



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

Spring 2021 – Wednesdays – 2-5:20 p.m.

Section: 060-21263R

Location: Online

Instructor: Daniel Schnur

Office: Online

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:30-1:30 p.m., and
Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays 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 in the public or private sector.

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 assume 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.

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 communications and advocacy processes and the ways that political messages are communicated to the voting public. Instead of arguing the relative merits of liberals vs. conservatives and Democrats vs. Republicans this course will focus on how successful campaign operatives of both parties and all ideologies develop, target and deliver a message to voters.

II. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

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, and 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. The 2016 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.

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. COURSE NOTES

Because the course will be offered online this fall, we will use screenshares, photos and short videos on a regular basis. Lectures will be posted online, but watching the lecture online outside of class should be an addition to – rather than a substitute for – class attendance

IV. REQUIRED READINGS AND SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

<i>Why We're Polarized</i>	by Ezra Klein (Profile Books)
<i>Them</i>	by Ben Sasse (St. Martin's Press)
<i>Notes from the Cracked Ceiling</i>	by Anne Kornblut (Crown Publishers)
<i>Trumped</i>	by Larry Sabato (Rowman & Littlefield)
<i>Inside Campaigns</i>	by Will Feltus, Ken Goldstein, and Matthew Dallek (Sage Publishing/CQ Press)

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) and Rough & Tumble (www.rtumble.com).

V. DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF ASSIGNMENTS

1. *Class participation 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 exercises. Students will be asked to submit short lists of questions or points of analysis regarding the assigned reading and current events, which will not be graded, but their completion will count toward this portion of the class grade. (More information on class participation will be provided in Section XII.)

2. *Midterm* 20%

The midterm will cover an overview of message development techniques introduced during first portion of semester in 90-minute test, as well as analysis of the first several weeks of assigned reading. Students will need to demonstrate familiarity with these concepts to continue working toward completion of final project.

3. *Semester Project* 60% total

This project will require the development of a comprehensive campaign strategy on behalf of a political candidate. Two additional written assignments, which are required to complete the final paper, will be graded as well. Other homework assignments relating to the semester paper will not be graded, but their sequential completion will be required for subsequent assignments and the final paper to be accepted.

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| a. Final Paper | 40% |
| b. Candidate Research Summary | 10% |
| c. Voter Targeting Summary | 10% |

4. *Final Group Project* 10%

Small group written project and 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. Presentation will take place during assigned time for class final.

VI. GRADING

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Class participation, discussion and homework assignments	10%

Midterm	20%
Semester Project	60% total
<i>a. Final Paper</i>	40%
<i>b. Candidate Research Summary</i>	10%
<i>c. Voter Targeting Summary</i>	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	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

c. 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. Grading Timeline

Grades and other written feedback will be provided within seven days after the assignment deadline. Students who hand in assignments late will receive their work back seven days after it is submitted.

VII. 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 online to the instructor’s personal email account: (dan.schnur@mindspring.com)

VIII. 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 Digital Lounge** for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, please visit USC’s **Information Technology Services** website.

IX. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/15/2021 – 4/30/2021; Final Exam Period: 5/5-12/2021)

Friday, February 5: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, February 5: Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, February 9: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, March 5: Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript for Session 001. Mark of “W” will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, March 5: 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, April 9: Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

X. COURSE SCHEDULE: A WEEKLY BREAKDOWN

SECTION I: GETTING READY TO RUN

January 20 – Class Introduction and Overview

- Introduction of course: expectations, weekly assignments, reading and discussion
- Competition for Voters’ Attention
- Expanding Voters’ Window of Opportunity
- Reading Assignment for 1/27: *Notes From the Cracked Ceiling* (Introduction - Chapter 3), *Inside Campaigns* Chapter 1 and Chapter 5)

January 27 – Message Development: Importance of Biography

- Biography as Foundation for Campaign Message
- Biography as Credibility Basis for Issue Discussion
- Using Biography to Connect with Voters
- Reading Assignment 2/3: *Cracked Ceiling* (Chapters 4-6), *Trumped* (Chapters 1, 3, 5-7)
- Writing Assignment for 2/5: Topics for final project

February 3 – Elements of Message Development

- Central elements of message development
- Candidate Guidelines for Issue Selection
- Message Reinforcement Techniques
- Writing Assignment for 2/5: Topics for final project
- Reading Assignment for 2/10: *Cracked Ceiling* (Chapters 7-8), *Why We’re Polarized* (Chapters 1-4), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapter 6)
- Writing Assignment for 2/12: 1-2 page Message Development Exercise

February 5 – Topics for final project due

February 10 – Message Development: Understanding the Landscape through Political Research

- Self and Opposition Research
- Demographic and Geographic Voter Research
- Issue Research: Planning for Voter Interest Level
- Reading Assignment for 2/17: *Them* (Chapters 1-4), *Trumped* (Chapters 2, 8-10)
- Group Assignment for 2/17 – Group Project #1

February 12 – 1-2 page Message Development Exercise due

February 17 – Message Delivery: Targeting the Message

- Identifying Voting Trends: Persuasion vs. Organization/Motivation

- Motivating Supporters/ Persuading Undecided Voters
- Voter Groups – Characteristics and Influence
- Reading Assignment for 2/24: *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 5-6), *Trumped* (Chapter 11), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapters 2-3, pp. 171-191)
- Writing Assignment for 2/26: Candidate Message Summary
- **Group Project #1 Due**

