Course Syllabus

MEDIA & POLITICS

University of Virginia

Course No. ISSS 3850

June 3---August 5, 2014

Tuesdays, 6 --9:45 pm

NOVA, Loudoun campus

Professor: Robert J. Guttman

Course Description:

The course will examine the role of mass media in the political process focusing on the presidency and presidential campaigns.

 Midterm elections for the House of Representatives, US Senate and many governors’ races will be held this November and the class will look at media coverage of these elections. We will also look at the media strategies of the various candidates running for office.

The course will look at print and broadcast news, social media and election campaigns.

The course will discuss the role of political advertising and whether or not negative ads actually work.

The course will focus on fundraising, media effects on public opinion and political participation.

We will look at how the media covers politics and how politicians and elected government officials use the media to spread the word about their programs.

We will discuss media strategies and media consultants and how the new social media has changed and is changing the landscape of politics today.

The class will look not only at the American media and the role they play in reporting on key foreign policy issues but how the international media also has a role in American foreign policy decision making by what stories they choose to make important.

We will look at global media firms from Rubert Murdoch’s media empire to CNN to the Financial Times to the Wall Street Journal to the Economist to the social media including the Huffington Post.

Required Books:

1. Media Power in Politics by Doris Graber, 2011, sixth edition, CQ Press
2. What I Saw At the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era by Peggy Noonan, Random House, 1990
3. Miami and the Siege of Chicago by Norman Mailer, 1968 Primus Press
4. Getting Elected: From Radio and Roosevelt to Television and Reagan; J. Leonard Reinsch; Hippocrene Books; 1988.

I will mention in every class other books I recommend plus Internet websites and various newspaper and magazine articles.

Course Requirements:

Class attendance is important and counts toward your final grade. This is a short summer course and students are expected to attend all classes. Students are expected to arrive on time for class. Coming in more than 15 minutes late will be counted as being absent.

Class participation is a key element in determining a student’s final grade. It is important that everyone express his or her views in class to make for a lively debate in each session.

Class participation and attendance will count for 10 percent of your final grade.

I will give assignments in class each week. The assignments will consist of writing a short paper (1-3 pages) due the next class meeting. The assignments will be about a topic we are discussing in class or a current event involving the media and politics.

The weekly short papers will make up 30% of your final grade.

The first written paper and oral presentation will count for 30% of your final grade.

The paper and presentation will have you acting as the press secretary to the President of the United States and conducting a daily briefing in the White House Press Office to members of the accredited White House media.

You will be giving a briefing on various topics. You are to choose two domestic issues and two foreign policy topics and explain the Presidents’ position.

After your talk the class will act as members of the media and ask you questions on the White House position on key issues of the day.

Students should use their imagination and be creative-and have some fun-in this exercise. Be sure and watch some press conferences on television and check out some previous press briefings on the Internet.

Your second written paper and oral presentation will also count for 30% of your final grade.

For this assignment you will be a reporter commenting on a key topic of the day.

You can be a blogger, broadcast journalist, newspaper reporter, radio journalist or a magazine reporter. Choose an Internet site or publication or cable or network television channel to represent.

You will give your talk (10-15 minutes in length) to the class and then answer questions from your classmates in a follow up question and answer period.

Pick a topic of interest to you. Give a non-partisan and objective talk so we do not know how you personally feel about the issue you are reporting on.

We will discuss both papers and talks in class before the papers and talks are due. The written papers will be from 10-12 pages and the oral presentations will be approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

First Class:

Introduction and Overview of the course. Discussion of the class and what is expected of the students. Go over the readings for the class and discuss the papers and talks. Overview of role of media in United States and role of politics in the country today.

Second Class:

Looking Back: The 2012 Presidential Race and how the various media covered the Obama and Romney campaigns. Did the media play a role in the final outcome of the media? Was the media biased in the campaign? How the candidates used media to their own advantages. The role of the presidential debates.

Third Class

The John F. Kennedy –Richard Nixon televised presidential debates. How television began to change politics in the United States.

From radio to television to the Internet—how new media of the time changes politics and how the media cover politics.

The role of debates from 1960 through 2012 and what to expect in 2016.

Fourth Class:

First paper oral presentations due in class.

Objective and non-partisan media—does it still exist today in our biased press.

Cable television: How Fox News and MSNBC present their conservative and liberal bias and views on an hourly basis. How does this affect politics and political decision making.

The role of social media. What power does Twitter, Facebook and bloggers have on politics today?

Fifth Class:

The media from newspaper columnists and well-known columnists to today’s Huffington Post and Politico websites.

A look back at how the media has covered America at war from Vietnam through the first Iraq War to the second Iraq War and Afghanistan.

The media and foreign policy will be discussed. We will look at the BBC and other international media and whether or not foreign media play a role in American politics.

Sixth Class:

A look back at the elections of 2000, 2004 and 2008. How the Internet changed the role of fundraising and media coverage.

The declining role of newspapers and magazines in our digital age. What will be the new media reporting on 2016 presidential campaign?

Seventh Class:

The Great Communicator: How President Ronald Reagan revolutionized the president’s role with the media. How the so-called ‘Teflon” president was covered by the media.

Reagan’s media strategy for the 1980 and 1984 presidential campaigns.

The negative presidential media campaign of 1988.

Eighth Class:

How the Obama White House media strategy works or does not work.

Is Obama a “Teflon” president who is rarely criticized by the media or does he get his share of complaints from the press?

What role is the media playing in the scandals of the second term of Obama?

Obama press conferences: Is he a good communicator?

The role of presidential press conferences from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama.

Ninth Class:

Deciding to run for president or Congress or for Governor. How do you plan a media strategy for your campaign.

As an elected official how do you work effectively with the media?

Primaries, caucuses and national political conventions: How does the media cover these important political events?

Tenth Class:

Second oral presentations due in class.

Review of the class. What will politics and the media look like in 2016 and beyond.

The changing nature of media companies and the changing nature of presidential politics.

UVA Honor System:

The University of Virginia Honor System will be followed in the class. All students are expected to adhere to the University of Virginia Honor System code.

Special Needs:

It is the policy of the University of Virginia to accommodate students with special needs in accordance with federal and state laws.

Learning Outcome:

As a result of completing this course, students will be able to:

Understand the role of the media in covering politics, political campaigns, and the government.

Understand how politics works at the national level and how politicians running for national office make up successful media strategies.

Understand the role of the traditional media and the new social media in commenting on politics and government today.

Understand decision making in the media and media firms and decision making by politicians and government officials.