MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA
COMM 481 - Fall 2004

Course Description

This course is aimed at analyzing the role of the mass media in contemporary Latin American democracies. We will investigate whether communication industries and institutions have contributed to promote or to impede democratic consolidation in the region. After introducing the main features of the region’s press and broadcasting systems, the course analyzes the political role of the media in different countries, focusing on the cases of Mexico and Brazil. The course then investigates the complex links between media scandals, corruption, and the consolidation of democratic institutions and attitudes in the region, emphasizing the role of investigative journalism. The course also discusses the political role of entertainment-oriented genres, including popular journalism and telenovelas (soap operas). Finally, the last part of the course explores the barriers to and perspectives for the full democratization of media and political spheres in the region, covering some important issues: the role of the media in promoting democratic attitudes among Latin-American citizens; the obstacles for media opening in the region; the perspectives for the democratization of media and political systems.

One of the central goals of the course is to provide conceptual tools that will enable students to develop a critical and comprehensive analysis of the role of the mass media in contemporary Latin American democracies.

Course Texts:


Evaluation:

Your final evaluation will be based on the following:

1) Midterm exam: Students will take an-in class exam on parts I, II and III of the course;
2) Final paper: Students will be required to write a 10-13 pages paper on one of the topics that will be proposed. The paper should be based on course materials and notes and not only on outside research sources;
3) Participation in class discussions: You should bring your notes and questions to enhance your participation in class discussions;
4) Performance on the reading assignments: You should make sure that you read the assigned texts in advance. Pop quizzes will be given to students as short tests on the assigned reading for class.

Your final grade will be calculated in the following manner:

- Midterm Exam 30%
- Final Paper 40%
- Participation 15%
- Pop Quizzes 15%

Academic dishonesty

Remember that plagiarism is a form of cheating. Do not present someone else’s ideas as yours, without citing the source. Buying or finding papers on similar topics of the course in the Internet is a form of plagiarism. Also remember that turning in the same paper for credit in two courses is a violation of scholarly ethics.

Course Schedule:

Aug 25, Wed - Introduction to the procedures and contents of the course
(No readings)

PART I
MEDIA SYSTEMS IN LATIN AMERICA

Aug 27, Fri – The historical context

Aug 30, Mon – Mass media in Latin America

Sep 1, Wed – The Mexican media system

Sep 3, Fri – The Brazilian media system

Sep 6, Mon – No class. Labor Day holiday.
PART II
MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY:
THE MEXICAN CASE

Sep. 8, Wed - Political communication in Mexico’s “perfect dictatorship”

Sep 10, Fri - The opening of Mexican media: the press
   * Lawson, chapter 5, pp. 61-92.

Sep 13, Mon - The opening of Mexican media: broadcasting
   * Lawson, chapter 6, pp. 93-121.

Sep 15, Wed – Media and civil society in Mexico

Sep 17, Fri - Media and elections in Mexico
   * Lawson, chapter 9, pp. 157-170.

Sep 20, Mon - Media and democracy in Mexico
   * Lawson, chapter 10, pp. 173-209.

PART III
MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY:
THE BRAZILIAN CASE

Sep. 22, Wed - The media in the Brazilian transition to democracy
   * Cesar Guimaraes and Roberto Amaral, “Brazilian television: a rapid conversion to the
     125-137.

Sep. 24, Fri - The 1989 presidential election
   * Venicio A. de Lima, “Brazilian television in the 1989 presidential election: constructing
     a president”. In T. Skidmore (Ed.), Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy

Sep 27, Mon - The media and the impeachment of president Collor de Mello (screening
   or part of the documentary “Assignment – Brazil”)
   * Silvio Waisbord, “The narrative exposes in South American journalism: telling the story
Sep. 29, Wed – The role of the media in Brazilian democracy (1985-2000)

Oct 1, Fri – Recent changes in Brazilian TV: the 2002 presidential election

Oct 4, Mon and Oct 6, Wed – MIDTERM EXAM.

PART IV
MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY:
OTHER COUNTRY CASES

Oct 8, Fri - Venezuela

Oct 11, Mon - Central America

Oct 13, Wed - Chile

PART V
CORRUPTION, MEDIA SCANDALS, AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

Oct 15, Fri - Media and political clientelism

Oct 18, Mon - Media, corruption and democracy in Central America
Oct 20, Wed - Scandals and regime legitimacy in Mexico
  * Lawson, chapter 8, pp. 138-156.

Oct 22, Fri – Obstacles to investigative journalism in South America
  * Waisbord, chapter 1, pp. 3-32.

Oct 25, Mon - Media scandals in South America
  * Waisbord, chapter 2, pp. 33-57.

Oct 27, Wed - Roots of watchdog journalism in South America: state and market forces
  * Waisbord, chapter 3, pp. 58-89.

Oct 29, Fri - Roots of watchdog journalism in South America: professional routines
  * Waisbord, chapter 4, pp. 93-118.

Nov 1, Mon - Journalistic norms: objectivity and investigations in South America
  * Waisbord, chapter 5, pp. 119-150.

Nov 3, Wed - Professionalism and journalism in South America
  * Waisbord, chapter 6, pp. 151-183.

Nov 5, Fri - Investigative journalism and democracy

PART VI
MEDIA, ENTERTAINMENT AND DEMOCRACY:
POPULAR JOURNALISM AND TELENOVELAS

Nov 8, Mon - Popular journalism in Mexico

Nov 10, Wed - Telenovelas and politics in Brazil

Nov 12, Fri – Screening of part of the documentary “Telenovelas: Love, TV and Power”
Nov 15, Mon – Telenovelas and politics: Brazil and Venezuela

PART VII
CONCLUSIONS: THE MEDIA AND THE PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

Nov 17, Wed – The media and support for democracy among citizens

Nov 19, Fri – Obstacles: The absence of a democratic tradition

Nov 22, Mon – The antidemocratic character of media structures
* Silvio Waisbord, “Media in South America: between the rock of the state and the hard place of the market”. In J. Curran and M. Park (Eds.), De-Westernizing Media Studies. London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 50-62

Nov 24 and 26 – No class. Thanksgiving recess.

Nov 29, Mon – Barriers to media opening

Dec 1, Wed – New perspectives: the role of civil society

Dec 3, Fri – Conclusions. Course evaluation.

FINAL PAPER DUE DEC 14, TUESDAY, 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Papers should be delivered at the instructor’s office: Newcomb Hall, room 219K1. Late papers, without prior notice and instructor’s authorization, will not be received.