

PMgt 212.10 — POLITICAL MANAGEMENT AND THE MEDIA

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Spring Semester, 2007
Mondays, 7:10-10:00 PM
1957 E Street, Room 315

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to (1) examine key the key features of contemporary communications media, (2) scrutinize the news gathering operations of the dominant media, (3) provide students with a foundation in strategic planning designed to maximize favorable attention for their interests, (4) assist students in effectively utilizing various media techniques, and (5) explore how media influences campaign politics and government policy making.

The course begins by examining who the media are, how they make their decisions, and how they influence outcomes in campaigns and other political situations. Next comes an introduction into the strategic planning that should surround political professionals thinking in dealing with the media. Then, focus is given to highlighting the particular dynamics that surround electronic, print, and the new media from their perspective. After this, attention moves to how best campaign professionals can utilize various techniques. The last five meetings of the class entail students assuming various roles (both on the side of the media and as campaign professionals) in news making situations, as well as participating in critiques of planned events.

REQUIREMENTS:

Students will be expected to complete several written exercises related to a final paper (approximately 20 pages of material). In addition, students will generate other written materials (some individually, some as part of a group).

The final grade will be awarded based on the following formula: 15% for the basic strategy (due 3/6); 40% for the major paper (due 3/27); 15% for the description of the media event (due 4/3); 15% for class participation, and 15% for participation in the various group events staged by the class. Peer feedback will be used in evaluating group events.

Attendance and participation in the class are an absolute must, especially during the last five sessions. Much of what will occur is dependent upon students actively contributing to group efforts.

CLASS SESSIONS:

1. January 22 Introduction and initial discussion
 2. January 28 Both Sides of the Interaction
 3. February 5 Television Operations
 4. February 12 In-studio events
 - February 19 NO CLASS
 5. February 26 Print media operations
 6. March 5 Radio – an old and a new medium
 - March 12 NO CLASS
 7. March 19 The New media: Nothing is the same
 8. March 26 The Reporters' View: Print and Television Media
 9. April 2 Media Event Considerations Large and Small
 10. April 9 Video Editing; Ethics in news generation
 11. April 16 Media events staged (editing on Saturday, April 21)
 12. April 21 **SATURDAY:** Editing of events staged on 4/16
 13. April 23 Media events staged (editing on Saturday, April 28)
 14. April 28 **SATURDAY:** Editing of events staged on 4/23
 15. April 30 Did it work (critique and media presentations)
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SESSION ONE

JANUARY 22

1. Subject: Introduction; The historical role of the media in politics; the importance of earned media in politics and why it matters. "Truth" as an elusive target.

Review of course outline, expectations, assignments, and procedures. Discussion of why candidates, elected officials, and political managers spend time, energy, and resources to attract and mold media coverage and attention. Consideration of the changes in news media over time and the historic role the news media has played in politics. Analysis of the relationship between political managers and the news media. Understanding differing views of the truth.

2. Assignments due this class: none
3. Reading assignments for next class (1/29):
 - A. Charlotte Ryan, Prime Time Activism: Chapter 2
 - B. Public Relations Ethics: Chapters 6 & 7
 - C. Breaking the News: Chapter 6.
4. Written assignments for next class: Watch or tape (then watch) the State of the Union address tomorrow night (1/23/06). Then, choose an organization for which you will write a news release on State of the Union.

SESSION TWO

JANUARY 29

1. Subject: Consideration of both sides of the interaction. First: our job as political communicators. Strategic planning—the factors that political professionals consider when developing a media strategy. Second, who are the media? How do they function, what motivates them, and what underpins their decision making?

In putting together a media strategy, political professionals need to address the realities of the media (who they are and how they operate) in order to best present their case. With few exceptions (such as public television and radio), the news media are “for profit” businesses. What differences does this make for their operation? Who owns the media? What sort of information becomes news and why? The mainstream media covers certain sorts of stories. They do it in certain sorts of ways. Some things get lost; some things become highlighted. The media is people and institutions. How do they interact with political forces?

2. Assignment due this class: News Release on State of the Union speech.

3. Reading assignments for next class (2/5):

A. James Hamilton: All the News That’s Fit to Sell: Chapters 1-2.

B. Bernard Goldberg, Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News: Chapters 5, 7, 8 & 11.

C. Peter Hannaford, Talking Back to the Media: Chapters 3 – 8.

4. Written assignments due for next class:

Assignment due next week (2/5):

Each student will be part of a group, assigned to monitor the newscasts of an entire week for one network, PBS, or local newscast (equivalent of thirty minutes immediately prior to national news). A grid will be given to each group to evaluate the nature and content of all stories, visual elements, advertising, etc. Each group will present on overhead slides or PowerPoint. Two hard copies of the slides for each group need to be prepared for the class.

