This course will ask you to focus critical attention on the function of mass media in American political discourse. In order to do so, the course is structured according to five areas of study. First, we will discuss what we mean by “mass media.” In this section, we will discuss what counts as “media,” the functions and purposes of media production, patterns of media ownership, and patterns of regulation. In the second section, we will focus on the consumption of mass media in America. Here we will investigate where Americans get their news, the distinction between information and entertainment, and the difference between educational news and propaganda. Third, we will focus on the role of alternative media in mass society. Fourth, we focus on issues relating to campaign financing. In this section we will discuss the impact of the McCain-Feingold Act of 2002, the Citizens United decision of 2010, and the McCutcheon decision of 2014. Finally, we will examine the polarizing effects of media on citizens in contemporary society. In this section we will discuss about possible solutions to the problems that have been posed throughout the class.

Course Requirements:

- **15%: Quizzes:** You are required to read the assigned material before coming to each class. To demonstrate that you have done so, **beginning on Monday of Week 2 you are required to take a short quiz in the Assignments folder on Blackboard before attending each respective class.** Beginning on Monday of Week 2, if there is a reading assignment for class, there is a corresponding quiz; if there is no reading assignment, there is no quiz. Since the purpose of these quizzes is only to ensure that you have made an earnest attempt to understand the material before attending class, they will be short and easy. Each quiz will consist of one single question, and if you have completed the readings then the correct answer to the question should jump off the screen at you. Whereas the midterm and final exams are designed to test your critical thinking
skills at a deep level, the quizzes are only meant to test your knowledge of the assigned material at the most basic level. By each Saturday night I will post the quizzes for the upcoming week and you are free to take them at your leisure, as long as each quiz is taken before that day’s class begins. I will drop your lowest quiz grade.

- **15%: In-Class Writing Reflections:** There will be 10 unannounced in-class writing assignments. Taken together, these short in-class reflections are meant to gauge attendance and participation. For each reflection I will ask you to write about an important theme in the reading. You are responsible for bringing a hard or electronic copy of the reading assignment to class, as well as paper and a writing utensil. A thoughtful response will receive full credit; an off-topic response will receive zero credit.

- **25%: Midterm Exam:** The midterm exam will be held during class on April 29th and will cover the material assigned during the first five weeks of class. This exam will be a combination of multiple choice and long essay. I will post a midterm exam study guide to Blackboard by April 22nd.

- **25%: Final Exam:** The final exam will be held at 10:15 on June 9th. This exam will also be a combination of multiple choice and long essay. I will post a final exam study guide to Blackboard by June 2nd.

- **20%: Essay:** I will post the instructions, guidelines, and expectations for this paper to Blackboard in the ‘Course Documents’ section by the end of Week 3. A hardcopy of this essay is due at the beginning of class on June 3rd, the final day of class.

**Assigned Readings:**

All of the readings are available on Blackboard in the ‘Course Documents’ section.

**Course Structure:** (NOTE: Do not purchase any of these books. This list merely indicates the kinds of readings that will be assigned for each of the five areas of study. A finalized syllabus with dates and reading assignments will be posted before the beginning of class.)

**I. Introduction to “Mass Media”**


**II. Media Consumption**

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Media*

Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*

Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the News Media*
Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*

### III. Alternative Media

Darrell M. West, *The Rise and Fall of the Media Establishment*

Selected articles from websites such as Mint Press News, Ben Swann, Media Roots, Cato Institute, and the Heritage Foundation.

### IV. Campaign Finance


*Citizens United v. FEC* (2010)

*McCutcheon v. FEC* (2014)

### V. Polarization Effects

Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*

Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*

Reynolds, *An Army of Davids: How Markets and Technology Empower Ordinary People to Beat Big Media, Big Government and Other Goliaths*

Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter*

Julian Sanchez, *Epistemic Closure, Technology, and the End of Distance*