

COMM 4814: Political Communication

Autumn 2019

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Lecture Times: Wednesday & Friday 11:10am - 12:30pm

Lecture Location: 309 Campbell Hall

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of the role of communication in politics, and the role it plays in a properly functioning democracy. We will explore research from the fields of communication and political science concerning the content of a variety of “old” and “new” forms of political communication. We will discuss the role of traditional news media, opinion and entertainment, face-to-face interpersonal communication, and various forms of technologically mediated social interactions in politics (e.g., social media), each from the perspectives of both the public and the government. We will also consider the cognitive and behavioral effects of political communication on the public and the political system. Although the primary emphasis of this course will be on American politics, we will at times discuss how the American system differs from others, and I welcome hearing from students with interests in other specific political systems.

Course Objectives

Students will (a) understand the actors and roles involved in political communication; (b) understand the production, form, and content of various media of political communication; (c) understand with whom, and how, political communication takes place within the family and broader social ties both face-to-face and via social media; and (d) how each of these matches up with the requirements of a functioning democratic political system.

Requirements & Grading

There will be no textbook for the course; instead, readings from a variety of sources have been assembled and are available via PDFs posted on the course Carmen site. Since the readings are made available to you at no cost and with easy access, I will expect you to have read and understood the assigned readings *before* class, and that you will be prepared to discuss them *in* class. Quizzes on the readings will account for 1/5 of your course grade. Much of class time will be spent clarifying, expanding upon, and applying the readings so involvement in this process is an important part of the course. If students are not prepared to discuss the readings they’ve done before class, it will be difficult to cover the material in class. Key readings are listed on this syllabus, but for many topic areas I also will be posting brief additional readings (e.g., news articles, blog posts) throughout the semester that will help shape discussion and must also be

read (and will be fair game for exams).

More generally, you will also find it useful to keep up with local, national, and world political events during this class – both through text-based media (e.g., online newspaper sources) and in video format (e.g., political talk and/or opinion programs on cable television). These sources of information will not only keep you up-to-date on political events of the day – something all of us should do as citizens of a democracy – but they will also be the source of examples and assignments that will be used to illustrate concepts discussed in class. You’ll be better off knowing and understanding a political topic used as an example in class if you’ve already read about it that morning in a newspaper.

Your grade for the semester will be based on the following evaluation criteria:

Class attendance / participation		10%
Reading quizzes:		20%
Homework assignments:		30%
Midterm exam:	2/26	20%
Final exam:	4/22	20%

The grading scale for this course follows the standard OSU grading scheme, which does not use rounding:

A =	93-100%	C =	73-76%
A- =	90-92%	C- =	70-72%
B+ =	87-89%	D+ =	67-69%
B =	83-86%	D =	63-66%
B- =	80-82%	D- =	60-62%
C+ =	77-79%	E =	0-59%

When letter grades are given for a homework assignment, they will be converted into the following numeric values for final grade calculation:

A+, A, A- =	100, 95, 91
B+, B, B- =	88, 85, 81
C+, C, C- =	78, 75, 71
D+, D, D- =	68, 65, 61
E (F) =	0

Class Participation: I will take attendance on random days throughout the semester, more often if overall class attendance seems to wane; I will also consider being in class on quiz days as attendance (above and beyond whatever grade you earn on the quiz that day). Excuses for missed days will need to be documented, and in nearly all cases except for emergencies must be provided in advance of class. I will also assess the extent to which students regularly contribute to class in a positive manner (i.e., participate in class discussion in an informed manner, demonstrate having read course readings) or negative manner (e.g., off-topic discussions, other distracting behaviors) as well as those who rarely participate, and this will be incorporated into the participation grade in a meaningful way. The combination of these two factors – attendance being measured objectively and class contributions being measured subjectively – are together

worth 10% of your course grade.