Additional assignment due next week (2/5):

The class will be broken up into four groups for the purpose of creating proposed news events in reaction to the State of the Union address. Two groups will be supportive of the President and two groups will represent interests generally opposed to the President. Each group should return to class with a description of the event they propose. In addition, every group should write up a press release for the event being proposed.

SESSION THREE

FEBRUARY 5

1. Subject: Television— A structural analysis of this essential medium of today's political world (in most instances).

Television is a particular medium in a particular state of affairs. Thinking of this medium, where can professionals make in-roads? What obstacles need to be overcome to be effective?

2. Assignments due this class: Analysis of TV coverage

3. Reading assignments for next class (2/26):

A. James Hamilton: All the News That's Fit to Sell: Chapter 3.

B. The Future of News: Chapters 2, 4 & 5.

C. Thomas Patterson, Out of Order: Chapter 5.

4. Assignment for Next Week (2/12)

Each member of the class will be part of a group. Each group will participate in simulating a media event. Some members of the group will be on the side of trying to get a message out, others will be part of the media, still others will be adversarial to the interests of those trying to get a story out. THE CLASS ON February 12 WILL BE HELD IN THE STUDIOS OF INTERFACE MEDIA 1233 20TH Street (between M & N). It is probable that a group staging a news conference, for instance, would produce news releases.

SESSION FOUR

FEBRUARY 12

Subject: In-studio staging of media situations. In addition, a brief review of the edit facility will occur to enhance the editing of coverage related to the staging of media events.

This class prepares students for television interviews and the prospects for using such appearances to reach citizens and the effects that interviews may have upon relationships between political managers and elite audiences including political reporters themselves. This class will train students for television interviews by replicating such appearances in a television studio. Students will prepare for a news conference, Sunday interview format, an editorial board appearance, and an encounter interview surrounding a media event.

2. Assignments due this class: Group memo describing event proposed by four groups and individual press releases for the event.

3. Reading assignments for next class (2/12):

Margarite Sullivan, Responsible Press Office: (U.S. State Department Publication), Entire.

4. Written assignments due for next class (2/26):

Identify the idea/cause you plan to utilize as basis for your efforts. This could be as simple as the election of a candidate for office, the passage (or defeat) of a specific piece of legislation or regulation. It could be generating public awareness and/or support for a cause such as reducing obesity. **In other words, what ultimate goal is it that you want to accomplish?** Because this is a class on political management and the media, what you select ought to be something where attention by the media is highly likely. Even better would be something where you need a significant amount of media attention to succeed, but, without considerable effort (and success from those efforts), you are unlikely to actually receive coverage.

FEBRUARY 19 - NO CLASS (GW BIRTHDAY)

SESSION FIVE

FEBRUARY 26

1. Subject: Print media operations — story selection.

Addressing the opportunities presented by print media often defines the effective reach for a story of a political nature. How do we best to think about this critical medium in an era with so much pressure to devote attention elsewhere?

2. Assignments due this class: Initial strategy statement for the major paper.
3. Reading assignments for next class (3/5):
 - A. The Future of the News: Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9 & 11.
 - B. Charlotte Ryan, Prime Time Activism: Chapters 7 & 8
4. **Written assignments due for next class (3/5):** Present the basic strategy to achieve your goal identified in the first paper. In addition, present the basic communications strategy. This should include: situation analysis, assumptions, theme, key messages, and target groups. In addition, a rough estimation of the emphasis to be placed on various tactics should be presented. What role will paid media, earned media, etc. play in the efforts. (15% of grade determined by this paper.)

SESSION SIX

MARCH 5

1. Subject: Radio — these outlets constitute an increasing portion of the attention of both targeted elements of the public and campaigns.

Since radio has been described as the equivalent of electronic direct mail, what does that make direct broadcast, Internet, etc.? What do campaigns want to do with these media outlets?

2. Assignments due this class: An outline of the basic strategy and communications plan for your group, including audience, message and delivery portions of the major paper.
3. Reading assignments for next class (3/19):
 - A. James Hamilton: All the News That's Fit to Sell: Chapter 7.
 - B. Charlotte Ryan, Prime Time Activism: Chapter 10.
4. Written assignments due for next class (3/19): Present the overall communications plan for your organization. You will include the revised version of the strategy document, along with more details on the various tactics to be employed. For tactics other than earned media, you need only outline what is to be done, along with cost estimates and how they connect to your earned media efforts (timing, messaging, etc.). For the earned media section, you will give a detailed presentation (done as a timeline) where you specify what it is that will be done to generate coverage, as well as targets for the coverage. **Also, you will highlight the media event within the earned media section that you intend to further detail in the paper to be submitted the next week.** (40% of overall grade.)

