

**PR 458: Public Relations in Politics and Political Campaigns**

**4 Units**

**Spring – Tuesdays – 2-5:20 p.m.**

**Section:** 21117

**Location:** ANN 305

**Instructor: Dan Schnur**

**Office Hours:** By Appointment **(**ASC 326E)

**Contact Info:** [dan.schnur@mindspring.com](mailto:dan.schnur@mindspring.com)

**I. Course Description**

This course will teach public relations strategy and tactics in the context of a political campaign, but the key concepts will be applicable to almost any persuasive and motivational messaging challenge.

Students will learn the principles of campaign message development, and will be asked to practically apply those lessons by developing campaign messages of their own for both real and hypothetical candidates. They will be asked to attempt to deliver campaign messages as well, both in writing and in classroom exercises that require them to play the role of both candidate and campaign strategist by participating in mock news conferences, ad tests, and other simulations of real-life campaign experiences. By the end of the semester, they will be prepared to write a full-length campaign strategy prospectus on behalf of a political candidate or cause of their choosing.

Students with an interest in politics and government will benefit from the ongoing discussion of contemporary and historical political activity as a regular feature of the course. Those students considering careers in politics and government will benefit from access to an instructor with real-world experience in these fields, as well as practical written and in-class exercises designed to help them understand the unique requirements of political messaging. Other students who are preparing for careers outside of politics and government will find the real-world framing of this course to be a useful complement to other classes in the Public Relations major.

This course will be an exercise in pure, practical politics. If you have a political ideology, be prepared to check it at the door. Because rather than engaging in a philosophical debate over the relative merits of various candidates and causes, we will instead use this course to examine the inner workings of the political process and the manner in which political messages are communicated to the voting public. Rather than arguing liberal vs. conservative and Democrat vs. Republican, this course will focus on how successful campaign operatives of both parties develop, target and deliver a message to the voters.

**II. Overall Learning Objectives and Assessment**

We will devote the bulk of the course to discussing the practicalities of campaign politics, with a specific emphasis on campaign strategy and messaging. We will focus on the means by which a campaign develops its message, how that message is communicated through the news media, paid advertising, online communications and social media. The class will also examine the broader strategic and tactical questions which guide a campaign’s operation.

In the aftermath of the 2016 election, we will take a broader look at the American political system: its strengths and weaknesses, the relationship between politicians and the voters and the changing influence of the news media on the political process. Last year’s campaign upended a great number of long-held assumptions about the interaction between candidates, voters, and media. We will discuss how the changing nature of those roles impacts not just politics but other areas of society as well.

Students will be expected to monitor national and state government and political news on an ongoing basis and be prepared to discuss relevant developments in class. We will use both breaking government and political news, including lessons from 2012 and the 2016 presidential campaigns and other recent campaigns at the state and national level.

The role of both the instructor and the students are much more participatory than in a traditional classroom atmosphere. While the first half of class is devoted to traditional lecture on a pre-assigned topic, students are expected to play an active and involved role in the form of questions, comments, or analysis on the topic at hand. The second half of each class requires even more involvement: it is devoted to a class discussion of contemporary politics or government (in the context of that week’s topic) or to the students’ involvement in a series of classroom activities designed to simulate actual campaign messaging activities.

**III. Description of Assignments**

1. *Class participation, discussion and homework assignments -- 10%*

This includes questions and comments during the lecture session of each class, as well as active involvement in class discussion and all small-group classroom presentations. Occasional short homework assignments will be assigned. While these assignments will not be graded, their completion will be required and count toward this portion of the student’s semester grade.

2. *Midterm – 20%*

Overview of message development techniques introduced in first portion of semester. Familiarity with these concepts needed to begin final project. Combination of short answer and essay questions.

(more)

3. *Semester Project -- 60%*

This project will require the development of a comprehensive campaign communications strategy on behalf of a political candidate running for state or national office. The final paper, presented in memo form, should be presentable to the actual candidate or campaign manager. Two written assignments which will both help in completing the final paper, will be graded separately and each will count for ten percent of your semester grade.

1. Final Paper 40%
2. Candidate Research Summary 10%
3. Voter Targeting Summary 10%

4. *In-Class Final Exam/Presentation – 10%*

Small group presentation utilizing communications strategy, comparative analysis and self and opposition research techniques learned in final portion of semester. Hands-on preparation and application of campaign messaging goals.

