well as attendance (do not be tardy or leave class early). In order to participate well in this class, you must pay close attention to assignments and deadlines (all of which are listed in this syllabus). You must complete all assigned readings prior to coming to class. Attendance is a very important aspect of this class — you will not receive the full benefit of this course if you are not in class to learn from your peers and to offer your own analyses. To get credit for attending class, you must show up within 10 minutes of the start of class. If you are not in class within the first 10 minutes, you will be marked absent for the day. You will also be marked absent if you leave class early. You will be permitted one unexcused absence. An excused absence is an illness that prevents you from attending class, religious holiday or a death in the family. Do not schedule meetings, banquets, vacations, or work for other classes during our regular class meeting time. Beyond your first unexcused absence, your participation grade will be reduced by one-third of a letter grade for every time you are marked absent. For example, if you earned a participation grade of a B+ and had three unexcused absences, you will be penalized two-thirds of a letter grade, and your final participation would be a B-. Similarly, if you had six unexcused absences and you had earned an A- for your participation grade, you would be penalized five-thirds of a letter grade, meaning that you would end up with a C for your final participation grade.

Turn off all pagers, phones and other electronic devices prior to entering the classroom. If you have an electronic device that emits noise during class (even an audible “vibration”), you will be asked to leave and will be marked absent for that day —no excuses and no exceptions.

2. **Assignments and Exercises:** Exercises are in-class work that must be turned in by the end of the class period and receives a credit / no-credit grade. Any exercises that are missed will not receive credit. Late exercises will receive partial credit if the work is complete and turned in by the next class meeting. Assignments are take-home work which will receive a letter grade. Any assignments turned in after the first 10 minutes of class will be treated as late by one day. Late assignments will be deducted one-third of a letter grade for every day they are late (see above for an example of this type of calculation). Assignment sheets specifying requirements will be distributed in class. They will not be emailed. See me during class or during my office hours if you missed any of them. Assignments must be double spaced and turned in as a hard copy, they may not be emailed. Do not show up to class with a diskette and attempt to explain why you have not yet printed your assignment. Always back-up your computer files in at least two places. It is your responsibility to keep track of due dates and to follow up on missed exercises and assignments. Telling the instructor that you “did not know” about a course requirement is not an acceptable excuse. It is your responsibility to keep yourself informed. Refer to this syllabus frequently. Please do not hesitate to email or call me if you have any questions or need any assistance. It is better to email me as I am on campus only one day per week. Late assignments should be turned in to my mailbox in the Political Science Department Office (SPA 257) on the next weekday. Have the secretary date-stamp your assignment.
3. **Examinations:** The examinations will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. The final exam will not be cumulative. Make-up exams are rarely given and only when a university-authorized excuse is provided. These excuses include illness and a death in the family only. You will not be excused from an exam simply because you missed the prior class. Any requests for a makeup exam must be made *before* the exam is given (call me). You will not be permitted to take a make-up exam if you do not request one before the exam is given. Make-up examinations will not include multiple choice questions. If you wear a hat with a brim on the day of an examination, you will be asked to remove it. If you have a disability that warrants additional consideration for examinations, please inform me so that I can accommodate you.
4. **Research Project or Research Paper:** You will be required to produce a Research Project or Research Paper for this course. If you choose the Research Project, you are to produce a piece of media (in the medium of your choice) on a political theme. Examples might include a print publication, a website, a documentary, an advertisement, a song, a painting, a sculpture, or some other form of mixed-media. You will be required to present your project to the class at the end of the semester. A schedule of presentations will be determined in mid-semester.