Reading Quizzes: Unless otherwise communicated, the first day of each new course topic will begin with a brief quiz on the readings assigned for that topic. Students will be provided with a list of questions in advance that they should be able to answer from the readings for each course topic. The reading quizzes will evaluate students' ability to answer those questions prior to addressing the material in class. Many of these questions may reappear in some form on the midterm and final exams. Readings quizzes are collectively worth 20% of the course grade. Students must be present (and on time!) to take the readings quizzes; there will be no makeups. I will discuss accommodations for students with a valid, documented, excuse who notify me in advance of (quiz) class time. See section below on "Schedule Conflicts."

Homework assignments: Throughout the semester students will complete a number of homework assignments. These may include written assessments of political communication content or conversations and reflections on course readings or lecture content; in many cases they will take a few days of planning or intermittent work before writing to complete, so think ahead! Late assignments will not be accepted, and assignments must be submitted to Carmen in PDF format before the official start of class on the due date. Usually these assignments will require you to make connections to assigned readings. I will provide a separate document detailing these assignments. In total, these homework assignments will account for 30% of the course grade.

Midterm and Final Exams: This course will employ a midterm and a final exam. These exams will be designed to evaluate your recall, comprehension and ability to apply the information presented in the course. The exams will cover both lecture and reading material. If the times/dates for the exams conflict with religious holiday, bring this to my attention by the end of the first week of class so we can negotiate potential alternative arrangements. Having more than one exam on the same day, or plans to miss class to travel for a holiday, wedding, etc. does not constitute a reason to miss an exam in this course.

After the first week of class, only those with a *prior* formal, written excuse from a doctor indicating they were physically unable to come to the exam will have exams rescheduled. Rescheduled exams will NOT be the same exam given to the rest of the class and may be of a different form. Any others who miss an exam will receive a zero for that exam and risk failing the course. The midterm is worth 20% of your course grade and the final is worth 20% of your course grade.

Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours (see above) during which I encourage you to come to see me to discuss course-related matters. If your schedule does not permit visiting me during formal office hours, please let me know and I will attempt to arrange an alternative time by appointment. Please notify me (by the start of office hours) if you plan to come by; if no one expresses interest in office hours on a given day, I may not be available in my office during that time.

Please do take advantage of this resource to ask questions or clarification, seek additional information, and so forth. It is my job to make sure that you have every opportunity to learn the course material, and I will make every effort to do so. But, it is also incumbent upon you to seek help when you think you need it. If you do not seek input when your grades indicate you need it, there is little I can do to help you. ***For those of you who are graduating seniors do not put yourself in the position to miss graduation because of your performance in this course – take advantage of every opportunity I can offer to do well.***

Course Policies

Schedule Conflicts. All exams and reading quizzes must be taken on the designated dates and times, and homework assignments but be turned in on time to be counted (no computer-related excuses accepted). It is your responsibility to note the day/time of exams/quizzes/homeworks now and make sure you will be able to attend all the exams and complete the quizzes and homeworks. If you have any schedule conflicts, you should rearrange your schedule so that you can complete all of the work (or perhaps consider dropping the class). No make-ups are allowed except in the case of an extreme emergency. In the rare event that an emergency arises, it is the student's responsibility to 1) inform the instructor prior to the exam time, and 2) provide the instructor with written documentation of the emergency. Documentation must be a written doctor's note explaining the necessity of the absence or the professor's PRIOR approval of a copy of the "Explanatory Statement for Absence from Class" (see <http://shs.osu.edu/posts/documents/absence-excuse-form2.pdf>). Please keep in mind that any falsification of the information on this form is considered academic misconduct and can lead to severe consequences.

Student Performance. All students (especially graduating seniors!) who "need" this course for whatever reason (scholarships, completing minors, graduating) should work especially hard to ensure that they will pass it. There will NOT be opportunities for students to re-take exams or re-complete assignments in order to raise grades. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that he or she receives a passing final grade by working diligently and responsibly throughout the quarter. No exceptions will be made. Grades will be calculated strictly by the criteria set forth in the syllabus.

