



Politics, Society, and the Mass Media (POLS-3000)

Winter Semester, T, 6-8.45 PM // C244

Instructor: James Magnus-Johnston.

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MPhil Political Economy, Cambridge University

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Summary: This course examines the relationship between the mass communications media and the political and social processes in which they operate, investigating the state of research on mass media, the role of media in creating and shaping political awareness, and in influencing human behaviour and values. Examples of topics that may be covered include media ownership and organization patterns, media in the electoral process, media in different global contexts, media and populism, propaganda, media freedom, and public opinion.

Prerequisite: 30 credit hours of university-level studies, including six credit hours in social science.

Objectives:

- Identify mass media institutions and what they do
- Understand critical perspectives of sociological, political, and communications theorists
- Apply critical theories to rhetorically analyze media discourse
- Describe the reciprocal persuasive influence of mass culture and social/political institutions
- Interpret one's own production and consumption of media to enhance self-understanding

Deadline for withdrawal without academic penalty: March 21

Reading List

REQUIRED TEXTS

Hirst, M., Harrison, J., and Mazepa, P. *Communication and New Media: from Broadcast to Narrowcast*. Toronto: Oxford, 2014.

REQUIRED READING (chapters will be assigned in class from the following texts)

Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet is doing to Our Brains*. W.W. Norton, 2010.

Davis, Evan. *Post-Truth: Why we have reached peak bullshit and what we can do about it*. Little Brown Books,

2017.

Gardner, Howard, and Katie Davis. *The App Generation: How Today's Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World*. Yale University Press, 2013.

Herman, E., and Chomsky, N. *Manufacturing Consent: The political economy of the mass media*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The extensions of man*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen, 1982.

Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. Vintage Books, 2005.

Tolentino, Jia. *Trick Mirror, Reflections on Self-Delusion*. Random house, 2019.

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

Agger, Ben. *Oversharing: Presentations of Self in the Internet Age*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Burgess, Jean, Joshua Green, Henry Jenkins, and John Hartley. *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Polity Press, 2009.

Campbell, Heidi. *When Religion Meets New Media*. Routledge, 2010.

Morozov, Evgeny. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. Penguin Books, 2011.

O'Reilly, Terry. *The Age of Persuasion: How Marketing Ate Our Culture*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010.

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| Participation (inc. attendance, discussion) | 10% |
| Media log (Feb 15 / Apr 12) | 20% |
| Learning objectives (in class) | 5% |
| Mid-term test (take-home; due Mar 1) | 10% |
| Media design concept (due Mar 15) | 10% |
| Presentation (sign up for your timeslot) | 20% |
| Final media project (due Apr 12) | 25% |

| Letter | % | GPA | Descriptor |
|---------------|----------|------------|-------------------|
| A+ | 90-100 | 4.5 | Exceptional |
| A | 80-89 | 4 | Excellent |
| B+ | 75-79 | 3.5 | Very Good |
| B | 70-74 | 3 | Good |
| C+ | 65-69 | 2.5 | Satisfactory |
| C | 60-64 | 2 | Adequate |
| F | 0-49 | 0 | Failure |

An "excellent" assignment (A) would display:

1. Original thinking and a superior grasp of the subject matter
2. A highly developed capacity for critical evaluation, synthesis, and creativity
3. Appropriate descriptions and quotations
4. Organizing and subordinating information well; writing and/or speaking clearly

5. The use of research sources using *any* recognized style format. For reference, see: Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. Eighth edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018

Class participation: Your participation grades will be posted at the middle and the end of the semester. You will be graded on the quality and quantity of interaction – that is, not only the volume of interaction, but its quality. Attendance and peer reviews will also be factored into your participation grade.

Media log: You will be expected to gauge and discuss your usage of the media in an informal media log consisting of one submission per class (approx. 100 words), with a focus on current controversies. Media sources include podcasts, news sites, newspapers, radio, TV, books, movies, and social media. In class, you will be asked to comment on the following: Did you interact with a short-format or long-format medium? How much time did you spend interacting with it? Did you consume news, sports, or entertainment? Did you interact consciously (opening a book or newspaper at a dedicated time) or unconsciously (clicking on a headline while performing another task)? *Please note that class readings may also count towards your media log entries.*

Media fast: At some point over the duration of the course, you will be expected to go on a ‘media fast’ for 48 hours (or more, if you can), during which you will avoid contact with electronic media. It’s suggested that you find a partner to do it with at the same time and schedule the exercise early in the semester. You should shut your mobile phone off for the duration of the fast. Please include a 500-word summary of the experience in your media log, and pro-actively report on the experience during in-class discussion.