For the final Research Paper, you will be asked to analyze a contemporary issue in the domain of media and politics (your choice) in terms of the analytical skills learned during this course. The paper is to be 6-7 pages in length and must include at least five textual (not internet) sources. Do not be afraid of the library. You may cite internet sources, but they must be authoritative and will not count towards your requisite five. Course texts may be cited, but again, they will not count toward the requisite five. The paper will be due on the last day of instruction. The paper must:

- be typewritten in 12 point Times Roman font
- be double spaced
- have 1 inch margins on top, bottom, and both sides
- include a title and cover page
- include a bibliography page
- done in the citation style of your choice (footnotes or parenthetical — be consistent)
- include page numbers
- include an introduction, body, and a conclusion that looks toward the future

Late papers must be turned in to the Political Science Department Office and date stamped. Late papers will be down-graded one full letter grade for every day that they are late (i.e. a B becomes a C

if the paper is one day late). Purchasing a paper constitutes plagiarism. I am familiar with all of the on-line term-paper sites and I *will* check your paper against those available on-line. Plagiarism is a *very serious* offense, and you should be familiar with this university's policy and penalties for plagiarism. Do not put a cover on your paper.

Grading

Participation	10%
Exercises and Assignments	25%
Midterm Examination	20%
Final Examination	20%
Research Project or Paper	25%

A plus/minus system of grading will be used for all assignments, exams, papers and projects, but the final course grade will not include a plus/minus, as per university policy. A letter grade will be assigned for each of the above categories. The grade will be converted to grade points and weighted by the corresponding percentage (see above). Here is an example: Suppose Stephanie received a B- for Participation, an B+ for Exercises and Assignments, a C for her Midterm Exam, a B- for her Final Exam, and an B+ for her Research Project (she wisely chose not to do the Research Paper). Stephanie's final grade would be calculated as follows:

$$\text{Final Grade} = (2.7 * .10) + (3.3 * .25) + (2.0 * .20) + (2.7 * .20) + (3.3 * .25)$$

$$\text{Final Grade} = .270 + .825 + .575 + .540 + .825$$

Final Grade = 3.035, which is closest to 3.0 grade points, which is equivalent to a B.

Course Outline

Week 1 (1/30). Course Introduction and Political Socialization

"Your world was made for you by someone above, but you choose evil ways instead of love. You made me master of the world where you exist. The soul I took from you was not even missed." -Black Sabbath, from "Lord of this World," c. 1971 Warner Brothers.

In-class Film: American Rock (Schoolhouse Rock)

- ◆ Syllabus Distributed
- ◆ Political Socialization: Sources and Effects
- ◆ What is "The Media?"
- ◆ Lippmann's "Pictures in their heads"
- ◆ Come prepared next week by having done the assigned reading

Week 2 (2/6). Expectations of the Media

"Glittering prizes and endless compromises shatter the illusion of integrity." -Rush, from "Limelight," c. 1981, Polygram.

Reading: Graber, pp. 5-43, 351-362.

Handout on Vanessa Leggett

- ◆ The Role of the Media in a Democracy
- ◆ The Role of the Media in a Authoritarian Regimes
- ◆ US Communications Policy
- ◆ Protections for the Media in the United States
- ◆ Additional Responsibilities for the Media in the United States
- ◆ Objective Journalism
- ◆ Advocacy Journalism
- ◆ Muckraking

Week 3 (2/13). The Early Years of Media Control: Propaganda

“The worst forms of tyranny, or certainly the most successful ones, are not those we rail against, but those that so insinuate themselves into the imagery of our consciousness and the fabric of our lives as not to be perceived as tyranny.” -Michael Parenti

Reading: Herman and Chomsky, chs. 1-2.

In-class Film: Triumph of the Will

In-Class Presentation: Examples of US and German Propaganda

- ◆ William Randolph Hearst
- ◆ Edward Bernays
- ◆ Leni Riefenstahl
- ◆ World War II Propaganda
- ◆ Anti-Communist Propaganda

Week 4 (2/20). Media Effects Theories and Research

“Faced with the choice between changing one’s mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof.” -Galbraith’s Law

“People only see what they are prepared to see.” -Ralph Waldo Emerson

Reading: Graber, pp. 44-148.

Assignment: The Un-TV Experiment (to be distributed in class).

