“The medium is the message.” – Marshall McLuhan, 1964

“Politics is just like show business.” – Ronald Reagan, 1966

“There is no such thing as Objective Journalism, the phrase itself is a pompous contradiction in terms.”

-- Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ’72*

These days it seems like you are nobody if you are not on television, have a heavily-trafficked web 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 politics of having instant and continuous media accessibility and connectivity?

On-Line Course

Instructor: Artemus Ward  
Office: 410 Zulauf Hall  
E-mail: aeward@niu.edu  
Website: http://polisci.niu.edu/polisci/faculty/profiles/ward/  
Office Hours: M W 11am-noon; 1pm-2pm and by appointment

Required Texts


Course Requirements

On-Line Participation

Each student should go on-line each week through Blackboard, and read the messages posted to the discussion board. You are also required to post in 7 different weeks of the course. Hence, making a post every other week will suffice. In these weeks you should post at least one (and not more than two) messages of your own, either responding to someone or making your own thread, about that week’s course material and/or current events that relate to the course. Do this by Sunday night. The participation grade will be calculated by averaging the % of quality posts you make (out of 7 weeks) with the % of posts that you read. The final participation grade will be posted at the end of the course.

Mid-Term Exam

The mid-term will be an on-line, objective test consisting of both true-false and multiple choice questions. The test will cover all of the material listed on the syllabus up to the mid-term exam date. The test will be available on Blackboard for a 24-hour period. You may take the test at any time during that window. Once you begin the exam, you will have 30 minutes to answer 33 questions. Each question is worth 3 points each for a total of 99 points.
Research Paper

The final project 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 an actor (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.

1. Background. Provide a brief background discussion of your actor. For an individual, discuss where they grew up, their education, work history, and all the relevant information that led them to their current position. For a group discuss when and how they were founded, the general demographic makeup, structure of the organization.

2. Media. Identify the media your actor uses to deliver their message. An obvious starting place will be the internet. Does your actor have a web presence, e-mail list, streaming video, etc.? Does your actor regularly appear on television shows, in newspaper articles, etc.?

3. Message. Identify the actor's message. Give examples of recent “messages” that your actor is communicating via the media that you identified.

4. Effect. Discuss what you regard as the effect of your actor's message as delivered by the media you identified. Is your actor enjoying success or failure and can that success or failure be traced to an effective or ineffectlve message and/or mode of delivery? Is the message clear and effective or confusing and ineffective? Are the media being used appropriately or inappropriately? What evidence is there of your actor's “success” or “failure”? Has the medium become the message?

Your paper must adhere to the following requirements:

a. The paper must be 5-6 pages long and contain at least four different sources such as books or articles that relate to your topic. These sources can be on-line and can be suggested sources linked from the syllabus and/or sources you locate on your own. They must be discussed and cited in your essay and also listed in your bibliography. While you may use any book or article, in order to earn an “A” on the paper all four sources must be scholarly books or articles in academic journals. Toward this end I strongly recommend using JSTOR or another scholarly database to find articles in journalism, communications, political science, and other related areas. Papers that rely on popular sources such as newspaper articles and websites can only earn a “B” at best. Papers that rely on general webpages such as Wikipedia can only earn a “C” at best. Note: course lectures and the required books and readings for the course do
NOT count as a source toward this requirement.

b. As with all papers, the paper for this class must be type-written or word-processed, double-spaced, with normal fonts (usually 12 pt.) and margins (at most one inch all around) and no fancy folders (a solid staple in the corner will do just fine). Make sure that you properly attribute and cite whenever you use information from a source such as a book, article, webpage, or film. Your paper must contain citations. You may use any accepted citation format such as within-text-cites, footnotes, or endnotes. Your paper must include a works cited/references/bibliography at the end of your essay. You must use an accepted bibliographic style. Consult a resource such as the Chicago Style manual or similar work if you are unsure of proper citation/bibliographic formats. This is particularly crucial for internet sources. Simply providing the web address (URL) is not sufficient.