Classroom Civility

We want to build a classroom climate that is comfortable for all. In a communication class, it is *especially* important that we (1) display respect for all members of the classroom – including the instructor and students, (2) pay attention to and participate in all class sessions and activities; (3) avoid unnecessary disruption during class time (e.g., having private conversations, reading the newspaper, surfing the Web or watching videos on a laptop or tablet computer, doing work for other classes, receiving cell phone calls and text messages); and (4) avoid racist, sexist, homophobic or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our campus / classroom. This is not an exhaustive list of behaviors; rather, they represent the minimum standards that help make the classroom a productive place for all concerned. If you cannot maintain these standards, you WILL be asked to leave the classroom so that others have the

opportunity to learn unimpeded. I encourage students to express their views in a civil manner, and to debate and critique one another's arguments on the basis of evidence and logic.

Student Use of Technology in the Classroom

Although I believe the use of laptops or tablets can be used for productive purposes in class, it is my observation (reinforced by academic research) that they primarily serve as distractions – both to those who use them, and those nearby. Although some might argue laptops are beneficial for taking notes, considerable scientific research demonstrates that **USING LAPTOPS FOR TAKING NOTES IMPEDES LEARNING COMPARED TO PAPER AND PEN NOTETAKING**. If you'd like to read a brief summary of just some of the evidence, [click here](#) or check out the *Scientific American* article "A Learning Secret: Don't Take Notes with a Laptop" on Carmen under "General Information." Here are a few quotes from that paper that might get you thinking about whether or not you should bring your iPad or laptop in class:

When participants were given an opportunity to study with their notes before the final assessment, once again those who took longhand notes outperformed laptop participants. Because longhand notes contain students' own words and handwriting, they may serve as more effective memory cues by recreating the context (e.g., thought processes, emotions, conclusions) as well as content (e.g., individual facts) from the original learning session...

...In the Mueller and Oppenheimer studies, all laptops were disconnected from the internet, thus eliminating any disruption from email, instant messaging, surfing, or other online distractions. In most typical college settings, however, internet access is available, and evidence suggests that when college students use laptops, they spend 40% of class time using applications unrelated to coursework, are more likely to fall off task, and are less satisfied with their education.

It's your money, and your education. So, as long as you use your laptop or tablet in a responsible manner that is not distracting to other students, I'll permit it. But, cellphone use in this class is banned; those who use cellphones in class will lose any class participation credit earned in the class that day. And, with regards to tablets and laptops, anyone using their device in a manner that is distracting to others (e.g., using email or social media, watching movies, playing games, online shopping) will be asked to leave class and/or will have any class attendance points for that day scored as zero.

Some Words About Academic Honesty

It is your responsibility to complete your own work as best you can in the time provided. The Ohio State University's *Code of Student Conduct* (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: "Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process." Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, possession of unauthorized materials during an examination, and falsification of laboratory or other data. Ignorance of the University's *Code of Student Conduct* is never considered an excuse for academic misconduct, so I recommend that you review the *Code of Student Conduct* and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct at http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp

Academic misconduct is a serious offense, and it is my responsibility to make sure it does not occur. If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM). If COAM determines that you have violated the University's *Code of Student Conduct*, the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University. If you have any questions about this policy or what constitutes academic misconduct, please contact your professor or TA or visit the COAM web page at <http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html>.

General Advice

If You Have Problems, Seek Solutions Early. For example, if you do poorly on an exam, see me at that time (instead of later in the course). In addition, as a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing.

If you are or someone you know is suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting <https://ccs.osu.edu/> or calling 614-292-5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower.

If you are thinking of harming yourself or need a safe, non-judgmental place to talk, or if you are worried about someone else and need advice about what to do, 24 hour emergency help is also available through the Suicide Prevention Hotline (Columbus: 614-221-5445 / National: 800-273-8255); or text (4hope to 741741); or at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request. Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor and seeking available assistance in a timely manner. If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact me to arrange an appointment by the second week of classes. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs and explore potential accommodations. If you have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services (ODS) but believe you may need accommodations, I encourage you to do so. I rely on the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in Rm. 150 Pomerene Hall for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies.

Course Schedule and Readings

(Students are responsible for any changes to this syllabus announced in class.)

