

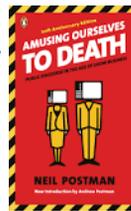


POLS 306

Mass Media & American Politics

Required Text

Postman, Neil, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985, 2005)

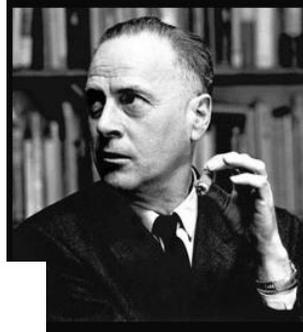


"Politics is just like show business."

-- Ronald Reagan, 1966

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 Office Hours: T TH 8-9:30am Zulauf 405

Online Course



Printing made literature possible. It did not merely encode literature. That is what I mean when I say that (in the not-so-long run) the medium is the message.

(Marshall McLuhan)



These days it seems like you are nobody if you are not on television, have a heavily-trafficked online presence, and regularly appear in the media. Reality TV, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and smart phone apps have become a routine part of life for the vast majority of Americans. Image and images are everything. As a result we will take a critical look at mass media: what it is, how it operates, and what effect it has. But we will go further and particularly examine media as it relates to government and public life in general. No longer confined to elections and campaigns, media appeals have become standard fare in the day-to-day conduct of government. Such appeals are used by private interests as well as by official decision makers to further partisan and self-serving objectives.

Politics is show business. Nearly every politician has a web presence and regularly appears on popular talk shows to "spin" issues in an attempt to appeal to the public. In short, the use and misuse of media by political elites for political purposes has transformed the practice of leadership and governance and raises questions about democratic process and policy outcomes. In this class we will broadly examine image-based, media-driven-politics in the United States both among citizens and between political elites and the public. What are the implications for government and politics of having instant and continuous media accessibility and connectivity?

Do These Things in This Order

- Module 01** - Lecture – Media Power and Government Control: An Introduction to Mass Media and American Politics; Reading: Postman - Introduction to the Twentieth Anniversary Edition, In 1985, and Foreword
- Module 02** - Lecture: Media Ownership and Regulation
- Module 03** - Reading: Postman – Ch.1-2
- Module 04** - Lecture: Freedom of the Press
- Module 05** - Film: *All the President's Men* (1976); FYI – “Flow Chart” in Content
- Module 06** - Reading: Postman – Ch.3-4
- Module 07** - Lecture – Prior Restraint; Lecture – Libel
- Module 08** - Reading: Postman – Ch.5-6
- The Midterm Exam will cover Modules 01-08.**
- Module 09** - Lecture: News Outlets and Their Audiences - Enhancing or Hindering Political Freedom?
- Module 10** - Film: *Network* (1976)
- Module 11** - Reading: Postman – Ch.6-7
- Module 12** - Lecture: News Imperatives - Reporting Routines and Bias
- Module 13** - Reading: Postman – Ch.8-9
- Module 14** - Lecture: Media as Policy Makers
- Module 15** - Postman - Ch.10-11
- Module 16** - Lecture: Media Campaigns & Elections
- The Final Exam will cover Module 09-16.**

Media & Politics Syllabus Page 2



Due Dates! No Late Work Allowed. ☹️

- All Discussion Board posts must be completed by Friday Dec 8 Noon.
- Term Papers due by Friday Dec 8 Noon.
- Both exams must be completed by Wed Dec 13th Noon.

Course Requirements

On-Line Participation

You are required to go to the discussion board on Blackboard and for each forum post one (and not more than two) messages (roughly 3-4 sentences) about the relevant course material or anything that relates to the course. You can either start your own thread or respond to a post that has already been made either by the instructor or another student. You should also read the posts that the other students in the class make. Your participation grade will be posted at the end of the course and is based on making at least one quality post in each of the different forums. Thus, making one quality post in each forum will earn you a perfect score for participation. You must complete all of your posts by the end of the semester by the date and time posted on the syllabus. No exceptions.

Mid-Term Exam

The mid-term will be an on-line, objective test consisting of both true-false and multiple choice questions. Once you begin the exam, you will have 30 minutes to answer 25 questions. Each question is worth 4 points each for a total of 100 points. The test will cover all of the material listed on the syllabus up until mid-term exam point on the syllabus. The test will be available on Blackboard throughout the semester. You may take the test at any time but you must complete it before the end of the course on the date specified on the syllabus.

Research Paper

The research paper requires you to provide an analysis/critique of an aspect of the mass media as it relates to politics and public life. You are required to choose a person or group in public life and analyze how they use media to deliver their message. For that individual or group, has the medium become the message? Examples of topics include individual politicians at the international, national, state, or local level; governmental agencies and offices, and non-governmental organizations that play a role in public life such as private businesses, interest groups, media organizations, and individuals. If you are unsure of whether your individual or group is appropriate be sure to check with the instructor. The paper must be 5-6pp., double-spaced, in length and uploaded to Blackboard through SafeAssign. Be sure to read the Paper Requirements document on Blackboard for details.

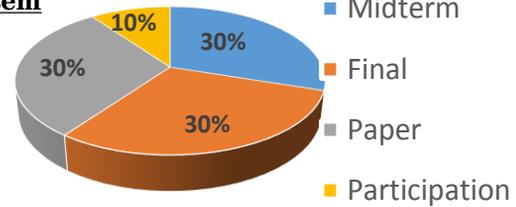
Final Exam

The final exam is the same format as the midterm but will only include the course material covered AFTER the midterm exam.

Your Grade

Grading System

93.5-100 = A
89.5-93.4 = A-
86.5-89.4 = B+
83.5-86.4 = B
79.5-83.4 = B-
74.5-79.4 = C+
69.5-74.4 = C
59.5-69.4 = D
0-59.4 = F



Suggested Reading (NOT Required): Research/Peer-Reviewed/Scholarly Articles FYI

Prior, Markus, "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (3, 2005): 577-92.

Forgette, Richard and Jonathan S. Morris, "High-Conflict Television News and Public Opinion," *Political Research Quarterly* 59 (3, 2006): 447-56.

Stroud, Natalie J., "Media Use and Political Predispositions: Revisiting the Concept of Selective Exposure," *Political Behavior* 30 (3, 2008): 341-66.

Altheide, David L, "The News Media, the Problem Frame, and the Production of Fear," *The Sociological Quarterly* 38 (4, 1997): 647-68

Turner, Joel, "The Messenger Overwhelming the Message: Ideological Cues and Perceptions of Bias in Television News," *Political Behavior* 29 (4, 2007): 441-64.

Shanahan, Elizabeth A., Mark K. McBeth, Paul L. Hathaway, and Ruth J. Arnell, "Conduit or Contributor? The Role of Media in Policy Change Theory," *Policy Sciences* 41 (2, 2008): 115-38.

The Fine Print

Cheating and Plagiarism - PLAGIARISM, SIMPLY DEFINED, IS TAKING SOMEONE ELSE'S WORDS OR IDEAS AND REPRESENTING THEM AS BEING YOUR OWN. It is specifically prohibited by University regulations, which state: "Good academic work must be based on honesty. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work that which he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university." (Undergraduate Catalog)

Statement Concerning Students with Disabilities - Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center. Any student requiring an academic accommodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center if they have not done so already. The Disability Resource Center is located in the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 [v], 815-753-3000 [TTY] or email at drc@niu.edu.