

USC Price

Sol Price School
of Public Policy

PPD 693: COMMUNICATING PUBLIC POLICY

Fall 2023, 4 units

Monday 2:00pm-5:20pm (Section 51511R)

Instructor: Lilian Coral

Email: lilianco@usc.edu

Office Hours: Monday 5:20pm-6:00pm, or by appointment.

Location: VPD 110 (or [Zoom](#) Classroom, if necessary)

IT Help: USC Information Technology Services Customer Support Center

Phone: 213-740-5555 (24 hours per day, 7 days per week)

Email: consult@usc.edu (Monday-Friday, 8:00am-6:00pm excluding holidays)

More Info: <https://itservices.usc.edu/contact/>

Price-specific IT Help: 213-740-2174 or sppdmis@usc.edu

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Course Description

The transition over the past decades towards a highly fragmented information ecosystem and unregulated world of conflicting information disseminated into the public sphere has had a dramatic impact on public policy development, discourse, and decision-making. Today, Americans' approval of and trust in government and politics are at their all-time low. Opinion journalism and hard journalism are increasingly blurred for the average American. Meanwhile, the impact of social and digital media continues to grow exponentially, and the divisions between political philosophies have hardened to extreme polarization. Some of this dramatic slide is the inability, or unwillingness, of policy makers, analysts, and journalists to adapt communication strategies effectively to engage each other and with ordinary citizens. Because of this, the need for clear and responsible policy analysis and policy reporting has never been greater.

Communicating Public Policy (PPD 693) will give students an understanding of the intersection of the role of policy developers and analysts and the practice of communications in the policy process. We will consider how sources of information coming from all public sources, especially media, drive public debate and the consideration of policy issues, as well as examine the entropy of the media complex and its impact on policy-making.

This course focuses on the role of the policy analyst in developing and/or evaluating “good” public policy within the constraints of real politics. It also explores the responsibilities of journalists to communicate public policy and politics and to help the public understand both, and the relationship of each to the other.

In addition to the assigned readings, students are required to monitor, on an on-going basis, coverage of major policy debates, governmental and political issues in the various media—including newspapers, news magazines, radio, broadcast and cable television and social media —Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Learning Objectives

The goals of this course are two-fold:

- To learn how policy analysts can and do explain complex policy issues to the news media, and to the public, in order to forward their policy agendas.
- To learn how both analysts and journalists can, and must, interact with each other to communicate policy options and decisions fully and accurately to opinion makers, policy makers and the public.

Academic Accommodations for Disability

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to

generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Classroom Conduct

All individuals involved in this course (students, teaching/course assistants, and instructor) are expected to conduct themselves professionally and engage respectfully and inclusively with one another, both in person and through other forms of communications such as email. Expectations for conduct follow the standards established by both the University (e.g., USC Code of Ethics, available [here](#)) and the Price School (e.g., the USC Price Strategic Plan for Equity, *Inclusive Excellence at Price: Equity, Diversity, Opportunity and Access*).

Student Conduct and Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the University Student Conduct Code as outlined by SCampus. The syllabus appendix summarizes these rules.

Attendance and Illness

The course is held in person. That being said, you should not attend class if you have a positive covid test (even if asymptomatic) or are experiencing any symptoms of covid (even without a positive covid test). To accommodate illness-related absences, I will record all class meetings and post them on Blackboard. You are still responsible for the course material of any class meeting that you missed.

Technology Requirements

In addition to some possible class meetings on Zoom, you may be required to watch some pre-recorded videos. You will submit assignments electronically via [Blackboard](#).

USC Technology Rental Program: If you need resources such as a laptop to successfully participate in your classes, you may be eligible for the university's equipment rental program. To apply, please submit a [Technology Rental Program Application](#).

Zoom Resources: Office hours will be held via Zoom in my [personal meeting room](#). We will hold class in a [Zoom classroom](#) if need be (e.g., if I am sick or the University moves instruction online). Please note that there are different Zoom links for office hours and [class meetings](#). Here is some useful information for when class is held on Zoom.

- **Video:** When you enter the virtual classroom, please **turn on your video** so that I can see you. Online delivery and electronic interaction can feel impersonal; I hope that seeing one another reduces that feeling. Please feel free to use a virtual background for some additional privacy. You may also turn off your camera if you need a moment of total privacy, but please turn it back on as soon as possible. (You can toggle your video on and off by clicking the camera icon near the bottom left corner of the window. Other video-related options are accessed by clicking on the adjacent ^ symbol.) If you would like an accommodation with respect to the camera policy, please contact me to discuss reasonable requests.

- **Audio:** When you enter the virtual classroom, you will automatically be muted. Please **leave yourself on mute** until you have a question or comment, but do not forget to re-mute once you finish speaking. To unmute and mute yourself, click on the microphone icon in the bottom left corner of the window. (Other audio-related options are accessed by clicking on the adjacent ^ symbol.) You can also unmute by holding down the space bar while you speak; once you release the space bar you will return to mute.

- **Speaking in Class:** If you would like to ask a question or make a comment, you can:
 - 1) Type your question in the group chat. You can access this by clicking on the “Chat” icon at the bottom of the window. I will read your question aloud and respond when I reach a good breaking point. This option is only good for relatively simple, succinct questions.
 - 2) Use the “raise hand” function. You will find this by clicking on the “Participants” icon at the bottom of the window. I will call on you when I reach a good breaking point, and then you can unmute and ask your question aloud. You can also “lower your hand” if I answer your question before calling on you.

