

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

Fall Semester 2017-18, T, 6-8.45 PM, [online](#) via zoom

Instructor: James Magnus-Johnston. PhD Candidate, McGill University; MPhil Economics, Cambridge University; BAs in Rhetoric & Communications, Political Studies (Hons.), and Theatre (Hons., Gold Medal), University of Winnipeg.

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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 which 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: Nov 12th, 2018

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.

Assignments and Grades

Participation (inc. attendance, discussion)	10%
Media log (Oct 22/Nov 26)	20%
Learning objectives (in class)	5%
Mid-term test (take-home; due Oct 29)	10%
Annotated bibliography (due Nov 12)	10%
Presentation (sign up for your timeslot)	20%
Final Essay (due Nov 26)	25%

Letter	Percentage	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

Class participation: Your participation grades will be posted at the middle and the end of the semester; each quarterly grade is worth 5%. You will be graded on the quality and quantity of interaction – that is, not only the volume of interaction, but its quality.

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, 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 objectives: Each student is required to provide a learning objective statement at the beginning of most (but not all) classes, outlining (a) your knowledge and interest in the topic at the beginning of each class; and (b) any additions to your knowledge of the topic at the end of the class. Short periods of class time will be allocated to ensuring statements are completed. Please keep a record of all your learning statements. *Note that your attendance will be gauged partly based on your submitted learning objectives.*

Presentation: 20 minutes during each class will be designated for a student to present on connections to readings and lectures with current events or material from other courses. Each of you will be expected to present on a topic of your choice. 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.*

Annotated bibliography: In preparation for your research paper, your annotated bibliography will give an account of the research that has been undertaken on a given topic. In addition to bibliographic data, an annotated bibliography also provides a concise (2-4 sentence) summary of each source and some assessment of its relevance to your paper. It is therefore important to define the scope of 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 8-10 sources.

Media commentary (2000 words): Each student is invited to write a 2000-word thesis dealing with a substantive issue from the course (ie. one of the themes from the list of topics). Your paper will be evaluated based on your definition of the issue, the quality of your argument, and the issue's contemporary relevance.

Policies

Handing in: Both e-mail and paper formats will be accepted for written assignments. If you submit by e-mail, watch for a reply from me within 24 hours confirming receipt of your document. If you do not receive my response, please contact me or drop into my office.

Late submissions: Late assignments are subject to a 5% per day penalty, including weekends. Extensions can be provided for extenuating circumstances. Extensions will be given for trips and involvement in sports and music activities *with advance notice.*

Final grades: Grades submitted by instructors are provisional until they have been vetted by the Dean's Council. That process occurs early in January for fall semester grades and early in May for winter semester grades.

Plagiarizing: Cases of plagiarizing are taken seriously and can result in academic penalties and disciplinary action. CMU policies regarding 'academic misconduct' can be found in the Academic Calendar, available at https://www.cmu.ca/uploaded/files/Academic_Calendar_Section_II_Academic_Policies.pdf

Accessibility: CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with unique needs. The Accessibility Services office coordinates with the Academic Office to provide academic accommodations to eligible students.

Course schedule

	Topic	Reading	Topic	Reading
THE DIALECTICS OF COMMUNICATION & MEDIA				
T	10-Sep Digital dilemmas <i>Introduction to the course.</i>	(intro)	Ideology in media - how to read the symbols <i>How to read a media piece as an ideological "artifact"</i>	Foss Hariman + Lucaites
T	17-Sep Political economy of media <i>How does the de/commodification of media inform politics, history, and social change?</i>	Ch. 1-2	Manufacturing consent <i>Herman and Chomsky argue that mass communication performs a propaganda function.</i>	Herman + Chomsky, Ch. 1
MEDIA HISTORY + SOCIO-CULTURAL EVOLUTION				
T	24-Sep The human/machine dialectic <i>How does technology increasingly mediate our interactions with nature and the world?</i>	Ch. 3	The medium is the message <i>What did McLuhan mean when he said the "medium is the message?" Why does it matter today?</i>	McLuhan Ch. 1
T	01-Oct A brief history of print media <i>The Gutenberg revolution: linking literacy to the social and political changes to follow.</i>	Ch. 4	Orality & Literacy <i>What are some of the differences between "oral" and "literate" modes of thought?</i>	Ong Ch. 3-4
T	08-Oct A brief history of graphic media <i>Photography and the development of cinema, mass media, and mass culture.</i>	Ch. 5	Amusing ourselves to death <i>Did Neil Postman predict the rise of authoritarianism through mass ("entertainment") culture?</i>	Postman Ch. 6-7
T	15-Oct Telegraphy to cyberia <i>Technological development, the 'information age,' and social change.</i>	Ch. 6-7	Mass communication & the culture industry <i>Horkheimer + Adorno present a critique of the capitalist "culture factory" and its passifying influences on society.</i>	Horkheimer + Adorno, PDF
	22-Oct The Internet golden age? <i>Digital media, the dream of the 'global village,' and critical reflections.</i>	Ch. 8	Internet media and the human brain <i>Nicholas Carr examines the connection between internet media consumption and shallow thinking.</i>	Twenge Carr, Ch. 5-7
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN NEW MEDIA				
T	29-Oct Government regulation <i>What modes of governance are used to regulate access to new media technologies?</i>	Ch. 9	Digital news, democracy, and ideology <i>Declining mainstream news, fake news, and new manufacturers of consent.</i>	Public Policy Forum (online)
T	05-Nov Who's a journalist now? <i>In an age of mass communication, is everyone a journalist?</i>	Ch. 10	The post-truth phenomenon and populism <i>How can we evaluate the truth-value and messages of propositions?</i>	Davis (video) Ch. 1 +11
POLITICAL ECONOMIES OF SURVEILLANCE AND COERCION				

T	12-Nov	Social media and surveillance Ch. 11 <i>We explore some of the contradictions of social media and data brokering</i>	Identity, opinion, opposition, and scale <i>Overvaluing opinions, maximizing opposition, and cheapening solidarity: the effects of media today</i>	Toletino Ch. 1 + 6
T	19-Nov	Big data: the surveillance economy Ch. 12 <i>How do commercial media legitimize growing political surveillance in our lives?</i>	Digital democracy vs. tyrannical cyberspace <i>"The hype of freedom on the web masks... disparities of power / dangers of blurring real and virtual identities"</i>	Zizek, video and short article
T	26-Nov	Politics and new media Ch. 13 <i>How has the shift towards digital media changed the nature of political participation?</i>	Media log sharing + future predictions <i>We'll spend the final class considering the influence of media in our lives and course revelations.</i>	