SECTION II: ENGAGING THE ELECTORATE AND THE OPPONENT

February 24 – Message Delivery: Messaging through News Media Coverage

- Objectives of News Media Relations
- Use of Public Events for Message Reinforcement
- Preparing for reporters' question
- Writing Assignment for 2/26: Candidate Message Summary
- Reading Assignment for 3/10: *Them* (Chapter 5), *Trumped* (pp. 194-196, Chapters 13-15)
- Writing Assignment for 3/12: Candidate Research Summary

February 26 – Candidate Message Summary Due

March 3 – Midterm

March 10 – Message Delivery – Principles of Paid Media and Advertising

- Goals of broadcast advertising, mass communication
- Nonverbal messaging/message reinforcement
- Advantages/Disadvantages of paid media
- Writing Assignment for 3/12: Candidate Research Summary
- Reading Assignment for 3/17: *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 7-8), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapter 7, pp 149-170)
- Group Assignment for 3/17 – Group Project #2

March 12 – Candidate Research Summary Assignment due

March 17 – Messaging Options in Paid and News Media

- Establishing candidate's positive credentials
- Focusing on opposition: negative/comparative messaging
- Coordination between paid/news media
- Reading Assignment for 10/21: *Them* (Chapters 6-7), *Inside Campaigns* (pp.192-204)
- Writing Assignment for 3/26: Voter Research Summary Assignment
- **Group Project #2 Due**

SECTION III: DIGITAL MEDIA AND ADVANCED MESSAGING

March 24 – Campaigning Online: Goals and Impact

- Trends in online communications
- Persuasive vs. motivational campaigning
- Online news/paid media
- Reading Assignment for 3/31: *Inside Campaigns* (Chapters 11-12, Appendix A)
- Group Assignment for 3/31 – Group Project #3
- Writing Assignment for 3/26: Voter Research Summary Assignment

March 26 – Voter Research Summary due

March 31 – 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 4/9: Voter Targeting Summary
- Reading Assignment for 4/14: *Them* (Chapter 8- conclusion), *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 9-10)
- **Group Project #3 Due**

April 7 – Wellness Day (no class)

April 9 – Voter Targeting Summary Assignment due

April 14 – Campaigning Online: Using Voter Data and Voter Targeting

- Reading Assignment for 4/21 -- TBD
- Writing Assignment for 4/23: Final paper

April 21 – Advanced Strategy: Damage Control, Data Analysis and Voter Outreach

- Expecting the unexpected: Strategies for staying on message
- Integrating media and grassroots outreach
- Data analysis
- Writing Assignment for 4/23: Final paper

April 23 – Final Paper due

April 28 – Final Thoughts and Wrapping Up

- Politics in the Future
- Preparation for Course Final
- Course Evaluations/Recap

May 10 (2-4 p.m.) – Class Final

XI. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Additional Policies

Course requirements are simple: show up, do the reading, participate in classroom discussion and exercises and complete all written assignments on time.

1. Students are expected to attend all classes and to make themselves visible on screen throughout the class period. Unexcused absences, lateness in signing in, 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 us before a class is missed. Students must request extensions before an assignment is due.
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. Participation in class discussion is required. Students are expected to have read all course assignments and to keep up on assigned current event topics, and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Communication

In addition to weekly office hours on Wednesdays, I am also available for individual and small group online meetings on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays if scheduled in advance. For written correspondence, students should use my personal email address (dan.schnur@mindspring.com) rather than a USC email address. I will respond to all emails within 24 hours.

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 or public relations class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” 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, 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

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

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

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 / Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplcity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscsa.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.

XII. ONLINE CLASS INVOLVEMENT

As noted in Section V, class participation will count for ten percent of your semester grade. Students can earn credit toward their participation grade in the manner described below. Because the syllabus is divided into three sections, a student’s semester participation grade will be calculated as an average of their participation during each of those three sections.

- A. **Breakout Rooms** – Students will be asked to attend a 30 minute breakout room on a Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday every other week throughout the semester (six sessions total). You will work with the Instructor to determine which days/weeks you will attend, but they should occur on an alternating basis throughout the semester. The sessions will focus on a current events discussion based on the topics outlined in class that week, on assigned class reading or to prepare for assigned group presentation projects. (Students will be encouraged to use the breakout rooms to develop content that they can use for in-class discussions on Wednesdays.) *8 points per breakout session. Maximum of 16 points per section.*
- B. **In-Class Participation** – Students are expected to participate in class on a regular basis, with questions during lecture or comments and/or questions during discussion of the assigned reading and current events. Offering questions via chat is perfectly acceptable, but you are encouraged to raise your hand to participate verbally as well. *1 point per in-class contribution (verbal or chat) --maximum 2 points per week, 8 points per section*

- C. **Group Presentations** - Each student will participate in three small-group projects over the course of the semester, which will involve jointly writing a script for a live on-line presentation. These projects will be presented to the entire class, and they must be submitted to the Instructor at the beginning of class on the day they are due. *4 points per presentation. Maximum 4 points per section.*

Point Thresholds – A=22-28 points, B= 15-21 points, C=14 points or less, (All numbers will be calculated after each monthly section. The three section grades will be averaged at the end of semester)

XIII. 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 UC—Berkeley and has taught at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He is the founder of the USC/LA Times statewide political poll and currently hosts a weekly webinar for the LA World Affairs Council Town Hall called "Politics in the Time of Coronavirus." (www.lawac.org)

Previously, Dan worked on four presidential and three gubernatorial campaigns. He served as the national Communications Director for Senator John McCain's 2000 presidential campaign 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). After completing his FPPC term, Dan registered as a No Party Preference voter and ran as a non-partisan candidate for California Secretary of State in 2014.

Dan has been an advisor to the William & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts on several education policy and political reform efforts.