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PSC 342.01: Media and Public Opinion

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
Department of Political Science

PSc 342 Media and Public Opinion
Spring 2002

Dr. Laslovich
Office: LA 354
Hrs: M 11-12:00, TR
10-11:00 & by app't (4418)

Course Description

An examination of mass media's effects on American politics and public policy. Despite extensive research and informed opinion, the extent of the mass media's power remains the object of considerable debate. For example, is the mass media a "change agent," or rather an institution easily manipulated in support of the status quo? Primary attention focuses on the ability of the mass media to perform its "democratic function." Other topics include the media's influence on public opinion, for example, election outcomes; the adversarial relationship between the press and other political actors; and proposals to improve the media's role in the development of a democratic citizenry.

Texts

The following texts are required reading and are available at the University Bookstore:

Entman, Robert M. Democracy Without Citizens, Media and The Decay of American Politics. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989;

Graber, Doris A. Mass Media and American Politics. 6th ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2002; and

Graber, Doris A., Denis McQuail and Pippa Norris, eds. The Politics of News, The News of Politics. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1998.

Course Requirements

Students are evaluated upon the following basis:

Exam 1 (Feb. 26) Topics I-IV	25%
Exam 2 (April 4) Topics V-VII	25%
Article Review (Due in class April 18)	10%
Final Exam (Wed., May 15, 8:00-10:00) Topics VIII-X	40%

Exam and Grading Policies

- Exams are comprised of essay ("blue book") questions.
- The final exam is **comprehensive**.
- Students are not allowed to take exams before the scheduled date.
- Students **who are excused** from a scheduled exam may write a makeup.
- Students taking the P/NP grading option, must attain a "C" to receive a "passing" grade.
- Students **must complete all course requirements** to pass the course.

Drop/Add Deadlines

Feb. 15 – Last day to add/drop by Dial Bear and to receive a full refund for classes.

March 11 – Last day to drop/add (no refund).

May 10 – Last day for drop petitions.

The Classroom Learning Environment (authored by Dr. Ronald Perrin, Professor of Political Theory)

Wherever the learning process takes place (for example, in the library or the seclusion of one's study) it does so best if there is a minimum of distractions. This requirement poses special challenges for the learning that takes place in the lecture hall or the classroom, where the possibility of distractions is the greatest.

In order to establish and maintain a supportive learning environment for my students I will not tolerate the few individuals who might be prone to: a) come to class late or leave early, b) carry on private conversations during class, or c) use the lecture hall/classroom as an opportunity to read material, such as the Kaimin, that is not relevant to the subject matter under consideration.

The only exception to these conditions concern students whose work schedules or unanticipated appointments require them to arrive for class late or leave early. In these instances I would appreciate knowing of the circumstance before it occurs and, in all such instances, request that students do so as unobtrusively as possible. Thank you.

Lecture Topics and Readings

I Introduction – Media Power

What is the political importance of the mass media, including its functions and effects.

Who should control news making?

Graber, chapter 1 and

Graber, et al., Introduction, chapters 1 and 2.

II Influences Shaping the News – Government Regulation and Ownership

Examine the types of ownership and control of the media and the trend toward “infotainment.” Are there instances of “permissible censorship”?

Graber, chapters 1-3 and

Graber, et al., 4, 5 and 10.

III News Making in Ordinary and Extraordinary Events

What is “news”? How do news production constraints affect the definition of news? In times of crisis, why does the media abandon its adversarial role and tend to become “teammates of officialdom”?

Graber, chapters 4 and 5.

IV Media as Policy Makers

Critically assess the nature and extent of the media's public policy role.

Graber, chapter 6 and

Graber, et al., 6 and 11.

V Media Impact on Political Attitudes and Behavior

Examine the media's role as an "agent of socialization" and its effects on political attitudes and behavior. Does the media foster "socially undesirable behavior"?

Graber, chapters 7-8 and

Graber, et al., 7-9.

VI Struggle for Control: News From the Presidency and Congress

What is the basis of the adversarial relationship and the resources each brings to the "negotiation of the news."

Graber, chapter 9 and

Graber, et al., 3.

VII Covering the Justice System and State and Local News

Compare and contrast the differing levels of media coverage of the courts and state and local news. For example, do cameras belong in the courtroom?

Graber, chapter 10.

VIII Foreign Affairs Coverage

What are the reasons and consequences of inadequate media coverage of foreign affairs?

Graber, chapter 11.

IX Media and Democracy

Does the media undermine "citizenship" and thus the essence of democracy?

Entman, passim.

X Conclusion

Graber, chapter 12 and

Graber, et al., 12 and Conclusion.