Learning reflections: From time to time, I will pose questions for your response in class. Short periods of class time will be allocated to complete those reflections. *Note that your attendance will be gauged partly based on your submissions.*

Presentation: For each chapter, students will prepare a presentation that summarizes the main argument of the reading in order to catalyze in-class discussion. Presentations are intended to be substantive, yet conversational. Those performing the summary will be asked to consider and summarize: the main argument/point; the sub-sections in support of the main argument/point; the implications and conclusion. Please also provide a critical analysis, including a series of questions to engage discussion. We will be asking for you to consider whether or not there was a problem with the author’s argument. Is there something that wasn't considered? Questions should lead the class to defend/critique the reading and may be posed throughout the presentation or at the end of it. Be sure to sign up early for your timeslot, and *please note that a media log entry will not be required on the date of your presentation. Note also that a portion of your grade will be provided by your peers, but that peer reviews are accepted only as recommendations to the instructor. Final grades will be vetted and adjusted by the instructor.*

Media design concept: In preparation for your media commentary, you are invited to outline your commentary on a concept that has been presented in class (preferably one you have not presented on). You can use a number of different “design” modes, including (but not limited to): a traditional essay, a video project, a narrated slideshow, or another mode of presenting ideas. You will still need to create a “thesis” and scope out your research (a problem or research question at the top of the assignment) so that you can make good judgments about what to include. Please consult 5-8 sources and list them bibliographically.

Media commentary (“final project”): Based on your design project, you will complete a project that not only outlines a substantive concept that has been presented in class, but also your commentary on the implications of that concept for politics and society.

Policies

Final grades: Grades submitted by instructors become final only after they are vetted by the Dean’s Council. That process occurs early in January for fall semester grades and early in May for winter semester grades.

Academic integrity: *Academic Integrity*—All material referred to in any assignment MUST be appropriately referenced. Plagiarism is a serious matter. Students should be aware of CMU Academic Policies, particularly those regarding academic misconduct (plagiarism and cheating), which apply to all University courses. These are detailed on CMU’s [website](#) and in the CMU Calendar. If you still have questions about appropriate referencing and what plagiarism is, a useful tutorial can be found [here](#). For more information on CMU policies regarding grades, academic misconduct, appeals, and other matters, please see CMU’s *Academic Calendar*.

Accessibility: CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with disabilities. If you are eligible for these services or have questions about becoming eligible, please contact Sandra Loeppky, Coordinator of Accessibility Programs at sloepky@cmu.ca or 204.487.3300 x.340. In recognition of individuals with asthma, allergies and severe environmental/chemical sensitivities, CMU is striving to become a scent-free campus. Students, staff and guests are asked to refrain from wearing fragrances and scented personal care products at CMU. This includes perfumes, colognes, aftershave and scented hair products. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated by those affected.

Academic support services: Student studying, tutoring, and the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) program are offered to CMU students free of charge in the Marpeck Mezzanine.

Counselling: University students face many challenges and at times may benefit from having a trained professional to talk to. There are qualified counsellors at CMU who volunteer their services free of charge to students on the CMU campus. Students wishing to book an appointment with a counsellor are asked to contact the North Side Receptionist at 204.487.3300 or info@cmu.ca. Confidentiality is maintained at all times. The counselling office is located at C365 (north side) and is free for CMU students.

Course Schedule

| | | Hirst et al // Supplementary | |
|---|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Dialectics of Communication | | | |
| Jan 11 | Digital dilemmas: clashes + the creation of new ideas | Intro | |
| Jan 18 | Political economy of media and communications | 1-2 | Chomsky, Ch. 1 |
| A Brief History of Media | | | |
| Jan 25 | The human-machine dialectic | 3 | McLuhan Ch. 1 |
| Feb 1 | A brief history of print media | 4 | Ong Ch. 3-4 |
| Feb 8 | A history of graphic media and television | 5 | Postman Ch. 6-7 |
| Feb 15 | Tech evolution, mass communication, and the culture industry | 6-7 | Horkheimer + Adorno |
| | <i>Media log due; test assigned</i> | | |
| | <i>Reading week - no class</i> | | |
| Contemporary issues in media | | | |
| Mar 1 | Digital media: its evolution, promise, and impact | 8 | Carr, Ch. 5-6 |
| Mar 8 | Government regulation of communication | 9 | Public Policy Forum reader |
| Mar 15 | Journalism "post-truth" | 10 | Davis, Ch. 1 + 11 |
| | <i>Media design concept due</i> | | |
| Broadcast to Narrowcast: A surveillance political economy? | | | |
| Mar 22 | Social media and the surveillance society | 11 | Tolentino |
| Mar 29 | The political economy of social media and digital marketing | 12 | Chomsky |
| Apr 5 | Electoral politics and new media | 13 | TBD |
| Apr 12 | Conclusion: media log summaries and political positions (final assignments due) | | |