**IV. Grading**

**a. Breakdown of Grade**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Assignment** | **Points** | **% of Grade** |
| Class participation, discussion and homework assignments |  | 10% |
| Midterm |  | 20% |
| Semester Project |  | 60% total |
| 1. Final Paper |  | 40% |
| b. Candidate Research Summary |  | 10% |
| c. Voter Targeting Summary |  | 10% |
| In-Class Final Exam |  | 10% |
| **TOTAL** |  | **100%** |

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**b. Grading Scale**

Course requirements are simple: show up, do the reading, participate in classroom discussion and exercises and complete all written assignments on time. A short midterm, based on the first several weeks of reading and lectures, will represent twenty percent of the course grade.

The centerpiece of the course will be a semester project for which students will research and write a full campaign plan that you would submit to a candidate for office as that candidate’s campaign manager. This plan will encompass all facets of campaign strategy, message development and communication and coalition development and voter targeting. Students will rely on class lectures and reading for the bulk of the necessary information, although a good amount of independent research will be required as well.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 95 to 100: A | 70 to less than 75: C+ | 45 to less than 50: D- |
| 90 to less than 95: A- | 65 to less than 70: C | 0 to less than 45: F |
| 85 to less than 90: B+ | 60 to less than 65: C- |  |
| 80 to less than 85: B | 55 to less than 60: D+ |  |
| 75 to less than 80: B- | 50 to less than 55: D |  |

1. **Grading Standards**

**“A” projects** have writing near professional quality; one or no mistakes; clearly proofread and edited material. All required elements included, as listed on final paper outline. Provides substantiation for all strategic assumptions. Excellent organization and flow; original thinking.

**“B” projects** have two to five spelling, grammar or AP Style mistakes. One or more required elements missing or poorly displayed. Most required elements included, including substantiation for most strategic assumptions. Good organization and flow; some original thinking.  
  
**“C” projects** have more than five errors (spelling, grammar, AP style). Poorly edited and/or proofread. Several required elements missing or poorly displayed. Substantiation not provided for many strategic assumptions. Fair organization and flow; little original thinking shown.   
  
“**D” projects** have more than 10 errors (spelling, grammar). Needs to be completely rewritten. Poorly edited and/or proofread. Many required elements missing or poorly displayed. Substantiation not provided for any strategic assumptions.Poor organization and flow; no original thinking shown.   
  
**“F” projects** are not rewritable, late without instructor approval or not turned in.

**d. Course Requirements**

1. Students are expected to attend all classes. Unexcused absences, lateness in arriving, leaving early (i.e. at the break), and failure to meet deadlines will have a negative impact on the student's final grade. I appreciate being notified in advance if a student plans to miss a class.
2. Students who unavoidably miss a class are responsible for getting assignments and notes from a classmate. If an assignment is due, the student is responsible for turning assignments in to me before a class a missed. No excuses. No exceptions.
3. Grammar, spelling and writing ability are extremely important. Students are expected to have learned from prior courses and experience how to produce written materials that are error-free and meet the quality of standards of this school and the profession.
4. All written assignments must be typed.
5. Participation in class discussion is not optional, but mandatory. Students are expected to have read all course assignments and be prepared to discuss them.
6. There are no make-ups for late assignments. No excuses. No exceptions.

**V. Assignment Submission Policy**

A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will automatically be given a grade of F.

B. Assignments must be submitted via hard-copies in class.

**VI. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

Hardball- Chris Matthews (Simon and Schuster Free Press)

Collision 2012- Dan Balz and James Silberman (Viking)

Presidential Elections- Nelson Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky (Chatham)

The Gamble- Lynn Vavreck and John Sides (Penguin)

Inside Campaigns- Will Feltus, Ken Goldstein, Matthew Dallek (Sage Publishing/CQ)

Additional Reading: Students are expected to be aware of current events and issues and are encouraged to read at least one daily newspaper per day, watch local and national news programs, and monitor online coverage of California and national politics and government. The following sites are recommended for comprehensive coverage: The Politico ([www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com/)) and Rough & Tumble ([www.rtumble.com](http://www.rtumble.com/)).

**VII. Laptop Policy**

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [**Annenberg Virtual Commons**](http://vc.uscannenberg.org/) for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, please visit USC’s [**Information Technology Services**](http://itservices.usc.edu/wireless/support/) website.

