

COMM 390/590: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: THEORY & RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STEVENS POINT, FALL '18
(TTh 2:00-3:15PM; CAC 204)

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Course Description

“He who loses the support of the people is a king no longer”

(Aristotle)

More than two millennia separate us from Aristotle who made the above comment. By now, after they lost “the support of the people,” most of those kings have been gone. Instead of kings in a traditional sense, we now have elected officials: mayors, judges, legislators, and among others, of course, presidents. Yet, the fate of these modern, elected “kings” is subject to the same, awesome force Aristotle talks about: it is the opinion of the public that puts them into office and discards them when time comes. It is a pervasive notion that this force, called *public opinion* can be managed. Indeed, what else could account for the billions of dollars spent on political advertising?

This course introduces you to the theory and practice of “public opinion management” on political matters, or in other words: *political communication*. Even though the primary focus will be on modern presidential campaigns, the topics to be covered are of relevance to political communication at all levels of contemporary American politics.

Objectives

This course seeks to:

- introduce you to the theoretical foundations of political communication, including political behavior and socialization, and theories of public opinion
- introduce you to political and campaign research
- enable you with skills of interpreting political poll data
- familiarize you with the profession of political consultants
- introduce you to the analysis and design of political messages suited to specific audiences
- introduce you to strategies of political campaigns

Readings

There one assigned textbook for this class:

Trent, J. S & Friedenberg R. V. (2008) *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices* (6th edition). New York: Rowman& Littlefield.

The book is available through text rental at the university bookstore. Additional required readings and supplementary materials will be made available through the course website (D2L) or occasionally distributed in class.

Class Activities and Grading

Your final grade will be contingent upon the following activities and assignments taking place over the course of the semester:

I. Exams:		25%
1. Exam #1:	10%	
2. Exam #2:	15%	
II. Pop-quizzes and homework:		10%
III. Papers:		25%
1. Debate analysis paper:	10%	
2. Term project paper:	15%	
IV. Presentations		25%
1. War Room Report (group assign.):	10%	
2. Term project presentation:	15%	
V. Participation in Discussions & community presentation:		10%
VI. Completion of IRB online training:		5%

Grading scale for final grade:

95 – 100% = A	84 – 86% = B	74 – 76% = C	60 – 66% = D
90 – 94% = A-	80 – 83% = B-	70 – 73% = C-	< 60% = F
87 – 89% = B+	77 – 79% = C+	67 – 69% = D+	

Attendance

In this seminar I will not take attendance formally. Yet, your regular attendance is a strong precursor of your final grade. Those who attend tend to do better on the assignments and the exams. Finally, if you're not present, you cannot participate in class discussions, which will lower your participation grade.

Missed/Late Assignments

You are expected to give your presentation on the class day when you are scheduled. If you miss your presentation, it will be impossible to make it up.

Written assignments must be handed in at the end of the class specified by the due date. Late papers receive a failing grade.

If you miss an exam or a quiz, unless you are granted an excused absence, you will not be permitted to make it up.

Academic Honesty

When completing your assignments, you are expected to do original work. That is, you must avoid any form of plagiarism. I consider plagiarism - as defined by *Dictionary.com* – the “use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work”. A student caught on plagiarizing shall receive a failing grade for his/her assignment. Further academic misconduct shall be sanctioned in accordance with the *UWSP Chapter 14 – Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures*.

Conduct in Class

To provide a fruitful experience and an effective learning environment for all of us, I expect each of you to conduct yourself with respect for your fellow students, in line with the *UWSP Communal Bill of Rights*. Also,

- Students are to be seated in class by 2:00PM, by which I will be ready to teach. I consider lateness disruptive and an emergent pattern of lateness will be treated as equivalent to absences.
- Any use, including the visual display of **cell phones** is not tolerated in this class. By the beginning of class, all cell phones must be **turned off and put away** until the end of class. I consider any use of cell phones, including text messaging, as disrespectful and disruptive.
- Use of **laptop** computers and **tablets** is **not allowed** in class. Exception is made in case of students who are unable to take paper notes due to some documented physical condition.

Course Schedule

(Note: This schedule is subject to change. Should changes occur, they will be announced in class)

Date	Topics & activities	Reading & task due
4-Sep	Distribution of syllabus, course introduction	
6-Sep	Political communication: definition and an overview; Political socialization	https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/1600/executive-branch (read: executive-, legislative-, judicial branch; the Constitution, elections and voting, Powel & Cowart Ch1, Ch2
11-Sep	"Moral Politics": the power of values and attitudes	Lakoff
13-Sep	Moral Politics 2	
18-Sep	Political behavior & public opinion 1	Niemi& Weisberg (2001)
20-Sep	Political polling	Powel & Cowart Ch 10
25-Sep	Intro. to political campaign communication	T & F Ch 1
27-Sep	Exam #1; War Room report #1	
2-Oct	The four stages of political communication campaigns	T & F Ch 2
4-Oct	Political campaign styles and strategies	T & F Ch 3; term project proposal due
9-Oct	Debates	T & F Ch 8
11-Oct	Interpersonal Communication; War Room report #2	T & F Ch 9
16-Oct	The mass media in political communication	T & F Ch 4
18-Oct	Televised political advertising	T & F Ch 5
23-Oct	War Room report #3 + discussion	Debate analysis paper due
25-Oct	Fieldwork set up and training	
30-Oct	Election Day: Fieldwork	
1-Nov	Public speaking/ political speech writing	T & F Ch 6
6-Nov	Recurring forms of political communication	T & F Ch 7
8-Nov	Political advertising + strategies	T & F Ch 10; Powel & Cowart Ch 3
13-Nov	Exam #2; campaign consultants	TBD
15-Nov	Case study video: The War Room1	
20-Nov	Case study video: The War Room2 + discussion	
22-Nov	The Internet in political communication	Stromer-Galley
27-Nov	Data analysis workshop 1	
29-Nov	Data analysis workshop 2	
4-Dec	Catch up day	
6-Dec	Final project presentations	
11-Dec	Final project presentations	
13-Dec	Final project presentations	
17-Dec	(Make up presentations?)	Term paper due