- ◆ The Magic Bullet Theory
- ◆ Minimal Effects Theory
- ◆ Agenda Setting Theory
- ◆ Framing Theory
- ◆ Metaphor Theory
- ◆ Constructionism
- ◆ Media and Public Opinion
- ◆ Media and Social Capital

Week 5 (2/27). Campaigns, Elections and the Media

“The failure to see the damage done by advertisements is the surest sign of substandard intelligence, or worse.” -H. G. Wells

“Sin is still in and our ballots are shrinking. So unleash the dogs, the only solution. Forgive and forget . . . no. I’m talking about a revolution.” -Corrosion of Conformity, from “Vote with a Bullet,” c. 1991, Relativity.

Reading: Graber, pp. 152-210.

Assignment: Write a 1-2 page review of a movie about the media aspect of political campaigns. Examples of movies you might choose include *The Candidate*, *The War Room*, *Bullworth*, *Primary Colors*, or *Bob Roberts*. An assignment sheet will be distributed with specific details about what your review should include.

- ◆ Campaigns and Elections
- ◆ Campaign Ads
- ◆ The Influence of Attack Ads
- ◆ The Internet and Political Campaigns
- ◆ Candidates vs. The Press
- ◆ The Media and Campaign Issues
- ◆ The Media and Election Outcomes
- ◆ Media Bias?

Week 6 (3/6). The Media, Public Officials and Governance

“One person conditioned to rule and control. The media sells it and you live the role.” -O. Osbourne, from “Crazy Train,” c. 1981, CBS.

“The ultimate in vanity, exploiting their supremacy. I can’t believe the things you say. I can’t believe the price you pay.” -Metallica, from “. . . and Justice for All,” c. 1988 Elektra.

Reading: Graber, pp. 213-288.

Assignment: Write a 1-2 page review of a television program that attempts to portray governance. Choose an episode of either *The West Wing* or *First Monday*. An assignment sheet will be distributed with specific details about what your review should include.

- ◆ The Media and The Presidency
- ◆ Going Public
- ◆ The Media and Congress
- ◆ The Media and the Supreme Court
- ◆ Cameras in the Courtroom
- ◆ Adversarial and Complimentary Relationships
- ◆ The Press and Governmental Sources
- ◆ Pundits and Academics

Week 7 (3/13). The Media and Public Policy

“I used to trust the media to tell us the truth, tell us the truth. Now I see the payoffs everywhere I look. Who do you trust when everyone’s a crook?” -Queensrÿche, from “Revolution Calling,” c. 1988, EMI.

“We’re all stars now, in the dope show.” -Marilyn Manson, from “The Dope Show,” c. 1998, Interscope.

Reading: Graber, pp. 292-336.

Herman and Chomsky chs. 3-7.

- ◆ The Issue Attention Cycle
- ◆ The Media and Foreign Policy, especially the War on Terrorism
- ◆ The Media and Crime Policy, especially The Drug War
- ◆ The Media and Health Care Policy
- ◆ The Media and Economic Policy
- ◆ The Media and Environmental Policy
- ◆ The Media and Energy Policy
- ◆ The Media and Race Relations
- ◆ Strategic Public Diplomacy
- ◆ Psy-Ops

Week 8 (3/20). Midterm Exam First Part of Class

Documentary Film Making I

No Reading

Assignment: Research Project or Research Paper Topic due (one paragraph, does not need to be typed)

In-class Film: The California Reich

- ◆ Documentary Films and Politics
- ◆ Styles of Documentaries

Spring Break Week (3/27). No Class

Week 9 (4/3). Documentary Film Making II

Reading: Nichols and McChesney, all.

Assignment: Write a 1-2 page review of a political documentary. Examples of documentaries you might choose include *Tell the Truth and Run*, *The Panama Deception*, *Chicano!*, *Berkeley in the Sixties*, *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*, *Coverup: Behind the Iran-Contra Affair*, or *A Place Called Chiapas*. An assignment sheet will be distributed with specific details about what your review should include.

In-class Film: This is What Democracy Looks Like

Guest Lecturer and Presentation: Gabriela Cowperthwaite, Producer, Arcwelder Films Ltd.

- ◆ Documentary Film Production
- ◆ Special Difficulties Facing Documentary Producers
- ◆ Documentary Film Distribution and Exhibition
- ◆ Documentary Films and Political Ideologies

Week 10 (4/10). Major Media Messages and Alternative Media I: Broadcast

“We are living in a material world and I am a material girl.” - Madonna c. 1984 Warner Brothers.