**VIII. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

**SECTION I: GETTING READY TO RUN**

Week 1: January 10 – Class Introduction and Overview

* Introduction of course: expectations, weekly assignments, reading and discussion
* Competition for Voters’ Attention – Making People Care
* Reading Assignment for 1/17: Hardball (Chapters 1-8)

Week 2: January 17– Message Development: Importance of Biography

* Biography as Foundation for Campaign Message
* Developing Emotional Conerction Between Candidate and Voters
* Biography as Credibility Basis for Issue/Policy Discussion
* Reading Assignment 1/24: Hardball (Chapters 9-conclusion), Presidential Elections (p. 1-26, 161-168)

Week 3: January 24 – Elements of Message Development

* Central Elements of Message Development
* Role of Issues in Campaign Message
* Message Reinforcement Techniques
* Reading Assignment for 1/31: Presidential Elections (p. 27-49, 85-92, 97-157, 168-182-195), Inside Campaigns (p. 1-31)
* **Writing Assignment for 1/31: 1-2 page Message Development Exercise**

Week 4: January 31 – Message Development: Understanding the Landscape through Political Research

* Self and Opposition Research
* Demographic and Geographic Voter Research
* Contrasting Between Candidate and Opponent
* **1-2 page Message Development Exercise due**
* Reading Assignment for 2/7: Collision (pp.1-235), Inside Campaigns (31-57)
* **Writing Assignment for 2/7: Topics for Final Project**

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Week 5: February 7 – Message Development: Targeting the Message

* Identifying Voting Trends: Persuasion vs. Organization/Motivation
* Motivating Supporters/ Persuading Undecided Voters
* Voter Groups – Characteristics and Influence
* Reading Assignment for 2/21: Collision (pp.236-354), Inside Campaigns (p.155-171), Presidential Elections (p. 51-85, 202-267)
* **Writing Assignment for 2/21: Candidate Message Summary**
* **Topics for Final Project due**

Week 6: February 14– Midterm

**SECTION II: ENGAGING THE ELECTORATE AND THE OPPONENT**

Week 7: February 21 - Message Delivery: Messaging through News Media Coverage

* Working with the News Media
* Use of Public Events for Message Reinforcement
* Changing Role of News Media
* Reading Assignment for 2/28: The Gamble (pp. 1- 140), Inside Campaigns (p. 103-133)
* **Candidate Message Summary due**

Week 8: February 28– Message Delivery – Principles of Paid Media and Advertising

* Goals of Broadcast Advertising, Mass Communication
* Nonverbal Messaging/Message Reinforcement
* Advantages/Disadvantages of Paid Media
* Reading Assignment for 3/7: Inside Campaigns (p. 133-151)
* **Writing Assignment for 3/7: Candidate Research Summary**

Week 9: March 7 – Messaging Options in Paid and News Media

* Options for Motivating, Persuading Voters
* Establishing Candidate’s Positive Credentials
* Focusing on Opposition: Negative/Comparative Messaging
* Coordination between Paid/News media
* **Candidate Research Summary due**
* Reading Assignment for 3/21: The Gamble (pp. 141- 242), Inside Campaigns (p. 57-80)

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March 14 - Spring Break (no class)

Week 10: March 21 – Targeted Paid Media and Advertising

* Goals of Communicating by Mail and E-Mail
* Value of Data Analysis
* Targeting message Demographically
* Reading Assignment for 3/28: Inside Campaigns (p. 85-100)
* **Writing Assignment for 3/28: Voter Research Summary Assignment**

**SECTION III: ADVANCED MESSAGING AND TARGETING**

Week 11: March 28 – Campaigning Online: Goals and Impact

* Trends in Online Communications
* Persuasive vs. Motivational Campaigning
* Online News/Paid Media
* **Voter Research Summary Assignment due**
* Reading Assignment for 4/4: Inside Campaigns (p. 173-231), Presidential Elections (p. 51-74, 213-267)

Week 12: April 4 – Campaigning Online: Social Media and Voter Contact

* Motivating, Organizing Supporters for Voter Contact
* Volunteer and Grassroots Outreach
* Trading Message Control for Supporter Involvement
* **Writing Assignment for 4/11: Voter Targeting Summary**
* Reading Assignment for 4/11: TBD

Week 13: April 11 – Advanced Strategy: Damage Control

* Expecting the Unexpected: Strategies for staying on message
* Framing debate to messaging goals
* Tyranny of the News Cycle: Rapid Response
* **Voter Targeting Summary Assignment due**

Week 14: April 18 – Politics in the Future

* Ideological Polarization vs. Search for Common Ground
* New Media's New Options
* Divide Between Information Haves/Have Nots
* **Writing Assignment for 4/25: Final Paper**

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Week 15: April 25 - Wrap-Up and Final Thoughts

* Semester review
* Practical/Professional Applications of Course Material
* Role of Citizen/Voter in Political Process
* **Final Paper due**
* **Students submit their USC Course Evaluations.**

**May 4, 2-4 p.m. – Final Exam**

**IX. Extra Credit Requirements**

Students should be conversant on current events and issues pertaining to politics and public policy. While online resources are helpful, attending on-campus and community events with a focus on current events for extra credit is strongly encouraged for more comprehensive understanding of the political and policy landscape. Each student can only increase one aspect of his or her grade. (i.e. You can increase either your paper grade or your midterm grade, but not both.)

