Rollins College

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Syllabus for Mass Media and American Politics

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POLITICAL SCIENCE 315S: MASS MEDIA AND AMERICAN POLITICS

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

While the mass media is not formally part of our government, it exerts a powerful influence upon it, by shaping public attitudes, by helping citizens learn about the world, and by allowing public officials to communicate with citizens and with each other. This is an exciting time to be learning about the political role of the mass media. The rise of the Internet, the growth of 24-hour cable news and the decline of the “Big Three” television networks has created a much more fluid and stimulating media environment than existed just a decade or two ago.

But this course is not simply about the role played by the mass media in a political system. It will also cover how political actors inside and outside of government try to shape media outputs and how they try to use the press to accomplish their own goals. We will also look at how blogging and YouTube have blurred the lines between journalism and activism, and have enabled ordinary citizens to play increased roles in the civic dialogue.

The primary purpose of this course is to analyze the role of the media in American politics and its relationship with the public, business, government, and candidates for office in a democratic society. We will do this by first examining the role and structure of the news media as a political and economic institution, and how it is being transformed by the Internet. We also will examine the conventions and controversies associated with the journalism profession, including news reporting and the newsgathering process, questions of bias and objectivity, and investigative journalism. The course concludes with an examination of the effects that media have on citizens’ attitudes and behaviors and the strategies that political actors use to manage the news and further their policy objectives.

Throughout the term we will also want to pay close attention to the political process as it unfolds in front of us. I strongly encourage you to bring current events, especially those regarding the media, into class discussion.

This is a writing-intensive course with a major research paper at its heart. The paper must involve significant research on your part; it must also state a clear thesis and support it with relevant information. I also recommend that you acknowledge likely opposing arguments and develop a coherent argument against them.
COURSE GRADE:
Midterm: 25%
Final Exam: 25%
Bibliography 5%
Rough draft 10%
Research Paper: 25%
Attendance and Participation: 10%

RESEARCH PAPER: Students must write a 10-to-15 page research paper about the media and American politics. I expect to hear from you frequently about your progress. Please cite all of your sources, using a commonly used system such as that used by the Modern Language Association, by the American Political Science Association, or that found in The Chicago Manual of Style.

Topic due January 19. Simply inform me (preferably by e-mail) what topic you will study. **I must approve your topic.** When choosing a topic, I recommend that you consult with me early and often.

Prospectus due January 26. Your prospectus should be 1-2 pages long and explain why you have chosen this topic, why it is important, and how you intend to conduct your research.

Bibliography due February 23. Your bibliography should list those works you intend to use in writing your research paper. Explain the importance of each work and how it fits into your overall project. I expect that you will list at least 5-6 books or articles.

Rough draft due March 23.

Research paper due April 25.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION: I expect that you attend every class and do all the assigned reading. I also expect that you participate in class discussion and all other activities.

LATE POLICY: Assignments are due at 5 PM on the day listed in the syllabus. After that, late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter per day. If you foresee a serious problem with submitting an assignment on time, please notify me well in advance.
BOOKS:


All other readings will be on electronic reserve.

Assignments:

January 10: Orientation

January 12-24: The Media as a Political Institution

*Mass Media and American Politics*, ch. 1 & 3

*Media Power*, chs. 1 & 3, 31-36

Bennett et al, Introduction & ch. 2

January 26 – February 2: The Media as a Business, Journalism as a Profession

*Mass Media and American Politics*, chs. 2 & 4


February 7-14 The Media Today

*Mass Media and American Politics*, ch. 12

*Media Power*, chs. 4-6, 12, 24


February 16-23: Making the News

*Mass Media and American Politics*, ch. 5
*Media Power*, ch. 24

Midterm: **February 28**

March 2-16: How the Media Shapes Public Opinion
*Mass Media and American Politics*, ch. 7
*Media Power*, chs. 2, 7-8, 10, 29

March 21-23: The Media and Public Policy
*Mass Media and American Politics*, chs. 9-10
*Media Power*, chs. 21-22

March 28-30: The Media and Foreign Policy
*Mass Media and American Politics*, ch. 11
*Media Power*, chs. 9, 11, 26-27, 30
Bennett et al, chs. 1 & 3

April 4-6: How Political Actors Shape the News
*Media Power*, chs. 19, 21-23, 25, 28
Bennett, chs. 4-6

April 11-13: The Media and the Presidency
Edwards (entire)
*Media Power*, ch. 20

April 18-20: Media and Elections
*Mass Media and American Politics*, ch. 8
*Media Power*, chs. 13-18

April 25: The Media and Democracy