

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

**4 Units**

**Fall 2019 – Wednesday, 2-5:20 PM**

**Section:** 21280R

**Location:** ANN L116

**Instructor: Dan Schnur**

**Office:** ASC lobby

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, by appointment

**Contact Info:** 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.

We will also 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.

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**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **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%** |

**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. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/26/18 – 12/6/18)**

**Friday, September 13:** Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

**Friday, September 13:** Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

**Tuesday, September 17**: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund for Session 001

**Friday, October 11:** Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

**Friday, October 11:** Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

**Friday, November 15:** Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

**IX. Course Schedule Weekly Breakdown**

**SECTION I: GETTING READY TO RUN**

Week 1: August 28 – Class Introduction and Overview

* Introduction of course: expectations, weekly assignments, reading and discussion
* Competition for Voters’ Attention – Making People Care
* Reading Assignment for 9/4: Hardball (Chapters 1-8)

Week 2: September 4 – Message Development: Importance of Biography

* Biography as Foundation for Campaign Message
* Developing Emotional Connection Between Candidate and Voters
* Biography as Credibility Basis for Issue/Policy Discussion
* Reading Assignment 9/11: Hardball (Chapters 9-conclusion), Presidential Elections (p. 1-26, 161-168)

Week 3: September 11 – Elements of Message Development

* Central Elements of Message Development
* Role of Issues in Campaign Message
* Message Reinforcement Techniques
* Reading Assignment for 9/18 Presidential Elections (p. 27-49, 85-92, 97-157, 168-182-195), Inside Campaigns (p. 1-31)
* **Writing Assignment for 9/18: 1-2 page Message Development Exercise**
* **Writing Assignment for 9/25: Topics for Final Project**

Week 4: September 18 – Message Development: Understanding the Landscape through Political Research

* Self and Opposition Research
* Demographic and Geographic Voter Research
* Contrasting Between Candidate and Opponent
* Reading Assignment for 9/25: Collision (pp.1-235), Inside Campaigns (31-57)
* **1-2 page Message Development Exercise due**
* **Topics for Final Project due**

Week 5: September 25 – 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 10/2: Collision (pp.236-354), Inside Campaigns (p.155-171), Presidential Elections (p. 51-85, 202-267)
* **Writing Assignment for 10/2: Candidate Message Summary**

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

Week 6: October 2 – 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 10/16: The Gamble (pp. 1- 140), Inside Campaigns (p. 103-133)
* **Candidate Message Summary Due**

Week 7: October 9 – Midterm

Week 8: October 16 – 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 10/23: Inside Campaigns (p. 133-151)
* **Writing Assignment for 10/23: Candidate Research Summary**

Week 9: October 23 – 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
* Reading Assignment for 10/30: The Gamble (pp. 141- 242), Inside Campaigns (p. 57-80)
* **Writing Assignment for 11/6: Voter Research Summary Assignment**
* **Candidate Research Summary due**

Week 10: October 30 – Targeted Paid Media and Advertising

* Goals of Communicating by Mail and E-Mail
* Value of Data Analysis
* Targeting message Demographically
* Reading Assignment for 11/6: Inside Campaigns (p. 85-100)
* **Writing Assignment for 11/20: Voter Targeting Summary**

**SECTION III: ADVANCED MESSAGING AND TARGETING**

Week 11: November 6 – Campaigning Online: Goals and Impact

* Trends in Online Communications
* Persuasive vs. Motivational Campaigning
* Online News/Paid Media
* Reading Assignment for 11/13: Inside Campaigns (p. 173-231), Presidential Elections (p. 51-74, 213-267)
* **Voter Research Summary Assignment due**

Week 12: November 13 – Campaigning Online: Social Media and Voter Contact

* Motivating, Organizing Supporters for Voter Contact
* Volunteer and Grassroots Outreach
* Trading Message Control for Supporter Involvement
* New Media's New Options
* Reading Assignment for 11/20: TBD

Week 13: November 20 – Advanced Strategy: Damage Control

* Expecting the Unexpected: Strategies for staying on message
* Framing debate to messaging goals
* Tyranny of the News Cycle: Rapid Response
* **Writing Assignment for 12/4: Final Paper**

Week 14: November 27 – Thanksgiving break (and paper preparation)

Week 15: December 4 – Politics in the Future/ Wrap-Up and Final Thoughts

* Ideological Polarization vs. Search for Common Ground
* Practical/Professional Applications of Course Material
* Role of Citizen/Voter in Political Process
* **Final Paper due**
* **Students submit their USC Course Evaluations**

**Friday, December 13, 2-4 p.m. – Final Exam**

**X. Policies and Procedures**

**Additional Policies**

Because class only meets once each week, absences should be avoided whenever possible. More than two unexcused absences will lead to a reduction of a student’s grade. Students should notify the instructor of an absence in advance whenever possible. Absence from class does not relieve the student of responsibility for completion of required assignments.

**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 by unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism class.

**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://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>). 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**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.* Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

**XI. 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. He is the founder of the USC/LA Times statewide political poll.

Previously, 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.

Dan is currently the director of the Sacramento Bee’s “California Influencers” series, an election-year project in which he leads a weekly online conversation between 100 of the state’s most respected experts in politics, government and public policy regarding the issues that are shaping the midterm elections. (www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/influencers/).

In 2010, Dan was appointed Chairman of the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC), where he implemented groundbreaking campaign finance disclosure requirements. 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.