



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

**4 Units**

**Spring 2022 – Wednesdays – 2-5:20 p.m.**

**Section:** 21263R

**Location:** ANN L101

**Instructor: Dan Schnur**

**Office:** ANN lobby

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 1-2 p.m., 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 portion 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%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

**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**

All assignments will be graded and returned along with written feedback within seven days of submission. Students will have the opportunity to meet with the instructor within seven days to clarify and address any graderelated concerns.

#### **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**

*Why We’re Polarized* by Ezra Klein (Profile Books)

*Them* by Ben Sasse (St. Martin's Press)

*Notes from the Cracked Ceiling* by Anne Kornblut (Crown Publishers)

*A Return to Normalcy?* by Larry Sabato (Rowman & Littlefield)

*Inside Campaigns* 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](http://www.politico.com)) and Rough & Tumble ([www.rtumble.com](http://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: 1/10/2022 – 4/29/2022; Final Exam Period: 5/4/2022)

Link: <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20221/calendar/>

**Last day to add:** Friday, January 28, 2022

**Last day to drop without a mark of "W" and receive a refund:** Friday, January 28, 2022

**Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit:** Friday, January 28, 2022 [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

**Last day to add/drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund or change to Audit:**

Tuesday, February 1

**Last day to withdraw without a "W" on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade:** Friday, February 25, 2022 [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 for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]

**Last day to drop with a mark of "W":** Friday, April 8, 2022

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

### SECTION I: GETTING READY TO RUN

#### January 12 – 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 1/19: *Notes From the Cracked Ceiling* (Introduction - Chapter 3), *Inside Campaigns* Chapter 1 and Chapter 5)

#### January 19 – 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 1/26: *Cracked Ceiling* (Chapters 4-6), *Return To Normalcy* (Chapters 1-3)
- Writing Assignment for 1/28: Topics for final project

#### January 26 – Elements of Message Development

- Central elements of message development
- Candidate Guidelines for Issue Selection
- Message Reinforcement Techniques
- Writing Assignment for 1/28: Topics for final project

- Reading Assignment for 2/2: *Cracked Ceiling* (Chapters 7-8), *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 1-4), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapter 6)
- Writing Assignment for 2/4: 1-2 page Message Development Exercise

### **January 28– Topics for final project due**

#### **February 2 – 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 2/9: *Them* (Chapters 1-4), *Return to Normalcy* (Chapter 4, 5)
- Group Assignment for 2/9 – Group Project #1
- Writing Assignment for 2/4: 1-2 page Message Development Exercise

### **February 4 – 1-2 page Message Development Exercise due**

#### **February 9 – 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 2/16: *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 5-6), *Return To Normalcy* (Chapters 9, 10), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapters 2-3, pp. 171-191)
- Writing Assignment for 2/18: Candidate Message Summary
- **Group Project #1 Due**

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

#### **February 16 – 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 2/18 Candidate Message Summary
- Reading Assignment for 3/1: *Them* (Chapter 5-6), *Return To Normalcy* (Chapters 11)
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### **February 18 – Candidate Message Summary Due**

#### **February 23 – Midterm**

## March 2 – 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 3/11 : Candidate Research Summary
- Reading Assignment for 3/11: *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 7-8), *Inside Campaigns* (Chapter 7, pp 149-170)

## March 9 – 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 3/11: Candidate Research Summary
- Reading Assignment for 3/23: *Them* (Chapter 7), *Inside Campaigns* (pp.192-204)
- Group Assignment for 3/23 – Group Project #2

## **March 11 – Candidate Research Summary Assignment due**

### **SECTION III: DIGITAL MEDIA AND ADVANCED MESSAGING**

## March 23 – Campaigning Online: Goals and Impact

- Trends in online communications
- Persuasive vs. motivational campaigning
- Online news/paid media
- Reading Assignment for 3/30: *Inside Campaigns* (Chapters 11-12, Appendix A), *Return To Normalcy* (Chapters 6-8, 13)
- Writing Assignment for 3/28: Voter Research Summary
- **Group Project #2 Due**

