

Course: PPHA 38615 - Modern Political Communications

Instructor: Kevin Lane

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Time: Thursday, 3-5:50pm, Room 289B

Office Hours: After class or by appointment only

Course Syllabus

DESCRIPTION

“I have yet to see a piece of writing, political or nonpolitical, that does not have a slant. All writing slants the way a writer leans, and no man is born perpendicular.” -- E.B. White

Smart public policy doesn't pass and implement itself. It's born out of the political environment surrounding it and often is shaped by well-planned, strategic messaging from candidates, elected officials, and political organizations. The business of politics is largely the business of communication: politicians and policy-makers cultivate consent through effective messaging campaigns. To advance our own beliefs and policy ideas we must understand and implement political communication. This course will teach students a theoretical framework for understanding political communications, examining historical and modern examples of powerful messaging across politics, government, and issue-based organizations. Students will discuss and apply their knowledge through their regular coursework and projects.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Articulate a core understanding of political communications and its primary functions.
2. Critically analyze historic and current political messaging based on this framework.
3. Develop a comprehensive strategic communications plan.
4. Demonstrate an example of effective political communications in your final project.

KEY UNDERSTANDINGS

By the end of this course, you will gain these enduring insights:

- There are four defining characteristics of political communication: a short-term orientation, specific objectives, primarily mediated, and is audience-centered.
- Political communication involves three main actors: political organizations, media, and citizens. Each actor has a distinct function and role in the political process.
- Political communication extends far beyond just the words that are communicated; body language, tone, informational source, purpose, and medium are interwoven into the meaning of the communication.
- Political communication can be analyzed and its purposes uncovered by understanding how the messaging fits into the four defining characteristics above.

REQUIRED READINGS

Note: All required readings will be provided online. All multimedia resources are also hyperlinked here.

[Politics and Communication in America](#) by Robert E. Denton Jr, Jim A. Kuypers (2008)

[Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide](#) by Shanto Iyengar (2016)

[A Guide to Earned Media](#) by Organizing for Action (2017)

[The Real Story about Fake News](#) by Amanda Taub (2017)

[How Great Leaders Inspire Action](#) by Simon Sinek (2009)

[Breaking News](#) by Simon Adler (2017)

GRADING POLICY

1. **Writing assignment:** 15% of grade
 - a. Write a two-page campaign speech, along with a one-page summary of how this speech fits into the political communication framework.
2. **Mid-term project:** 20% of grade
 - a. Critically analyze an example of political communications; two-page minimum.
3. **Final project:** 20% of grade
 - a. As a group, develop a strategic communications plan. This plan can be made from a campaign, organizational, or government perspective.
4. **Final presentation:** 15% of grade
 - a. As a group, create a piece of effective political communication. This can be a TV ad, radio ad, a national address, etc.
5. **Participation:** 30% of grade
 - a. Students will be expected to attend class and complete reading assignments. You should come to class prepared to discuss and engage all course material.

Quantitative item	Points possible
Class participation	300 (30% of final grade)
Writing assignment	150 (15% of final grade)
Mid-term project	200 (20% of final grade)
Final project	200 (20% of final grade)
Final presentation	150 (15% of final grade)
Total	1000 points (100%)

1000 - 900 = **A** 899.9 - 800 = **B** 799.9 - 700 = **C** 699.9 - 600 = **D** 599.9 - 0 = **F**

Qualitative

A – You went beyond expectations in completing the coursework and challenged yourself along the way. Your work shows a conceptual understanding as well as a practical application of what

we covered in class. Throughout the term you participated regularly and constructively in discussions and group work.

B – It's clear that you successfully tackled the conceptual challenge of the coursework and that you had a handle on practical application of skills with a few weaknesses – let's just call it a lack of follow through as opposed to not actually understanding. Throughout most of the term you participated constructively in discussions and group work.

C – Either you didn't fully understand the concepts covered in the course or you didn't focus enough to demonstrate what you had learned. Your work showed an initial effort, but did not develop beyond a functional understanding of the material. Your participation in discussions and group work was inconsistent and did not help move the class material forward.

D – There is little evidence that you understand the course content in any regard, due in part to a lack of work being completed. Work turned in shows very little effort aside from the challenge of the course material. You participated minimally and unproductively, if at all, in discussions and group work.

F – The simplest expectations aren't met and you've made little or no attempt to apply what we've covered in class to any coursework, if it was turned in at all. There is a clear lack of any effort and interest in the course.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

This class will only add to your knowledge if you put in the time and effort, so please come to class every week. Attendance will be taken every class, either by roll call or sign-in sheet. You may miss THREE classes over the course of the semester without penalty. Any absences beyond this will start to adversely affect your grade, with each absence taking points off your final grade. It is up to you to make up for any time you miss in regards to notes or readings you have missed, though I encourage you to come to my office hours after an absence so that you can get back up to speed. Similarly, I expect you to be on time to class. Excessive tardiness will adversely affect your grade just as excessive absences would.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

I do accept late work up until the final week of class, but take 10% off the work's grade for every week it is late, up to 50% off. You will always have incentive to turn in work, no matter how late, but it should be turned in on time if you wish to pass the class.

PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY

Please take some time to reflect on which, if any, forms of technology you would like to use in class, and:

- Be aware that sometimes these devices can be distracting not only to you but to other students sitting near you.
- If you need to multitask, be considerate of others nearby, and make sure you are giving listening cues to fellow students and the instructor when they are talking.

- If you are using a reader app for assigned readings during class, please be sure it has underlining/highlighting/annotation capabilities so that you can interact with the text before class and during the discussion.
- I may periodically ask us to revisit our practices with regard to use of devices in class for the purposes of creating the best seminar environment for all students.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

This is an interactive and discussion-based class that rests on your willingness to engage with the readings and with one another. Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to share your thoughts, questions, and disagreements. This course depends on class discussion and engagement with the materials presented.

Given the topic and focus of the class, we will have many feelings, thoughts, and reactions to the class readings and to each other. To facilitate a respectful and communal learning environment, we will develop a shared set of values and commitments to hold class discussions. I expect that each member of the class will be responsible for the climate of the classroom; this means that each member is responsible for adhering to discussion guidelines for the class and for calling attention to any difficulties that might arise.

If you are concerned about classroom dynamics, please feel free to bring it up in the class and/or talk with me. Similarly, if we have not addressed an issue you believe to be significant and you would like to see it addressed, I expect you to raise the issue in the class, and/or to contact or meet with me outside of class.

We are all expected to be respectful and open-minded to one another. We will not always agree, but we are not to raise our voices against, insult, or otherwise offend each other. If there is a disagreement, we will use that opportunity to model best practices in resolving arguments; reason will be our guide.

Students who are disrespectful or offensive to the instructor or any member of the classroom community will first be addressed by the instructor. If there are no improvements, students will be referred promptly for disciplinary action.

You are welcome to bring food or drink or use the bathroom, provided you do not distract your classmates.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Academic dishonesty is a serious offense, which includes but is not limited to the following: cheating, complicity, fabrication and falsification, forgery, and plagiarism. Cheating involves copying another student's paper, exam, quiz, or use of technology devices to exchange information during class time and/or testing. It also involves the unauthorized use of notes, calculators, and other devices or study aids. In addition, it includes the unauthorized collaboration on academic work of any sort. Complicity, on the other hand, involves the attempt to assist another student to commit an act of academic dishonesty. Fabrication and falsification,

respectively, involve the invention or alteration of any information (data, results, source, identity, etc.) in academic work. Another example of academic dishonesty is forgery, which involves the duplication of a signature in order to represent it as authentic. Lastly, plagiarism involves the failure to acknowledge sources (of ideas, facts, charges, illustrations, etc.) properly in academic work, thus falsely representing another's ideas as one's own. In individual cases of academic dishonesty, sanctions may range from a written warning to a failing grade for the course; the severity of the penalty is left to the discretion of the instructor.

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS
Thursday, January 4	Course introduction What is political communication?	<i>Politics and Communication in America</i> , Ch. 1	Complete reading assignment
Thursday, January 11	Targeting your message: Audience and purpose In practice: OFA's strategy	<i>A Guide to Earned Media</i>	Complete reading assignment
Thursday, January 18	Messaging through media	<i>Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide</i> Ch. 6	Complete reading assignment Writing assignment: due by February 1
Thursday, January 25	Public speeches: Campaigns, government, and citizens	<i>Politics and Communication in America</i> Ch. 9	Complete reading assignment
Thursday, February 1	Messaging in the Digital Age In practice: OFA's email and social media strategy	<i>Politics and Communication in America</i> Ch. 7	Complete reading assignment Mid-term project assigned: due by February 15
Thursday, February 8	Politics and Television	<i>Politics and Communication in America</i> Ch. 15	Complete reading assignment

Thursday, February 15	Branding and advertising: A political perspective	Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide Ch. 6 cont.	Complete reading assignment Final project assigned: Due by March 8 Final presentation assigned: Due during March 12 finals week
Thursday, February 22	Persuasive conversations	https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action	Complete reading assignment
Thursday, March 1	Strategic communications: Planning & management	Politics and Communication in America Ch. 9	Complete reading assignment
Thursday, March 8	The new era of news	The Real Story about Fake News http://www.radiolab.org/story/breaking-news/	Complete reading assignment
Thursday, March 15	Finals week	None	Final presentations due

NOTE: This syllabus is a living document and I reserve the right to augment the syllabus and course schedule.