

Mass Media, Public Opinion & Public Policy
34:833:521:67684
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Instructor:

Bob Sommer, Executive Vice President

MWW Group

Office Hours: By Appointment – Please talk with me after class or call my Executive Assistant,
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Course Overview and Objective

Media responds to government officials. Or is it the other way around? Who sets public policy? The media? The public majority? The influential minority? Elected or appointed officials?

These are the who, what, when, where, why and how of our class. As we will explore, government officials can't exist without media coverage but without the government, there would be little for the media to do.

Now, another question. Is the media independent? Before you answer, think about it. If nobody watches, listens or reads the news, media corporations wouldn't be in business for very long. That, of course, is what the media is all about. Virtually, all media is for-profit and publicly traded, so shareholders would *like* an outstanding product, but **expect** returns on their investment -- meaning the media must create a product that the public will pay attention to so advertisers can be charged premiums for space and air time. Even public television and radio cannot exist without viewers and listeners like you (making corporate and individual contributions)!

A harsh analysis? Perhaps, but no more so than the media's typical view of campaign contributions and lobbyists. No doubt this is but one opinion of the media, but it will give you a sense of how we will explore the newsmakers and news creators in our class.

We will examine explore four diverse issues as in-depth case studies, issues that are making headlines, issues that are polarizing and issues that have forceful advocates on both (or in one case – all three) sides. You will have the chance to play policy maker, key influencer, reporter, advertiser, public affairs professional and the voting public.

We will explore (1) the battle over the Alito nomination or the Abramoff investigation (based on timing of events); (2) a fight between pharmaceutical companies over regulatory approvals; (3) the debate this Spring to pass the New Jersey budget and (4) the struggle over stem cell research on both the federal and state levels.

This course is designed to make you a better media consumer. You'll come away from our course with a new opinion toward the who, what, where, why and how. And, you'll be better writers as well!

Class Procedures

Classes will consist of lectures, extensive discussion of the day's subject and several guest lecturers with practical experience in Washington and New Jersey. We will also have 2-3 role-playing experiences as class sessions.

Course Requirements

Research Paper - Each student will choose a major national or New Jersey policy issue being covered extensively by the media (other than the four we will examine). The student will prepare a 15-20 page double-spaced paper comparing, critiquing and recommending changes in media strategy by both sides in the debate. Students must consult with me in advance to determine the efficacy of the issue.

Papers will be presented orally at the end of the semester following my review and revisions by the student.

News Releases – For each of the four case studies, students will be assigned a specific position to prepare a two-page news release stating the position as if to be used in a news conference.

Class Participation - Students are required to attend classes. It is important for everyone to attend, especially when we have a guest lecturer, in order to ensure all students participate in discussions. If a student misses more than one class, he or she should provide me with a good explanation. The instructor reserves the right to reduce a student's grade by one mark (B+ to B) if the student misses several classes.

For each of the four case studies, students will be assigned a specific position to prepare a two-page "white paper" stating the position as if to be presented to a public official or reporter.

Grades

Research paper	40%
Research paper oral presentation	10%
News releases	20% (5% each)
Class participation	30%

Course Outline

1. January 23 Introduction/Overview of the Four Case Studies
2. January 30 Mass Media, New Media Public Policy and Political Issues
3. February 6 The Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of Coverage and Technology
4. February 13 Case Study 1
First News Release Due
Topic for Research Paper Selected
5. February 20 The Newsmakers and How Government Officials Talk with Voters and How Voters Talk Back
6. February 27 Case Study 2
Second News Release Due
7. March 6 Public Opinion Research and Impact on Decision Making
8. March 20 Case Study 3
Third News Release Due
Research Paper Outline Due (optional)
9. March 27 Advertising – Is the Money Spent Wisely
10. April 3 Case Study 4
Fourth News Release Due
11. April 10 Evaluating News, Reporters and Sources
Research Paper Due
12. April 17 Consequences of News? Who's Being Served?
13. April 24 Oral Presentations
14. May 1 Oral Presentations

Required Readings

Students will be expected to read *The New York Times* national and metro sections religiously as well as *The Times Sunday Week in Review*. (And through class discussion I will know who's been reading!) Handouts occasionally will be provided for the following week's class. *Democracy at Risk* will be required reading for the final paper and class discussions. In addition, students will need to choose one network, cable or radio evening news show and become a consistent viewer or listener during the semester.