COURSE OVERVIEW:

This course will examine the influence of the media on public policy in the United States. During the mini, students will join the instructor in considering various explanations of how the news (and other activities of journalists) affects the policy-making process. This will involve exposure to the major themes of media influence in American politics. We will also consider the role of the media in elections, in public policy debates, and in public opinion formation.

Through lots of readings, discussion, and expert guest visitors, we want to understand how the media influences American politics and policy, as well as why the media behaves the way it does.

Working in teams, students will complete a project during the mini that involves drafting a “media strategy analysis” for some organization promoting a major policy issue of current importance.

Students will leave the course with a better understanding of the role of the media in American public life, with practical experience in the analysis of news, with knowledge of the laws that affect the media, and with some sense of how to interact with journalists and media when participating in policy-making.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation:

All students are expected to participate vigorously in class. Student contributions will shape the direction of the discussion and the agendas of future class sessions. Class
participation will be a significant component of the final grade. Participation will be judged based on attendance (always important in these short minis) and evidence of preparation for the class sessions, contributions to the class discussions, and interrogation of both the instructor and class visitors.

This instructor also believes that students should be encouraged to speak freely and openly in the classroom. No comment is too unimportant, and no question is too silly. And there are rarely right or wrong answers. If you are NOT an active participant in the classroom, you cannot earn the highest grade. There are always a few students who love to talk, and I welcome them to my classes. I'm a talker, too. But to guarantee that everyone who wants to contribute has an equal chance, I will always give other class members the opportunity to speak before returning to someone who has already spoken.

When it comes to ideas, there is no such thing as political correctness in a classroom. We can be respectful to each other’s right to an opinion without fear that any idea whatsoever is off limits for discussion. Free speech requires students to feel free to say whatever they want without worrying that their words will come back to haunt them on YouTube! Consequently, no student may record or tape any classroom activity without the express written consent of this instructor. If a student believes that he/she is disabled and needs to record or tape classroom activities, he/she should contact the Office of Disability Resources to request an appropriate accommodation.

Finally, during class, please turn those smart phones OFF -- please, no texting in class. Laptops in class, when not used for note-taking, can be annoying and distractive to other students sitting nearby. Bottom line, please stay focused on the class discussion and not be surfing the net or receiving emails, instant messages, and texts. Step outside the classroom if you really must engage in non-classroom relevant activity.

Course Project:

Each group of students will prepare a media strategy analysis for an organization involved in an important public policy issue. Students should identify that organization and policy issue, and then prepare recommendations for the organization on how to improve the use of the media as an instrument for policy change. This analysis will offer reasoned advice, based on the course material and class discussion, on how the organization can further its policy agenda through the media. The grade for the project will be based both on the quality of the written report (including the quality of the writing) and the soundness of the analysis provided.

Mini Quiz:

To help separate the A and A+ students from the others, on the last day of class, students will take a very short mini quiz. The quiz will encompass only those readings
assigned by the instructor and the class discussions. A review of class notes and the materials assigned should suffice for preparation.

**Grades:**

Final course grades will be based on the following percentage distribution across the course requirements:

- Course project: 35 percent of grade
- Class participation: 30 percent of grade
- Mini quiz: 35 percent of grade

Grades are not necessarily curved. The final grade, in general, will follow from the average earned across the requirements, but the instructor does reserve the right to assign grades when circumstances warrant that differ with the straight average.

**Readings:**


Handouts from Instructor

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Monday, October 24:** What is the Media?

General introductions of students and instructor
Discussion of student expectations
Analysis of what is the Media
Monday, October 31: The History & Current Status of the Media

Readings for Oct. 31:

Turner, “My Beef with Big Media.”

Discussion of the development of media in America and current trends.

Monday, November 7: What is the “News Business”

Readings for Oct. 7:

Bennett, Chapters 1, 3 & 4
McChesney, pp. 1-50

Discussion of what constitutes the “media” in today’s world, the debate over how “controlled” it is, and its impact on policy-making.

Monday, November 14: What is Media Bias?

Readings for Nov. 14:

Bennett, Chapter 2 & 5
McChesney, pp. 51-148

Discussion of the true nature of media bias.

Monday, November 21: How Do Interest Groups Influence the Media

Readings for Nov. 21:

Bennett, Chapter 6
McChesney, pp. 149-242
Discussion of organizational interaction with the media.

**Monday, November 28: The Great Debate—Left versus Right**

Readings for Nov. 28:

Brock, *The Republican Noise Machine*
Goldberg, *Arrogance*

Discussion of who REALLY controls the media – the left or the right? Role Play on developing a Media Strategy Analysis.

**Monday, December 5: What the Rules & Where Are We Heading?**

[Class Meets at KDKA-TV, One Gateway Center, Downtown]

Readings for Dec. 5:

Bennett, Chapter 7
McChesney, pp. 243-end

Introduction to some of the rules and regulations that govern media conduct. Discussion of the changing media in the 21st century.

Guest Speaker: Attorney Expert on Media and the Law

Visit to KDKA-TV Studios & meet with selected KDKA people

**Monday, December 12: Wrapping It All Up**

Mini Quiz

**Thursday, December 15, midnight:** FINAL PAPERS DUE.
All papers must be emailed to me at jdelano@andrew.cmu.edu by 12:00 midnight at the end of the day Thursday, December 15th! No extensions, please.