



Lakehead UNIVERSITY

**POLI 2410/MDST 2411
Mass Media and Politics
Winter 2023**

Mondays & Wednesdays 4:00-5:30 pm via Zoom

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Mathie

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Office Hours: Wednesday 11:30am - 1:30 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 in the Content section.

Grading:

Paper: 30%

Midterm: 25%

Final Exam: 30%
Participation: 15%

Papers: Papers will be 8-10 pages in length. Your paper topics and instructions will be distributed through d2l at the beginning of March. Papers will be due on April 2nd. Late assignments will see a grade deduction of 2% per day. Extensions may be requested well in advance of the due date, but not afterwards.

Class Participation: All students are expected to:

- 1) Read assigned material carefully.
- 2) **Have working Zoom cameras and turn them on throughout the entirety of our class sessions.**
- 3) Be prepared to discuss the readings and answer questions about them over Zoom.
- 4) Have printed or digital copies (on an alternate device) of the readings with them during the Zoom seminar.
- 5) 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.

Academic Accommodations:

Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities/medical conditions. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities/medical conditions to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability/medical condition and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, please email sas@lakeheadu.ca or visit <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/sas>.

Course Outline

NOTE: Readings and schedule will be adjusted as necessary at my discretion. Of course, Zoom can sometimes pose special challenges to 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

Jan 9

Introduction to the course and review of syllabus and course expectations

Jan 11

- 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

Jan 16

current data on state of news media in North America

- Canada : 2022 Reuters Digital News Report for Canada
- United States: Pew Research State of the News Media Fact Sheets on Newspapers, Digital News, Cable News and Network News

Jan 18

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.

Jan 23

the role of journalism and journalists

- Zelizer, Barbie, "Definitions of Journalism."

Jan 25

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.

Jan 30 & Feb 1 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.

Feb 6 & 8 press freedom and restrictions in Canada and in other democracies

- George Anastaplo, "The Pentagon Papers and the Abolition of Television" in *The American Moralist* (1992).
- Jamie Cameron, "Section 2(b)'s Other Fundamental Freedom: The Press Guarantee, 1982-2012," in *The Unfulfilled Promise of Press Freedom* (2016).
- Anne-Marie Gingras, "Freedom of Expression, Entertainment, Hate Speech, and Defamation: Where Do We Draw the Line?" in *The Unfulfilled Promise of Press Freedom* (2016).
- James Allan, "The View from Down Under: Freedom of the Press in Canada," in *The Unfulfilled Promise of Press Freedom* (2016).

Feb 13 publicity and the creation of "pseudo-events"

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

PART II: Mass Media and Political and Cultural Transformation

Feb 15 & 27 television and weakening social capital in the USA and Canada

- Robert Putnam "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America." *Political Science in Politics*, December 1995
- Interview with Robert Putnam
- Trends in Social Capital in Canada, Statistics Canada, Nov. 2015.

Mar 1 MIDTERM

Mar 6 how different media tend to transform politics and society

- Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 1951. (Excerpts).

Mar 8, 13 & 15 the medium is the message

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964. (Excerpts)
- Video Selections

Mar 20 & 22 the medium is the message (and it's not good)

- Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Excerpts)
- Video Selections

Mar 27, 29, Apr 3 & Apr 5 mass media and propaganda

- Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda* (Excerpts)