

Political Campaign Communication

COMM 489
Fall 2018

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Office hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 2-4 and by appointment

Democratic governments depend upon the willingness of citizens to surrender power to the public officials whom they elect to govern them. Those elected to political office pass the laws under which we live. These laws cover a full range of human activities from the substantive to the mundane. Officeholders in a democracy derive their authority to enact and enforce these laws on the basis of public support for the ritualistic processes of candidate emergence and election that put them in power. Democracy succeeds only when the citizens of a state accept the legitimacy of the political leadership, believe that their government acts in their behalf, and see their interests being served. If a substantial percentage of the citizenry in any democratic state begin to doubt the legitimacy of the political system, lose confidence in the integrity of their elected officials, disregard the laws or withhold the payment of their taxes, or even if they merely stop casting their ballots, democracy will begin to unravel.

During political campaigns citizens divide themselves into dramatically different and sometimes incompatible ideological factions each committed to the election of a candidate or slate of candidates who best reflects their particular world views. At the local level political candidates may simply meet with their neighbors in close conversational settings to discuss the issues. As the size and scope of the electorate grows, however, the process becomes increasingly complex and costly. Candidates may still meet with many groups of citizens in groups both large and small, but they also make use of a wide range of election “technologies” to help understand and communicate with voters. These technologies may include public opinion polls, focus group interviews, and the use of paid professional consultants. Since the candidates can’t meet all possible voters they must rely on the media and on paid political advertisements to get their messages before the public. Candidates seek to develop communication strategies that can win votes from a plurality of citizens likely to go to the polls. The actual conduct of the campaigns is often bitterly divisive. Yet once the election is finished citizens are expected to put aside their differences and to acknowledge the legitimacy of the system and the rightful authority of those who won the elections to govern.

Democratic governments thus owe their existence to communication. Political discussions take place in daily face-to-face conversations with friends and family, in the mass media, and also on social media platforms. The tenor and texture of political conversation shapes the values that come to define a society. Our political conversations thus give us a sense of ourselves as a people, what we stand for as a nation, and what we are committed to as a culture.

A healthy democracy requires enlivened political discussions wherein people surface and discuss disagreements. Democratic pluralism means that these conversations occur in such a way as to permit people and governments to organize and maintain their connections to

each other. Democratic political argument functions best when conducted in such a way as to enhance mutual respect and a search for shared values. The values that are contested, and thus that are at risk, are expressed through public discourse. The study of public discourse -- the messages that shape and give life to our political choices -- gives us great insight into the values, beliefs, attitudes, and aspirations of our society.

Students in this class will read and come to understand a variety of different theoretical approaches to the study of political campaign communication. In addition, they will learn about how campaigns are planned and established, how public opinion polling informs campaign strategy, how the news media influences public opinion, and how social media creates networks of belief and action. The class seeks to go beyond merely teaching you about the practice of political campaign communication; however, it seeks to fully engage you in one or more of the campaigns being waged this term and to turn you into living, breathing, political beings.

Texts:

Hollihan, T.A., *Uncivil wars: Political campaigns in a media age*. 2nd ed.

Perloff, R.M., *The Dynamics of Political Communication: Media and Politics in a Digital Age*, 2d. ed.

Trent, J.S., Friedenber, R., & Denton, R.E., *Political Campaign Communication*, 8th ed.

In addition, handouts of additional readings will be made available. All are encouraged to read the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and other newspapers, magazines and WEB sites to keep up with current political issues and events.

Assignments:

1. Major paper (30% of final grade). You have two options with this paper. Option 1 is a detailed analysis of a campaign (not the campaign you volunteer for in assignment #2). You can select an ongoing campaign or a recently concluded campaign. The paper should consider candidate and issue strategies, advertisements, public speeches, digital media, etc. and should offer a convincing explanation as to why the campaign succeeded or failed. The paper should draw upon relevant political communication theories as appropriate to support your arguments. Option 2 is to select an important public controversy and analyze how political leaders and the press are responding to that controversy. One might, for example, look at the debate over health care, climate change, education policy, etc. Your focus should be on the communication strategies employed by the different political players or parties. Again, you should draw upon relevant political communication theories to support your arguments. The paper should be 12 pages maximum, draw upon a range of sources, and follow APA style. Each student will present a five minute presentation of their paper on November 27th. The written paper is due December 4th.

2. Campaign Participation (20% of final grade). Each student should volunteer for a political campaign and commit to spend several hours a week on that campaign. You should pay close attention to the campaign's electoral strategy, key messages, targeted voters, get out the vote effort, etc. You will be asked at the end of the term to write an eight page paper summarizing this campaign, explaining your role in it, and explaining why the campaign succeeded or failed. Paper is due November 13th.

3. Group Project (10% of final grade). All students will be assigned to work in groups of 3-4 students. Each group will be asked to assess the current political campaign environment and to select one or more significant issue for discussion, analysis, and study. Topics such as: voter turnout, campaign finance reform, cynicism about politics, misleading advertising, or another topic that you deem important can be considered. Ideally, each group will choose a different topic or issue, so you are encouraged to form your groups as soon as possible and select your topic for my approval to avoid duplications. Each group project should mature into a polished 30-45 minute (depending on group size and available time) power point, text, and/or multimedia presentation. The presentation should reflect your knowledge of the research literature in political campaign communication and your understanding of the issue you selected for analysis. The group presentations will be evaluated on the basis of the oral presentation and the accompanying power point slides and materials. A brief 5-6 page written summary with reference notations should be included when the power point materials are turned in for evaluation. These student presentations will occur on October 23rd.

4. Midterm Examination (15% of final grade). October 16.

5. Final Examination (25% of final grade). This two hour essay examination will occur on **December 11, 5:00-7:00.**

Academic Integrity Policy

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's academic integrity code as detailed in *SCAMPUS*. You should familiarize yourself with these policies. It is the policy of the School of Communication that all violations are reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Any serious violations will result in a failing grade for the course and may also result in expulsion from the Communication major.

ADA Compliance

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with the office of Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations must be obtained from DSP. Please be sure that the letter is delivered to me before the end of the third week of classes.

Tentative Daily Schedule

August 21 Introductions, Communication is essential to politics

August 28 The nature and evolution of the modern campaign
Hollihan, Chapter 1 & 2
Trent, Chapters 1 & 2
Perloff, Chapters 1 & 2

September 4	History of the study of politics and political socialization Hollihan, Chapter 3 Perloff, Chapters 3-5
September 11	Candidate image Hollihan, Chapter 4 Trent, Chapter 3 & 6
September 18	The role of legacy media Hollihan, Chapter 5 Trent, Chapter 4 Perloff, Chapters 6 & 7
September 25	The role of networked social media Trent, Chapter 11 Hollihan, Chapter 8 Perloff, Chapter 8 Handouts
October 2	News Bias and Fake News Perloff, Chapter 9 Handouts
October 9	Campaign Advertising Hollihan, Chapter 6 Trent, Chapter 5 Perloff, Chapter 13
October 16	Mid Term Examination Student Group Work Time
October 23	Student Group Presentations
October 30	The participation crisis in American Politics Hollihan, Chapter 10
November 6	Campaign finance and televised debates Hollihan, Chapter 11 Trent, Chapter 8 Perloff, Chapter 14
November 13	Election Wrap-up discussion Read everything you can find in the media explaining the results of the midterms

November 20	Leadership in the media age Hollihan, Chapter 12 Hollihan, Epilogue Perloff, Chapter 12
November 27	Student Paper Presentations Review for final
December 11	Final Examination 2-4 PM