



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

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

Section: 21280R

Location: ANN L115

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

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, private or non-profit sectors.

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.

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.

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 and group presentations designed to simulate actual communications and messaging activities.

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.

By learning about how candidates develop and deliver a campaign message to build public and political support, students will be able to apply those communications techniques and concepts toward messaging goals in the fields of private sector public relations, non-profit advocacy work and other professional and community-based projects,

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 and 2020 campaigns upended many 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.

Course Notes

Class will meet in person. 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

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Students will complete a series of 1-2 page and 5-page assignments over the course of the semester that will serve as the foundation for the final semester project – a communications strategy designed to elect a candidate to political office. Each assignment will receive written and verbal feedback to help the students move on to the next step.

The students will be asked to participate on a regular basis, offering their own thoughts on the assigned reading and on contemporary news events. (Students will be given the specific topics for discussion in advance so they will be able to properly prepare.)

Students will be encouraged to share their own experiences and to apply them to classroom discussion, and grow to understand that the most effective way to persuade and/or motivate an audience toward your goals is to understand their perspectives, backgrounds and experiences, and to demonstrate respect when addressing and acknowledging differences between the communicator and their audience.

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.

Assignment Submission Policy

- A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will have points deducted.
- B. Assignments must be submitted online to the instructor’s personal email account: (dan.schnur@mindspring.com)

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>A Return to Normalcy?</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).

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.

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 8/23/21 – 12/3/21)

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20213/calendar/>

Friday, September 10: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, September 10: Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, September 10: Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall

Tuesday, September 14: Last day to add or drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund or change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001

Friday, October 8: 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, October 8: 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 12: Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

Saturday, November 13: Last day to change between letter grade or Pass/No pass in a letter graded course for Session 001.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

SECTION I: GETTING READY TO RUN

August 25 – 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 9/1: *Notes From the Cracked Ceiling* (Introduction - Chapter 3), *Inside Campaigns* Chapter 1 and Chapter 5)

September 1 – 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 9/8: *Cracked Ceiling* (Chapters 4-6), *Return To Normalcy* (Chapters 1-3)
- Writing Assignment for 9/10: Topics for final project

September 8 – Elements of Message Development

- Central elements of message development
- Candidate Guidelines for Issue Selection
- Message Reinforcement Techniques
- Writing Assignment for 9/10: Topics for final project
- Reading Assignment for 9/15: *Cracked Ceiling* (Chapters 7-8), *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 1-4), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapter 6)

- Writing Assignment for 9/17: 1-2 page Message Development Exercise

September 10– Topics for final project due

September 15 – 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 9/22: *Them* (Chapters 1-4), *Return to Normalcy* (Chapter 4, 5)
- Group Assignment for 9/22 – Group Project #1

September 17 – 1-2 page Message Development Exercise due

September 22 – 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 9/29: *Why We’re Polarized* (Chapters 5-6), *Return To Normalcy* (Chapters 9, 10), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapters 2-3, pp. 171-191)
- Writing Assignment for 10/1: Candidate Message Summary
- **Group Project #1 Due**

SECTION II: ENGAGING THE ELECTORATE AND THE OPPONENT

September 29 – 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 10/1: Candidate Message Summary
- Reading Assignment for 10/13: *Them* (Chapter 5-6), *Return To Normalcy* (Chapters 11)
- Writing Assignment for 10/15: Candidate Research Summary

October 1 – Candidate Message Summary Due

October 6 – Midterm

October 13 – 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 10/15: Candidate Research Summary

- Reading Assignment for 10/20: *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 7-8), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapter 7, pp 149-170)
- Group Assignment for 10/20 – Group Project #2

October 15 – Candidate Research Summary Assignment due

October 20 – Messaging Options in Paid and News Media

- Establishing candidate's positive credentials
- Focusing on opposition: negative/comparative messaging
- Coordination between paid/news media
- Writing Assignment for 10/22: Voter Research Summary Assignment
- Reading Assignment for 10/27: *Them* (Chapter 7), *Inside Campaigns* (pp.192-204)
- **Group Project #2 Due**

October 22 – Voter Research Summary due

SECTION III: DIGITAL MEDIA AND ADVANCED MESSAGING

October 27 – Campaigning Online: Goals and Impact

- Trends in online communications
- Persuasive vs. motivational campaigning
- Online news/paid media
- Reading Assignment for 11/3: *Inside Campaigns* (Chapters 11-12, Appendix A), *Return To Normalcy* (Chapters 6-8, 13)
- Group Assignment for 11/3 – Group Project #3
- Writing Assignment for 11/5: Voter Targeting Summary

November 3 – 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 11/5: Voter Targeting Summary
- Reading Assignment for 11/10: *Them* (Chapter 8- conclusion), *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 9-10)
- **Group Project #3 Due**

November 5 – Voter Targeting Summary Assignment due

November 10 – 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 11/19: Final paper

November 17 – Final Thoughts and Wrapping Up

- Politics in the Future
- Divide between information haves/have nots
- Course Evaluations/Recap
- Writing Assignment for 11/19: Final paper

November 19 – Final Paper due

November 17 –No Class: Thanksgiving Break

December 10 (2-4 P.M.) – Class Final

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.symplicity.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.

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.