Overview: This course considers the degree to which Americans' political opinions and actions are influenced by the mass media, particularly television, as well as the influence of the mass media on public policy. Topics to be covered include the history of the mass media, recent trends in the news media, theories of attitude formation and change, the nature of news, the ways in which the news shapes the public's perceptions of the political world, campaign communication, how the media and public opinion affect the manner in which public officials govern, and the general role of the mass media in the democratic process.

Requirements:
(1) Term paper. There will be one paper (approximately 13-15 pages, double spaced), based on a topic covered in the course. The paper counts for 40% of the final grade and will be due at the last meeting of the class.
(2) Group project. For the group project, teams of students will prepare a proposal, in the form of a policy briefing, for reforming some aspect of the conduct of political campaigns in America. At the end of the semester, each team will submit their proposal, in writing, and then present a summary (approximately 30 minutes) to the class, followed by a Q&A session. The group project will count for 35% of the final grade.
(3) Participation. There are two elements to the participation grade. First, for each class meeting, 1-2 students will be asked to find a newspaper or news magazine article that relates to one or more of the theoretical perspectives addressed in the pertinent lecture or readings. The student(s) will summarize the story (verbally) and explain how it relates to the theoretical concepts we are addressing in the course. This will be followed by a class discussion. Second, participation in class discussions will also count toward the overall participation grade. Together, these two elements count for 25% of the final grade.

Readings: All readings are available online, included in a course reader, or both.

I. Course Overview (September 2)

II. Introduction to the Mass Media
   A. Historical Development (September 9)
      Readings:

      Discussion Topic: What, if any, lessons do the eras of the partisan press and/or yellow journalism hold for contemporary politics and political communication? Are there any parallels that, in your view, would help us to understand what to expect in the future?

   B. Economics: technology, regulation and competition (September 14)
      Readings:

**Discussion Topic:** Is news a “public good” or a commodity, whose content is driven by market considerations? Can it be both? How should news be treated by society? Can public be induced to consume more, and more serious, political news? Should it be?

C. A new news paradigm? (September 16 and 21)

**Readings:**

**Discussion Topic:** Is the blending of news and entertainment good or bad for democracy? What effects is this trend likely to have on politics and public policy?

III. Mass Media and Public Opinion

A. The Debate over Public Competence (September 23)

**Readings:**

**Discussion Topic:** What are the requirements for citizenship in a republican democracy? How much information do citizens need to fulfill their democratic responsibilities?

B. Media Effects (September 28, 30 & October 5)

**Readings:**

**Discussion Topic**: Based on your own understanding of what “democracy” means, does the U.S. have a “real” democracy or do we have only the illusion of democracy, with voters manipulated to support whatever policies and candidates media and political elites favor?

**IV. Media, Public Opinion and Politics**

A. How the Media Cover Politics (October 7 & 14)

**Readings**:

**Discussion Topic**: How should politics and elections be covered? How well do the media measure up to this standard? What would you anticipate would be the practical beneficial effect political coverage along the lines you suggest?

B. Media Bias (October 19)

**Readings**:

**Discussion Topic**: Do you believe the media are biased? If so, how? Is this “good” or “bad” for politics and democracy? How do you know bias when you see it? What are the implications for political discourse in America of citizen perceptions of bias in the media?
C. Campaign Advertising & Political Participation (October 21 & 26)

Readings:

Discussion Topic: What steps, if any, can/should be taken to increase citizen participation in politics?

Guest Lecturer: Nicco Mele (October 28). Topic TBD

D. Gauging Public Opinion (November 2)

Readings:

Discussion Topic: How can we improve the use of public opinion polls in the news media in order to (a) help political leaders better understand what the public thinks and wants, and (b) help the public, as well as leaders, better understand what the polls can and cannot tell us about public attitudes?

V. Media, Public Opinion and Public Policy

A. Influencing Public Policy (November 4)

Readings:

Discussion Topic: How much influence do you think public opinion has on public policy? How much “should” it have?

B. Case study: The CNN Effect & Operation Restore Hope (November 9)

Readings:

C. Case study: Media, Public Opinion, and Iraq (November 16 & 18)

**Discussion Topic:** Is media influence on politics or foreign policy “good” or “bad” for democracy? Why?

**VI. Group Presentations** (November 23, 25, 30 & December 2)