

Political Science 116
Dr. Sanders
Spring 2006
Meredith 212
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x3172

Media and Modern Politics

COURSE:

This class will explore the impact of the mass media, particularly television, on politics in the United States. We will look at the structure of the mass media and the way the organizational needs of media businesses shape news and entertainment programming. We will examine the impact of the media on the public, both in terms of the way it shapes opinions, and the way in which it focuses attention on particular issues. Finally we will explore the impact of the media on the institutions of American government and the way in which they operate. How has the media changed the nature of the election process, the Presidency, and Congress?

I think it is impossible to talk about contemporary American politics without talking about television. We find television everywhere in all of our governing institutions in both important and seemingly trivial ways. When the President wants to pursue a new policy, he goes on television. When Al Gore lost the Presidential election, he went on Saturday Night Live, and now he hawks Viagra and Diet Pepsi in television ads and is a regular on Comedy Central's The Daily Show. When Al Gore was trying to decide whether or not to run for President in 2004 he made visits to David Letterman and Jay Leno and hosted Saturday Night Live. And potential candidates for the Presidency in 2008 have already begun the late-night talk-show circuit.

However, while we, the American public, still look to television to tell us about what is happening and it still seems as if none of our leaders will take any step without, at a minimum, considering how it will look on television, we now also have to consider the Internet. Politics may revolve more around television than our newest form of instant communication, but that is changing. It is not yet as important for a candidate to have a good website as it is for her or him to run good television ads, but at some point in the future, that is likely to shift.

Still, while the influence of the media on American politics is something often remarked upon, it is not very well understood. Television and the Internet have an impact on our political system, but the particulars of that influence are not easy to sort through. I hope that this class will allow us all to understand that influence more clearly.

If you are an active participant in this class, you can help improve the quality of this venture, both for yourselves and for the rest of the class, including me. (I have no more desire to sit through a boring class than you do!!) So do the readings and the assignments and come to class prepared. If you do, we all will enjoy this semester a whole lot more than if you do not, and you (and I) will probably learn more as well!!

For more information about other course offerings and policies of the Department of Politics and International Relations, see the Department's [home page](#).

READINGS:

There are six books available for purchase at the bookstore. They are:

- Davis, Richard, *Politics Online*
- Farnsworth, Stephen and Lichter, Robert, *The Mediated Presidency*
- Lenz, Timothy, *Changing Images of Law in Film and Television Crime Stories*
- Mindich, David, *Tuned Out*
- Powers, John, *Sore Winners*
- West, Darrell, *Air Wars*, Fourth Edition

In addition, I strongly urge you to read a daily newspaper and watch the evening news.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. Preparation for and participation in class discussions. All readings should be done by the time of the class for which they are assigned and I will take attendance and call on people in class (If you are not in class I will assume you are not prepared). Please note, at times the class discussion will fall behind the syllabus. This is (partially anyway) by design. Please keep up with the reading as noted in the syllabus. My expectation is that you will do so. And we will catch up. 10%.

2. There will be a series of five short (3-6) page essay assignments through the course of the semester. The essays will require no reading aside from that already assigned for the class, but most of them will require that you watch some television news or entertainment programming or gather information from the Internet. Work on these papers should be done following standard rules of academic honesty. For more information about [academic dishonesty](#), see the discussion on the Department of Politics and International Relations Website. The specific questions will be passed out at least one week before they are due. Each of these essays will be worth 12.5% of your grade for a total of 62.5%.

3. There will be a final exam on Tuesday, May 9 at 2:00 pm. The exam will be worth 27.5% of your grade.

ASSIGNMENTS:

I. The Media: Television and Newspapers as Institutional Actors:

Check out a variety of media sources on the web. For example, look at [The New York Times](#). Or the TV Networks. Try [CBS](#) Or [NBC](#) Or the local Des Moines stations [KCCL-TV8](#) or [WHO-TV13](#)

January 17: Introduction - no readings.
January 19: Mindich, chapters 1,2.
January 24: Mindich, chapters 3,4.
January 26: Mindich, chapters 5,6.
January 31: Mindich, chapter 7.
February 2: *Essay #1 due*

II. Agenda-Setting in Television and Internet News and Entertainment Programming:

You might want to check out some other media news and entertainment web sites such as [Disney](#) Or [Fox](#).

February 7: Lenz, chapters 1,2.
February 9: Lenz, chapter 3.
February 14: Lenz, chapter 4.
February 16: Lenz, chapter 5.
February 21: Lenz, chapter 6.
February 23: *Essay #2 due*.

III. Media and the Election Process:

February 28: West, chapters 1,2.
March 2: West, chapters 3,4.
March 7: West, chapters 5,6.
March 9: West, chapters 7,8.
March 14: West, chapters 9,10.
March 16: *Essay #3 due*

March 21, 23: Spring Break: Enjoy.

IV. The Media and the Institutions of American Government:

Check Out the [White House on the Web](#), or the [House of Representatives](#) or [Senate](#) web sites.

March 28: Farnsworth and Lichter, chapters 1,2.

March 30: No class. I will be out of town.

April 4: Farnsworth and Lichter, chapters 3,4.

April 6: Farnsworth and Lichter, chapters 5,6.

April 11: Farnsworth and Lichter, chapter 7.

April 13: *Essay #4 due.*

V. Public Policy, Television, the Internet and the Future of American Politics:

Check Out the [Yahoo Politics](#) Web Site, or the sites of the [Democratic](#) and [Republican](#) Parties.

April 18: Davis, chapters 1,2,3.

April 20: No class. I will be out of town.

April 25: Davis, chapters 4,5,6.

April 27: *Essay #5 due.*

May 2: Powers, Introduction, chapters 1,2,3,4.

May 4: Powers, chapters 5,6,7, Epilogue, Afterword

Final Exam on Tuesday, May 9. 2:00-3:50.