MARCH 12 - NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

1. Subject: The “New Media”:

The proliferation of media outlets controlled by the political side of the equation (websites, email) and those “independent” media (i.e. blogs, v-logs) that engage citizens in political discussion. Both types of new media constitute an increasing portion of the attention of both the public and campaigns.

2. Written assignments due this class: ***MAJOR PAPER DUE*** .

3. Reading assignments due for next class (3/26):

- A. James Hamilton: All the News That’s Fit to Sell: Chapters 6 & 8.

- B. Lance Bennett, News, The Politics of Illusion: Chapters 3 & 4.

4. **Written assignments due for next class (3/26):** For the final part of your written media plan, you will present a detailed description for a particular event that is part of your overall earned media program. Building upon what has been covered during the semester, you will be expected to provide us with the timeline leading to the event, its immediate follow-up, and connection to everything being done in the area of earned media and all other communications (who does what, when do they do it, where are the efforts aimed, etc.). Materials associated with the event (press releases, Talking points, physical layout, etc.) should either be included or described in precise detail. Items associated with the logistical aspect of the event also need to be addressed. (15% of overall grade.)

SESSION EIGHT

MARCH 26

1. Subject. The Reporters' View: Print and Television Media

How do reporters actually go about their jobs? What sources do they use? What beats do they cover? How do they confirm details? What are the "terms of trade" between reporters and political managers? What are the special requirements for television news organizations in terms of personnel, equipment, and budgets that influence the selection of events that they can cover and the product that is ultimately conveyed to the public. The class will explore these relationships as they affect the possibilities for generating news coverage.

2. Written assignments due this class: **Media Event Paper is due..**
3. Reading assignments due for next class:
 - A. James Hamilton: All the News That's Fit to Sell: Chapter 5.
4. Written assignment due for next class: NONE.

NOTE: A SELECTION OF THE EVENTS TO BE STAGED APRIL 16 AND 23 WILL BE MADE DURING THIS CLASS, STUDENTS ASSIGNED TO GROUPS.

SESSION NINE

APRIL 2

1. Subject: Media Event Considerations, Large and Small

What factors make for a successful media event, meaning that reporters actually cover the event and produce news coverage that reflects the objectives of the political managers staging the event. Strategic and logistical considerations.

2. Assignments due this class: None.
3. Reading assignments for next class: NONE. DETERMINED
4. Written assignments for next class: None.

SESSION TEN

APRIL 9

1. Subjects: Editing video and ethics in the pursuit of news coverage.

This class will take place in the editing facilities of Fenn Media. The class will be divided into two groups. One group will learn the basics of video editing while the other groups discuss the fact that those in politics confront a number of ethical dilemmas as they deal with reporters, journalists and news organizations. The class will explore both the ethical norms of journalism and those that guide the action of political managers. The two groups will switch places midway through the class time.

2. Written assignments due this class: None.
3. Reading assignments due for next class: None.
4. Written assignments due for next class: None.

SESSION ELEVEN

APRIL 16

CLASS WILL START AT 5:00 PM THIS DATE IN ORDER TO ALLOW DAYLIGHT TO BE PRESENT FOR BOTH EVENTS

Two of the media events will be staged. Students in group one stage the first media event. Students in group two are at their site preparing for their event. Students in group three serve as “props” for group one. Students in group four are the media covering the first event.

For the second event, group two stages it, group one is idle, group four will be the “props” and group three covers it as media.

Before staging an event, the leader of the group will present a piece of paper to the instructors that identifies: (a) desired headline for newspaper, (b) desired picture to be used by television, and (c) desired soundbite to be used by electronic media. This is true of all groups for all events.

SESSION TWELVE

SPECIAL SESSION: SATURDAY, APRIL 21

On Saturday, April 21, groups three and four do the television edits for the event their groups covered.

SESSION THIRTEEN APRIL 23

CLASS WILL START AT 5:00 PM THIS DATE IN ORDER TO ALLOW DAYLIGHT TO BE PRESENT FOR BOTH EVENTS

The second two media events will be staged. Students in group three will stage the first event that evening. Students in group four are readying for the second event of the evening. Students in group two serve as “props” and students in group one will be the media covering the event.

The second event on this date will be staged by group four. Group four stages, group three is idle, group one will be “props” and students in group two are the media covering it.

Before staging an event, the leader of the group will present a piece of paper to the instructors that identifies: (a) desired headline for newspaper, (b) desired picture to be used by television, and (c) desired soundbite to be used by electronic media. This is true of all groups for all events.

SESSION FOURTEEN SPECIAL SESSION SATURDAY, APRIL 28

On Saturday, April 28, groups one and two do the television edits for the event their group covered.

SESSION FIFTEEN APRIL 30

The groups present their strategic goals and objectives in staging the media events followed by media coverage of the events to which they were assigned. Group discussion as to the relationship between the desired coverage and what actually occurred.