Programs related to politics and public policy can all qualify for extra credit. But all require the instructor’s permission, which must be requested at least 24 hours before the event takes place.

The basis for extra credit is as follows:

1) Attend two events and write a 1-2 page summary of each event before class the following week – increase class participation and homework grade by 1/3 grade

2) Attend four events and write a 1-2 page summary of each event before class the following week – increase midterm grade by 1/3 grade

3) Attend six events and write a 1-2 page summary of each event before class the following week – increase final paper grade by 1/3 grade

**Internships**

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism class.

**X. Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**a. Academic Conduct**

*Plagiarism*

Presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words - is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/b/11-00-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

*USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity*

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

**b. Support Systems**

*Equity and Diversity*

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* (<http://equity.usc.edu/>) or to the *Department of Public Safety* (<http://dps.usc.edu/contact/report/>). This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community - such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member - can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person.The *Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services* (<http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/>) provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage (<https://sarc.usc.edu/>) describes reporting options and other resources.

*Support with Scholarly Writing*

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* (<http://ali.usc.edu/>) which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs* (<http://dsp.usc.edu/>) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.

Students requesting test-related accommodations will need to share and discuss their DSP recommended accommodation letter/s with their faculty and/or appropriate departmental contact person at least three weeks before the date the accommodations will be needed. Additional time may be needed for final exams. Reasonable exceptions will be considered during the first three weeks of the semester as well as for temporary injuries and for students recently diagnosed. Please note that a reasonable period of time is still required for DSP to review documentation and to make a determination whether a requested accommodation will be appropriate.

*Stress Management*

Students are under a lot of pressure. If you start to feel overwhelmed, it is important that you reach out for help. A good place to start is the USC Student Counseling Services office at (213) 740-7711. The service is confidential, and there is no charge.

*Emergency Information*

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* (<http://emergency.usc.edu/>) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

**XI. Student Support**

We are extremely fortunate to have a graduate student with extensive political and government experience to serve as our course reader/grader. Nathaniel Haas will be responsible for grading your midterms, your research summaries and final paper. Nathaniel will be available to meet by appointment throughout the semester and can be reached at: [nathanielhaas2@gmail.com](mailto:nathanielhaas2@gmail.com).

We are also fortunate to have three USC undergraduate students: Sarah Collins, Darya Fenton, and Miya Wensley, to serve as Student Mentors for the class. Each student mentor has taken PR 458, or a class very similar to it, during her time here. They will not be involved in grading your work, but will be available throughout the semester to help you to fulfill your class obligations in any way they can. They will hold weekly office hours to meet with students who are seeking additional guidance with the course material and requirements. They can be reached at:

Sarah Collins [sdcollin@usc.edu](mailto:sdcollin@usc.edu)

Darya Fenton [dhfenton@usc.edu](mailto:dhfenton@usc.edu)

Miya Wensley [mwensley@usc.edu](mailto:mwensley@usc.edu)

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Each enrolled student in PR 458 will be assigned to a student mentor as a primary out- of-class contact. While you can visit any of them (as well as the instructor) during their office hours whenever it may be helpful to you, your designated student mentor will have primary responsibility for monitoring your class participation and other non-graded work. The student mentor office hours will be announced in the second week of class. We will provide a schedule for each of their office hours next week.

**XII. About Your Instructor**

Dan Schnur has been teaching courses in politics, communications and leadership at USC since 2004. Dan is also an Adjunct Instructor at the University of California—Berkeley’s Institute of Governmental Studies and has taught at the John F. Kennedy School of Government’s Institute of Politics at Harvard University and George Washington University’s Graduate School of Political Management.

Before coming to USC, Dan worked on four presidential and three gubernatorial campaigns as one of California’s leading political strategists. He served as the national Director of Communications for the 2000 presidential campaign of U.S. Senator John McCain and was the chief media spokesman for California Governor Pete Wilson.

In 2010, Dan was appointed Chairman of the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC), where he implemented groundbreaking campaign finance disclosure requirements. Dan also was a founder and cochairman of the Voices of Reform project, the bi-partisan statewide effort whose work laid the foundation for California’s landmark redistricting reform.

After completing his FPPC term, Dan registered as a No Party Preference voter and launched Fixing California, an organization dedicated to campaign finance and political reform. In 2014, Dan ran for statewide office as a non-partisan candidate for California Secretary of State.

Dan has been an advisor to the William & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Broad Education Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the James Irvine Foundation, the Public Policy Institute of California and the Stuart Foundation on a variety of K-12 education and college and workforce preparedness efforts.