“With masks and chains they sell in vain to please the falling hoards. . . we become one.” -Fastway, from “We Become One,” c. 1983, CBS.

“Fret for your figure and fret for your latté and fret for your hairpiece and fret for your lawsuit and fret for your Prozac and fret for your pilot and fret for your contract and fret for your car.” -Tool, from “Ænima,” c. 1996, BMG.

Reading: McLuhan and Fiore, all.

Assignment: Alternative Broadcast Media Analysis (to be distributed in class)

- ◆ Major Media Messages (“Massages”)
- ◆ Consumerism
- ◆ Free Market Ideology
- ◆ The American Dream
- ◆ Cable Access
- ◆ Public Radio
- ◆ Pacifica Radio
- ◆ Talk-Radio
- ◆ Low-Power Radio

Week 11 (4/17). Alternative Media II: Print

“White-collar conservative flashing down the street, pointing your plastic finger at me. They’re hoping soon my kind will drop and die, but I’m going to wave my freak flag high.” -Jimi Hendrix, from “If 6 was 9,” c. 1968, MCA.

Reading: Chomsky, all.

Assignment: Alternative Print Media Analysis (to be distributed in class)

- ◆ Bumper Stickers and Postcards
- ◆ Banners and Posters, especially Robbie Conal
- ◆ Billboards
- ◆ Pamphlets
- ◆ Magazines
- ◆ Newspapers and News Weeklies
- ◆ Alternative Book Publishers
- ◆ Comics

Week 12 (4/24). Alternative Media III: The Internet

Reading: Parenti, chs. 1-6.

Assignment: Alternative Internet Media Analysis (to be distributed in class)

- ◆ Third Parties and the Internet
- ◆ Fringe Groups and Organizations and the Internet
- ◆ Internet Reporting: Indy Media and the Guerrilla News Network
- ◆ The Internet as a Commercial Vehicle for other Alternative Media
- ◆ Internet Humor and Politics
- ◆ Typo-squatting
- ◆ Napster and Morpheus

Week 13 (5/1). Alternative Media IV: Culture Jamming

“Peace sells. . . but who’s buying?” -Megadeth, from “Peace Sells. . . but Who’s Buying,” c. 1986, Capitol Records.

“They can not crush you if you don’t crawl.” -Corrosion of Conformity, from “Broken Man,” c. 1994, Sony Music.

Guest Speaker and Presentation: Gerry Fialka, Media Ecologist and Film Festival Curator

Reading: Parenti, chs. 7-13.

- ◆ Street Theater and Politics
- ◆ Art and Politics, especially Barbara Kruger
- ◆ Political Pranksterism
- ◆ Billboard Liberation
- ◆ Street Sign Correction

Week 14 (5/8). Music, Slogans, Poetry and Politics

Reading: Alger, chs. 1-3.

Handout: McCollum v. CBS Records

Assignment: Bring an example of a song with a political message (CD or cassette). Write up a one-page summary of the political message within the song. Students will be called at random to play their song and to explain its political significance to the class. Do not choose overtly political songs such as “Get Up, Stand Up” by Bob Marley. Rather, choose something with a political meaning that is not immediately obvious to the listener.

- ◆ The Dead Kennedys and the Frankenchrist Cover
- ◆ Ozzy Osbourne’s Suicide Solution Case
- ◆ Judas Priest and the Backwards Masking Case
- ◆ The 2-Live Crew and Obscenity
- ◆ Musical Performances and Politics
- ◆ Music’s Influence on Public Policy
- ◆ Political Slogans and Poetry

Week 15 (5/15). The Future of Media and Politics

Reading: Alger, chs. 4-9.

Assignment: Research Projects and Research Papers Due.

- ◆ Media Celebrities and Politics
- ◆ Corporate Consolidation in the Media
- ◆ “Synergies”
- ◆ Prospects for Reporting, Deliberation, and Civil Society

Final Exam: Wednesday (5/22) 2:45 pm - 4:45 pm in our regular classroom.