



Lakehead UNIVERSITY

**POLI 2410/MDST 2411
Mass Media and Politics
Winter 2024**

Mondays & Wednesdays 8:30-10 am via Zoom

Instructor: Dr. Catherine Mathie

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Office Hours: Wednesday noon - 2 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 and the political community, especially in 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. All students are expected to print out these readings or else use an e-reader or similar device to download them such that they can be read carefully prior to our seminars and consulted throughout our class discussions without disrupting your access to our zoom seminar.

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 before the end of February. Papers will be due by 11:59 pm on March 28th. Late assignments will see a grade deduction of 2% per day. If your grounds are reasonable, an extension may be approved 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.

Generative AI Use Prohibited: Generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI or GenAI) is a category of AI systems capable of generating text, images, or other media in response to prompts. These systems include ChatGPT and its variants Bing (built by OpenAI) and Bard (built by Google) among several others. Other Generative AI models include artificial intelligence art systems such as Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, and DALL-E.

Any use of GenAI systems to produce assignments for this course is not permitted. All work submitted for evaluation in this course must be the student's original work. The submission of any work containing AI generated content will be considered a violation of academic integrity ("Use of Unauthorized Materials").

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 8 Introduction to the course and review of syllabus and course expectations

Jan 10

- Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*, excerpts on the relationship between the free press and democratic life

Part I: The News Media

Jan 15 Current data on the state of news media in North America

- Canada : 2023 Reuters Digital News Report for Canada

- United States: Pew Research on the state of journalism in the United States

Jan 17 Commentary on the state of the Press

- Fink, Katherine. "The biggest challenge facing journalism: A lack of trust." *Journalism*, 2019.
- Schudson, Michael. "Where We Are and Whither We Are Tending." *Journalism*, 2019.
- Stephens, Mitchell. "Beyond News: The Case for Wisdom Journalism." Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, June 2009.

Jan 22 The role of journalism and journalists

- Zelizer, Barbie. "Definitions of Journalism."

Jan 24 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 29 & 31 Digital & social media

- Lehmann, Nicholas. "Amateur Hour: Journalism without Journalists," *The New Yorker*, Aug 7, 2006.
- Sunstein, Cass. "Neither Hayek nor Habermas." *Public Choice* (2008).
- Zelizer, Barbie, "Why Journalism is About More than Digital Technology," *Digital Journalism*, 2019.
- Applebaum, Anne & Pomerantsev, Peter, "How to Put out Democracy's Dumpster Fire," *The Atlantic*, April 2021.

Feb 5 & 7 Press freedom and restrictions in Canada and in other democracies

- Anastaplo, George. "The Pentagon Papers and the Abolition of Television" in *The American Moralist* (1992).
- Cameron, Jamie. "Section 2(b)'s Other Fundamental Freedom: The Press Guarantee, 1982-2012," in *The Unfulfilled Promise of Press Freedom* (2016).
- Allan, James. "The View from Down Under: Freedom of the Press in Canada," in *The Unfulfilled Promise of Press Freedom* (2016).

Feb 12 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 14 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*.

Feb 19-23 Winter Study Week - No Classes

Feb 26 MIDTERM

Feb 28 How different media tend to transform politics and society

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

Mar 4-13 The medium is the message

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

Mar 18 & 20 The medium is the message (and it's not good)

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

Mar 25 - Apr 8 Mass media and propaganda

- Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda* (Excerpts)