



POLI 2410 Mass Media and Politics (Fall 2021)
Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:00-2:30 pm

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Mathie

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Office Hours: Thursday 3:00 - 4:30 pm (via Zoom), or by appointment

Course Description

In this course, we will study and discuss scholarship and important writings on the relationship and interaction between mass media and politics with a special focus on the democratic politics and culture of Canada and the United States. In the first part of the course, we will examine the functioning (and dysfunction) of mass news media within North American society today and throughout its history. In the second part, we will turn to an examination of "mass media" understood more broadly as all of the technological channels through which information, ideas, etc. are disseminated throughout our culture and we will closely study a number of important theories about the ways that human life, especially in our modern democratic societies, are transformed by these media.

Since this seminar will be offered over Zoom, some necessary adjustments may be made as we go along to the format of class discussions in order to make it possible for everyone to get the most out of it.

Course Requirements

Required Texts:

For this course, we will not be using a textbook. All of the required readings are listed in the Course outline and will be found on the course website.

Grading:

Assignments: 2x10%=20%

Paper: 20%

Midterm: 20%

Final Exam: 30%

Participation: 10%

Assignments: As per the course outline, instructions will be given on the course website for the two short written assignments which will require reflection and engagement with the course material to which they correspond.

Papers: Your paper topics will be distributed at the beginning of October. Papers will be due on the 1st of November. Late assignments will see a grade deduction of 2% per day. Extensions may be requested in advance of the due date, but not afterwards.

Class Participation: All students are expected to:

- 1) Read assigned material carefully.
- 2) Be prepared to discuss the readings over Zoom.
- 3) Have hard copies of the readings with them during the Zoom seminar.
- 4) Avoid: (a) excessive absences from or lateness to our seminars; (b) being or appearing inattentive to seminars; (c) engaging in conversations with others outside of the Zoom seminar during class time.

Participation marks are not free:

- Consistently meeting these expectations will earn a mark in the B range (70-79%).
- Consistently meeting these expectations AND regularly participating thoughtfully in our discussions will be required for a mark in the A range (80-100%).
- Failure to follow even one of the expectations may result in an extremely low grade.

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is expected of all Lakehead University students. It should go without saying that cheating, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to make themselves fully familiar with Lakehead's policies in this area. Although all these policies will be enforced in full, it is worth emphasizing the following:

PLAGIARISM INVOLVES PRESENTING ANOTHER'S WORK, IDEAS, THEORIES, OR INTERPRETATION AS ONE'S OWN.

To avoid plagiarism, always:

- 1) Put quotation marks around any words taken from sources.
- 2) Paraphrase material completely; do not simply rearrange words from a source or change them using a thesaurus, etc.
- 3) Whether it is being quoted or paraphrased in your work, always give accurate and complete citations for all material that comes from another source.
- 4) Avoid borrowing entire arguments or ideas from another writer. Your arguments should be original to you.

Course Outline

NOTE: Readings and schedule will be adjusted as necessary at the instructor's discretion. Of course, Zoom is an imperfect forum for discussion, so as we proceed with the seminar, I may

find it necessary to make some changes with the structure of class discussions. I greatly appreciate your flexibility and understanding.

Introduction

Sept 7

Introduction to the course and review of syllabus and course expectations

Sept 9

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Book II, Chapter 6 (Of the Relation Between Public Associations and the Newspapers) and related excerpts

Part I: The News Media:

Sept 14 current data on state of news media in North America

Canada-2020 and 2021 Reuters Digital News Reports - Data from Canada

-Gregg, Allen. "What Canadians Think of the News Media," Policy Options, Feb. 10, 2017.

United States -Pew Research State of the News Media Fact Sheets on Newspapers, Digital News, Cable News and Network News

Sept 16 commentary on the state of journalism

"Tossed by a Gale," *The Economist*, March 16, 2009.

Stephens, Mitchell. *Beyond News: The Case for Wisdom Journalism*. Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, June 2009.

Sept 21 the role of journalism

Zelizer, Barbie, "Definitions of Journalism."

-Assignment 1 due. (See course website for instructions.)

Sept 23 ideology in the press

Rosen, Jay, "Clowns to the Left of Me, Jokers to the Right: On the Actual Ideology of the American Press." *Pressthink.org*, June 2010.

Groseclose and Milyo, "A Measure of Media Bias." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, November 2005.

Sept 28 & 30 digital & social media

Cass Sunstein, "Neither Hayek nor Habermas," *Public Choice* (2008).

Nicholas Lehmann. "Amateur Hour: Journalism without Journalists" *The New Yorker*, Aug 7, 2006.

Shirky, Clay, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs*, Feb. 2011.

Oct 5 publicity and the creation of "pseudo-events"

Boorstin, Daniel, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, 1992. (excerpts)

PART II: Mass Media and Political and Cultural Transformation

Oct 7 & 19 television and weakening social capital in the USA and Canada
Putnam, Robert, "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America." Political Science in Politics, December 1995
Trends in Social Capital in Canada, Statistics Canada, Nov. 2015.

Oct 21 Midterm

October 26 how media has transformed society
-Harold Innis, The Bias of Communication, 1951. (Excerpts).

Oct 28, Nov. 2-4 the medium is the message
-McLuhan, Marshall, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, 1964. (Excerpts)
-Video Selections
Assignment 2 due on Nov. 4. (See course website for instructions.)

Nov. 9-16 the medium is the message (and it's not good)
-Postman, Neil, Amusing Ourselves to Death (Excerpts)
-Video Selections

Nov. 18-25 mass media and propaganda
-Jacques Ellul, Propaganda (Excerpts)

Nov. 30 applying media ecology to digital media
Logan, Robert, "Understanding Humans: The Extensions of Digital Media," Information, Sept. 2019.

Dec. 2
-Conclusion and Review