DATE	TOPIC	REQUIRED READINGS
1/8	Introduction & Course Objectives	No readings
1/10	Overview of Political Communication Research	Norris (2000) Ch. 2: "Evaluating Media Performance"
1/15, 1/17, 1/22, 1/24	Political Public Relations	Maltese (1992) Ch. 1: "Introduction" Kumar (2007) Ch. 4: "White House Communications Advisers" (only pp. 119-136, 143-155, and 165-168) Ballhaus (2019) "White House Communications Director Bill Shine..." Kumar (2007) Ch. 5: "The Press Secretary to the President" Hess (2017) "Why the Leaks Won't Stop" Eilperin (2017) "Under Trump, Inconvenient Data is Being Sidelined" Williamson (2019) "Stephanie Grisham's Turbulent Ascent..."
1/29, 1/31, 2/5	Political Advertising	Geer (2012) "The News Media and the Rise of Negativity in Presidential Campaigns" Parry-Giles et al. (2016) "2016 Presidential Advertising..." Fowler, Franz, & Ridout (2018) "The Big Lessons of Advertising in 2018"
2/7, 2/12, 2/14	Traditional News Media	Bennett (2009) Ch. 2: "News Content: Four Information Biases That Matter" Patterson (2016) "News Coverage of the 2016..." Eveland & Garrett (2017) "Communication Modalities and Political Knowledge"
2/19, 2/21	Presidential Debates	Schroeder (2008) Ch. 1: "The Predebate Debate" Melber (2016) "For Trump-Clinton 2016 Debate..." Forgey (2019) "Trump Slams Debate Commission..." <i>*Also view (even if you have before) one 2016 presidential debate between Clinton and Trump. Search YouTube.</i>
2/26	Midterm Exam	No readings
2/28, 3/4, 3/6, 3/11, 3/13	The "New" Media Environment: Talk and Entertainment	Delli Carpini (2017) "The Political Effects of Entertainment Media" Mutz (2016) "Harry Potter and the Deathly Donald"
3/18, 3/20, 3/25	Political Networks, Conversations and Deliberation	Morrell (2018) "Listening and Deliberation" Rolfe & Chan (2018) "Voting and Political Participation" Pew (2019) "Public Highly Critical of State of Political Discourse..."
3/27, 4/1, 4/3	Politics Online	Settle (2018) "The END Framework of Political Interaction on Social Media" Shanahan (2016) "How News Sites' Online Comments..." Grygiel (2019) "Facebook Algorithm Changes..."
4/8, 4/10	A Comparative Perspective	Iyengar & McGrady (2007) Ch. 2: "The Press and the Democratic Process" Freedom House (2016) "Freedom of the Press 2017"
4/15, 4/17	Family Communication & Youth	McDevitt (2016) "Political Socialization" Clark, Hall, & Duffy (2018) "How to Talk About Politics..."
Wed. 4/22	Final Exam	12-1:45pm in our normal classroom; 80 minutes exam time

Note: No classes on 3/11 or 3/13. **Highlighted dates** are homework due dates; **red** are quiz dates.

Full Citations for Book-Based Assigned Readings

- Bennett, W. L. (2009). *News: The politics of illusion* (8th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Delli Carpini, M. X. (2017). The political effects of entertainment media. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 851-870). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Eveland, W. P., Jr. & Garrett, R. K. (2017). Communication modalities and political knowledge. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 517-530). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Iyengar, S., & McGrady, J. A. (2007). *Media politics: A citizen's guide*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Kumar, M. J. (2007). *Managing the president's message: The White House communications operation*. Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press.
- Maltese, J. A. (1992). *Spin control: The White House Office of Communications and the management of presidential news*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Norris, P. (2000). *A virtuous circle: Political communications in postindustrial societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rolfe, M., & Chan, S. (2018). Voting and political participation. In J. N. Victor, A. H. Montgomery, & M. Lubell (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political networks* (pp. 357-382). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schroeder, A. (2008). *Presidential debates: Fifty years of high-risk TV*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Settle, J. E. (2018). *Frenemies: How social media polarizes America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.