This course will examine how the media affects public policy, and is affected by it in turn. We will focus on several broad topics—political communication/advertising, policy advocacy, and political journalism. This will of course necessitate some discussion of political communication in the pre-internet era. Students will be asked to examine how the internet has changed the news media, the quality of political information available to citizens, and the way in which political campaigns are waged. For example, how does internet journalism differ in focus, quality, and quantity from earlier media? Are traditional media dinosaurs? Are modern American elections won and lost based on non-narrative, image-laden viral ads, rumors, and irrational appeals to emotion? How can non-profits, interest groups, average citizens, and governmental agency communicate their messages in this new era? We will also examine the question of media bias at some length. Finally, we will examine internet politics in the global context. What role did social media play in Russian intervention in the presidential election of 2016? Has truth itself become a casualty of our modern media environment?

Students will be expected not only to learn how media politics works today but to create their own internet media messages, working in teams.

Texts:
- *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman
- *The Death of Truth*, Michiko Kakutani
- *Political Advertising in the United States*, Fowler, Franz, Ridout
- *How to Go Viral And Reach Millions*, Joseph Romm
- *American Media Politics in Transition*, Mayer (don’t purchase, provided electronically)
- *Senate Intelligence Committee Report on Russian Intervention on Social Media in 2016* (not yet available)

In addition to these texts, other readings will be assigned, with the expectation that students will actually read them. Also, we will be looking at sample political ads, and these videos will be made available online for further review.

Jan 23: Introduction: Theories of Media Influence
Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, by Walter Benjamin (essay available on line)
Mayer, Chapter 1

Jan 30: Heirs of a Typographic Revolution
Postman, Chapters 1-5,
Mayer Chapters 2-3

Feb 6: A Short History of Political Journalism
Postman, Chapters 6-11
Mayer Chapters 4-5

Feb 13: Campaign Ads, History and Techniques
Fowler Ch 1, 3-5
Mayer Chapter 6-8

Feb 20: The Effect of Ads (and some Video Instruction)
Fowler Chapter 6-9

Feb 27: Going Viral
Romm Selections

March 6: In Class Project Work Day

March 20: Media, the Law, and the Regulatory Environment
TBA

March 27: Media Advocacy in a Digital World
TBA

April 3: National Security, Terrorism, and Media
TBA

April 10: New Media in the Arab Spring
TBA

April 17: Social Media and Political Communication
Senate Report on Russian Intervention
Romm, Selections

April 24: Death of Truth and the Rise of Trump
Kakutani, entire

May 1: Presentations

Grading
Class Participation 10%
Midterm 20%
Video/Internet Project 30%
Final Exam 40%

Class Participation: Students will be rigorously assessed on their participation in discussion. Quality participation can occur only with adequate preparation. Unless otherwise notified by the instructor, it is expected that students will have completed a week’s reading prior to the first class meeting of that week. Obviously, failure to attend class will prevent any participation.

Video/Internet Project: Students will take part in an innovative experiential education project. In groups of three, they will script, storyboard, direct, shoot, edit, and produce three political ads or messages.

Students will have to choose if they want to make ads on behalf of a fictional candidate, or if they want to make content that addresses a political issue outside of electoral politics. For example, a team could try to make ads that seek to support an NGO, or to raise awareness of an issue for an interest group. If a team would like to reach out to a local group, and seek to provide content to a real political/policy organization, that’s an option.

The group must work together and will be graded as a unit except in the most extreme circumstances. Each student is expected to do more than their fair share of the work—this seeming paradox is the key to successful group projects. Teamwork, openness to diversity, and a willingness to listen to each other and to learn from each will be essential.

Part of the assignment if you do a campaign will involve interacting with your “candidate.” You will receive data sheets on your candidate and their opponent prior to your first meeting. Based on the issue positions given, you are to design three proposed ads. You must schedule a meeting with your candidate, to present these proposals to them. You may have to adjust your plans if the candidate is displeased with any aspect, or if the shooting schedule calls for more of the candidate’s time than he/she is willing to give. You may also have to recruit people from the campus and/or the community to serve as extras in your ads. You are responsible for the final product’s quality; if your plan is not feasible, then you will have to adjust it to meet your resources and time constraints.
You should complete the shooting by the start of third week, and the editing and production by the start of the fourth week. The presentations will consist of your ads, and explaining your choices to the class.

Further information on the project will be disseminated in class.

Midterm and Final Exam: The midterm will be takehome. The final exam will consist of a take home portion that will be open book, and an in-class portion which will be multiple choice and short answer.