c. Before you start writing this or any essay, ask yourself: What is my overall argument/thesis? Am I supporting my position with reasons and/or evidence? Am I structuring my discussion so that it is as clear and comprehensive as it can be? Have I provided examples and explanations for each argument that I advance? What are the possible counter-arguments that my critics might bring up and how would I respond to those criticisms?

d. In grading your essays I will consider whether you have (a) developed a clear and thoughtful thesis, (b) supported your thesis with a well-reasoned and well-organized discussion, (c) taken into account opposing points of view, (d) demonstrated your familiarity with course materials, and (e) followed the paper requirements including length, sources, and the rules of proper grammar, spelling, and citation/bibliographic format. Note: JSTOR is not a source and should not be cited in your bibliography. It is a highly recommended search engine which allows you to locate specific sources.

e. You must submit your papers through SafeAssign on Blackboard.

Final Exam

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

Grading System

Final grades will be determined by the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Grade Breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>% of Total Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total= 100%</td>
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</tbody>
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Course Policies

1. Extracurricular Activities - It is your responsibility to notify me in advance of any activities that will disrupt your attendance. If your activities make it impossible for you to attend classes each week, you should consider withdrawing from the course. Material is covered in class that cannot be found in the course readings.

2. Late Work - Anything turned in late will be marked down one-third grade for every day it is overdue. Exceptions are made only in the most extraordinary circumstances and I will require some sort of documentation to make any accommodation.

3. 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)

4. 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.

5. Undergraduate Writing Awards - The Department of Political Science will recognize, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Winners are expected to attend the Department's spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and $50.00. Papers, which can be submitted by students or faculty, must be supplied in triplicate to a department secretary by the end of February. All copies should have two cover pages - one with the student's name and one without the student's name. Only papers written in the previous calendar can be considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year's competition even if the student has graduated.

6. Department of Political Science Web Site - Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to http://polisci.niu.edu

Course Calendar

Week 1 Course Introduction

Review Syllabus
Censored 2013 – Foreword and Introduction.

Week 2 Media Power and Government Control

Reading: *Censored 2013* – Ch. 1 pp.35-84.

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**Week 3 Media Ownership and Regulation**

Lecture: Media Ownership and Regulation.

Reading: Postman - Ch.1-2.

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**Week 4 Freedom of the Press**

Lecture: Freedom of the Press.

Reading: *Censored 2013* – Ch. 1 pp. 85-136.

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**Week 5 Freedom of the Press**

Lecture: Prior Restraint.

Reading: Postman - Ch. 3-4.

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**Week 6 Freedom of the Press**

Lecture: Libel.

Reading: *Censored 2013* – Ch. 2.

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**Week 7 Freedom of the Press and Political Freedom**

Lecture: News Outlets and Their Audiences - Enhancing or Hindering Political Freedom?

Reading: Postman - Ch. 5.
Suggested Reading:


**The Midterm Exam** will be available on-line for a 24-hour period beginning at 6pm on Wed October 9.

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**Week 8 News Imperatives**

Lecture: News Imperatives - Reporting Routines and Bias.

Reading: *Censored 2013* – Ch. 3.

Suggested Reading:


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**Week 9 News Imperatives**

Reading: *Censored 2013* – Ch. 5.

Film: *Network* (1976).

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**Week 10 News as Activism**

Lecture: Media as Policy Makers.

Reading Postman - Ch. 6-7.
Suggested Reading:


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**Week 11 Alternative News**

Lecture: Alternative News Sources – Comedy

Reading: Postman - Ch. 8, 9.

Suggested Reading:


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**Week 12 Alternative News**


Reading: *Censored 2013* – Ch. 9.

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**Week 13 Mass Mediated Campaigns**

Lecture: The Political-Media Industrial Complex: Conflict in Campaigns and Elections

Reading: Postman - Ch. 10-11.
Week 14 Thanksgiving Break

No Class

Week 15 Is There Such a Thing as Good/Positive News?

Reading: *Censored 2013* – Ch. 4.

Film: *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005).

Final Research Papers due on Wed Dec. 4. Submit to SafeAssign on Blackboard.

Week 16 Final Exam

Final Exam: Available on Blackboard for a 24-hour period beginning on W Dec. 11 at 6pm.