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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 2001

Dr. Laslovich
Office: LA 354
Hrs: MWF 1-2:00,
and 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; "attack journalism" 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. Media Power In Politics. 4th ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000; and
Sabato, Larry J. Feeding Frenzy, Attack Journalism and American Politics. Baltimore: Lanahan Publishers, 2000.

Course Requirements

Students will be evaluated upon the following basis:

Exam 1 (Feb. 12) Topics I and II	25%
Exam 2 (March 2) Topics III and IV	25%
Book/Article Report (Due in class April 20)	20%
Final Exam (Tues., May 15, 3:20-5:20) Topics V-VII	30%

Drop/Add Deadlines

Feb. 16 – Last day to add/drop by Dial Bear and to receive a full refund for classes .

March 12 – Last day to drop/add (no refund).

May 11 – Last day for drop petitions.

Makeup Exam Policy

Students who are excused from a scheduled exam may write a makeup. In fairness to all students, the instructor must approve exam absences.

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 – Putting Mass Media Effects in Perspective
Graber, chapters 1-6; and
Entman, chapters 1-3.
- II Shaping the Political Agenda and Public Opinion
Graber, chapters 7-12; and
Entman, chapter 4.
- III Media and Political Campaigns
Graber, chapters 13-18.
- IV Controlling Media Power: Political Actors versus Mass Media
Graber, chapters 19-24.
- V Media and Public Policy
Graber, chapters 25-30.
- VI Regulation and Manipulation of the Press
Graber, chapters 31-36; and
Entman, chapters 5 and 6.
- VII Conclusion
Sabato, *passim*.
Entman, chapter 7.