

**GRANDE PRAIRIE REGIONAL COLLEGE**

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 3030 (UT 3)**

**POLITICS AND THE MEDIA**

Winter, 2003

Instructor: Scott McAlpine

OH: TBA

Office: C 313

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

Office: 539-2982

e-mail: [mcalpine@gprc.ab.ca](mailto:mcalpine@gprc.ab.ca)  
[scottm@telusplanet.net](mailto:scottm@telusplanet.net)

website: <http://www.abn.gpab.net/polsci>  
 (Note: This site may change)

Home:

532-8720

fax:

539-2732 (24 hours)

surface mail: Dr. Scott McAlpine  
 Instructor of Political Science  
 Grande Prairie Regional College  
 10726-106 Ave.  
 Grande Prairie, Alberta  
 T8V 4C4

**BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course is an examination of the roles and behaviour of the mass media in the political process with particular emphasis on the Canadian experience. Communications theories such as those of Innis and McLuhan, Chomsky, political propaganda, the mass media and elections, opinion formation, and selected Canadian communications policies are among the topics studied.

The course was entirely re-written for 2000 and substantially revised for 2003 taking into account the events of 9-11 and its aftermath. Organized in three broad sections, we adopt an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the media with reference to the 'political' where the 'political' is broadly understood to include societal values as well as particular policy frameworks and effects of the media. Section 1 concentrates on traditional and critical theories of the media in society. Section 2 is a more traditional description of media contexts and policy frameworks in Canada and requires a thorough understanding of section 1 to hold it together. Section 3 examines the ways in which the mass media can generate effects on the public, or more broadly, the techniques which may be used to manipulate or influence the public including the nature of certain effects of the mass media focussing on elections, opinion formation, 'spin doctors' and so on. The concluding section examines the future of the media and its impact on politics and finally, examines the degree to which the media in society can be seen as or used as an instrument of change toward democracy, freedom, and/or expression of those groups lacking a means of communication in current democratic societies.

As it is probable that the United States will be at "war" with Iraq some time early in the course (January 24, 2003?), the course focus in this event will be the 'war on terrorism' and the use of

force and the role of the media to 'manufacture consent'. More will be said about this later.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

The following are the major objectives of this course:

1. The gaining of fundamental theories and generalizations about the media in society
2. The acquisition of specific factual knowledge about the media, its operations in Canada, and the ways that the media can be used to create effects.

### **COURSE THEMES:**

The Martin text most adequately sums up the thematic of the course in terms of "culture, domination, and opposition" which is the text's subtitle. Thus, we will focus on the macro and then the micro, insiders and outsiders, control and resistance. That media is essential to the functioning of democracy is, in many ways, taken as a given. The question is whether or not the media is essentially undemocratic or anti-democratic in operation and the degree to which strategies can actually be utilized by the public to create a more democratic media and, by extension, society particularly in the post-911 environment.

### **PRE-REQUISITE:**

There is **no formal pre-requisite** to this course. However, the course requires three main things from students:

1. An interest in the area
2. A willingness to critically analyze the mass media from a variety of perspectives
3. A willingness to engage in some degree of speculation and imagination.

### **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Due dates will be discussed depending on class start date.**

Internet/Preliminary Assignment:	January 29	10%
Midterm Examination	Exam Week	25%
Term Paper/Research Project:	March 19	30%
Final Exam	Exam Period	35%

### **A NOTE ON TERM PAPERS AND DUE DATES:**

Papers in this course are normally in the 12-15 page range (typed, double spaced) and represent a significant research effort. Papers **must** be in proper academic style. Suggested topics will be distributed. An alternative to the traditional library-based term paper is a paper based on either original research (content analysis of newspapers, etc.) **or** on the internet, etc. More will be said about this in class.

Papers and assignments are due on the date indicated. Late papers may be accepted but at a penalty of 5% per 24 hour period or portion thereof (including weekends and holidays). This late penalty may be waived in unusual circumstances. E-mail submissions will **not** be accepted under any circumstances. Faxes will be accepted in preference to snail mail for students outside of Grande Prairie.

### **TEXTS:**

#### **Required:**

Arthur Siegel. Politics and the Media in Canada (2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed.). ( Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1993)

Michele Martin with Graham Knight, Communication and Mass Media: Culture, Domination and Opposition. (Scarborough, Prentice-Hall, 1997).

Noam Chomsky, 9-11. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002).





- domestic geopolitics of continentalism and colonialism
- international geopolitics

Critical Concepts: Structure and Concentration

Background: Free Trade

Siegel, chapters 5, 6, 7, 9

## 2. THE PRESS AND POLITICS:

- overview
- news gathering structures

Seigel, chapter 8

## 3. THE MEDIA AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND EXPRESSION:

Critical Concepts: Materialism and Post-Materialism

Background Value Change in Democratic Societies

Seigel, chapter 10

## III: THE CREATION OF EFFECTS:

5 sessions

**The focus of this section is on the ways in which media effects can (presumably) be created with particular emphasis on 'democratic' societies and case studies.**

### 1. SOCIALIZATION, OPINION FORMATION, AND PROPAGANDA:

- models of socialization
- models of propaganda
- models of opinion formation

Critical Concepts: Levels of Orientation  
 Dimensions of Opinion  
 Median Voter Model  
 Agents of Socialization and Control  
 Product Adoption  
 Emotive vs. Cognitive Mobilization

Dawson et. al., Political Socialization chapter 10 (to be distributed)  
 Other readings TBA

### 2. TELEVISION AND HOLLYWOOD ENTERTAINMENT

- Hollywood
- Professional Sports
- Women's Representation
- Minority Representation

Critical Concepts: Representation and Silences

Martin Chapter 7

### **3. POPULAR PRINT TO MASS ADVERTISING: INDIRECT MEDIATION?**

- Popular Fiction
- Children's Comics
- Mass Advertising
- Video Games
- Popular Music

Martin, Chapters 8, 9, 10

### **4. NEWS: PROPAGANDA, CONSENT, AND RESISTANCE**

- National News
- International Monopolies
- Wag the Dog?

Martin, chapter 11

Herman and Chomsky, chapters 3, 4, 5, 6

### **5. POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND THE SPINDOCTORS**

- Elections and Electoral Behaviour
- Leadership
- Campaign debates
- the 1984, 1988 and 1993, 1997, and 2000 general elections

## **IV: CONCLUSIONS: BACK TO THE FUTURE?:**

**2 sessions**

### **1. GROUP MEDIATED POLITICS- STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE?:**

- resistance as a democratic necessity
- interest groups and media
- media as an instrument of political change

Pross, "Interest Groups: Talking Chameleons" (to be distributed)

Seigel, chapter 10 (re-read)

## **2. TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS:**

- the shrinking world
- CATV, satellite, and technological frontiers
- the emergence of the information economy
- the internet