## **March 28 – Voter Research Summary due**

## March 30 – 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 4/6 *Them* (Chapter 8- conclusion), *Why We're Polarized* (Chapters 9-10)

## April 6 – Campaigning Online: Data Analysis and Voter Outreach

- Integrating social media and grassroots outreach

- Data analysis
- Online targeting
- Reading Assignment for 4/13: TBD
- Writing Assignment for 4/11 Voter Targeting Summary

### **April 11 – Voter Targeting Summary Assignment due**

#### April 13 – Advanced Strategy: Damage Control, Crisis Communications and Staying on Message

- Expecting the unexpected: how to prepare for crisis
- Redirecting the Conversation: strategies for staying on message
- Writing Assignment for 4/25: Final paper

#### April 20 – Final Thoughts and Wrapping Up

- Politics in the Future
- Divide between information haves/have nots
- Course Evaluations/Recap
- Writing Assignment for 4/25: Final paper

### **April 25 – Final Paper due**

#### April 27 – Final Preparation

- Reviewing assignment for class final
- Leadership discussion
- Careers Discussion
- **Group Project #3 Due**

### **May 9 (2-4 P.M.) – Class Final**

#### **Policies and Procedures Additional Policies**

Classes will be posted on Blackboard, but student in-person attendance is preferred. If you're not able to attend class, I ask that you let me know in advance. You'll be responsible for watching the class video by the time class meets again the following week, but I am happy to meet with you as well to make sure you're caught up on what you missed.

#### **Class Involvement and participation**

As noted earlier in the syllabus, class participation will count for ten percent of your semester grade. The syllabus is divided into three modules (one per month). Students will receive participation points for each of three modules. Each student's semester participation grade will be calculated as an average of their participation during the two modules of the three in which they compile the greatest number of participation points. Students can earn credit toward their participation grade in the ways described below.

- A. **Breakout Rooms** – Students will be encouraged 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 can use the breakout rooms to develop content that they can use for in-class discussions on Wednesdays.) *6 points per breakout session. Maximum of 12 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. Students can also earn a participation point each week by submitting three questions or short comments in writing before class begins. *1 point per in-class –maximum 2 points per week, 4 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 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=16-20 points, B= 11-15 points, C=10 points or less, (All numbers will be calculated after each monthly section. The three section grades will be averaged at the end of semester)

**Alternative ways to earn participation points** – Students with scheduling or Internet connection challenges can contact their Student Mentor and be given an alternative way of earning participation points unavailable to them in the Breakout Sessions or Group Projects.

#### **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](mailto: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](http://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](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**

*Counseling and Mental Health* - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://equity.usc.edu),  
[titleix.usc.edu](http://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](https://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 Student Accessibility Services* - (213) 740-0776 [osas.usc.edu/](https://osas.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 [uscса.usc.edu](https://uscса.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](https://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](https://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](https://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](https://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 cocurricular programs and opportunities.

**About Your Instructor**

Dan Schnur has taught 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 hosts a webinar for the LA World Affairs Council Town Hall called “Politics in the Time of Coronavirus.” ([www.lawac.org](http://www.lawac.org))

Previously, Dan worked on four presidential and three gubernatorial campaigns and served as the national Communications Director for Senator John McCain’s 2000 presidential campaign. In 2010, Dan was appointed Chairman of the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC). Dan is now 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. 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 political reform, K-12 education and college and workforce preparedness efforts.

Dan serves as a board member of the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, the Pacific Council on International Policy, the Center for Asians United for Self Empowerment (CAUSE) and as a senior advisor to the Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE) leadership training programs. He is the former Los Angeles director for the American Jewish Committee and serves as an advisor to the Los Angeles Jewish Federation.

Dan is a graduate of the American University in Washington, D.C. He and his wife Cecile Ablack, an international communications consultant and former Deputy Mayor of Los Angeles, live in LA.