- **Additional Zoom resources:**
 - [Price-produced video on Zoom etiquette](#)
 - [How to “raise your hand” in Zoom](#)
 - [Attendee controls in a meeting \(including mute and unmute\)](#)
 - [My video/camera isn’t working](#)
 - [Testing computer or device audio](#)
 - [Audio echo in a meeting](#)

Required Reading

Catherine F. Smith, *Writing Public Policy: A Practical Guide to Communicating in the Policy Making Process*, 6th Ed., (Oxford University Press, 2022)

Mass Media and American Politics, Johanna L Hathaway, Doris A. Graber., 11th Ed., (CQ Press, 2007)

Emiliano Grossman, *Media and Policy Making in the Digital Age*, *Annual Review of Political Science* (February 2022) <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051120-103422>

Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, *Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election* (Spring 2017) <https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.31.2.211>

Media and Democracy: Unpacking America’s Complex Views on the Digital Public Square (March 2022) <https://knightfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/KMAD-2022-1.pdf>

[Civic Signals, Building Better Digital Public Spaces](#), New_ Public 2021

Additional readings:

- Daily monitoring of key news outlets with respect to the development of public policy and its coverage. Includes broadcast and online outlets including the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Wall Street Journal, CNN, MSNBC, CNBC, Fox News Channel, Mediaite, Politico, Yahoo News, NPR, and Google News.

- Readings selected and distributed and/or e-mailed or posted on Blackboard prior to class discussion will constitute a portion of reading assignments, because the issues to be studied are so current.

Grading Breakdown and Scale

Your final grade will be calculated using the following weights.

Writing Assignments	20%
Mid-Term	25%
Final Project	40%
<u>Preparation and Participation</u>	<u>15%</u>
Total	100%

After any adjustments based on participation (see upcoming “Participation” section), your letter grade will be determined according to the following scale.

96-100 A	84-88 B	72-76 C	63-66 D
92-96 A-	80-84 B-	69-72 C-	60-63 D-
88-92 B+	76-80 C+	66-69 D+	0-60 F

If the GPA is too low, I will use a curve that lowers, but never raises, some of these thresholds. For example, a score of 95 is guaranteed an A- but could potentially earn an A depending on the curve.

Participation

Students are expected to be active participants during class meetings.

There is no explicit class attendance requirement for the course, with the caveat that you cannot participate if you are not present and your participation grade will suffer from frequent absences. If you miss more than a couple of classes for health-related reasons or another emergency and are worried about your participation grade, please contact me to determine make-up assignment(s) that can compensate for your absences.

Written Assignments

- There will be three written assignments centered around current affairs given throughout the semester. Submissions must be between 500-750 words, double spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, one-inch margins unless otherwise expressed, and proofread carefully and thoroughly.

Mid-Term

The mid-term will be an individual submission comprised of two parts:

- I. Policy Memo — 3-5 pages in length that uses the principles of communications learned in the first part of the course, to advance a set policy position and strategy.
- II. Presentation — will be a 5 minute presentation in the style of public testimony made to a “committee” to whom the memo is addressed.

Final Project

The final project will consist of two parts and will be done in teams.

- I. Written Product – 5–10 page strategic plan (double spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, one-inch margins) to be submitted and presented on your assigned due date. An accompanying bibliography attached separately will be required (no minimum number of references required);
- II. Presentation – a 25 minute, in-class, oral presentation together with your team (includes class discussion and Q&A). The oral presentation may be in PowerPoint or using other visual aids shared on-screen over Zoom. The topic for your final project and your team composition will be assigned on Week 11 of the course and presented on November 28th and December 5th.

The final project will operationalize the theories and concepts covered through the semester.

Course Schedule

Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Required readings should be read before class.

Week	Date	Topic(s) & Reading
1	Monday, 8/21	CLASS INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW
2	Monday, 8/28	LAYING THE GROUNDWORK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Basics of Public Policy—A Review • The Basics of Communicating Public Policy Readings: Smith, Chapters 1,2,3
3	Monday, 9/4	HOLIDAY – Labor Day
4	Monday, 9/11	THE ROLE OF ELECTED OFFICIALS & STAFF Readings: Smith, Chapters 4,5,6 Written Assignment I
5	Monday, 9/18	THE ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS & LOBBYISTS Readings: Smith, Chapters 7,8, 9,10, Conclusion

Week	Date	Topic(s) & Reading
6	Monday, 9/25	TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO POLICY Readings: Hathaway & Graber, Chapters 1-4 Written Assignment II
7	Monday, 10/2	Midterm Presentations 1
8	Monday, 10/9	Midterm Presentations 2
9	Monday, 10/16	THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA & DIGITAL Readings: Hathaway & Graber, Chapters 10, 13, 14
10	Monday, 10/23	IDENTIFYING AUDIENCE & CHANNELS Readings: Hathaway & Graber, Chapters 7, 9 Written Assignment III
11	Monday, 10/30	DATA & DESIGN OF DIGITAL PUBLIC SQUARE Readings: Civic Signals
12	Monday, 11/6	WORKING WITH THE MEDIA Readings: Hathaway & Graber, Chapters 11, 12

Week	Date	Topic(s) & Reading
13	Monday, 11/13	EROSION OF LOCAL MEDIA & IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION Readings: Grossman Alcott & Gentzkow
14	Monday, 11/20	THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATIONS Readings: Media & Democracy Knight Foundation Report
15	Monday, 11/27	Class Wrap-Up
	Monday, 12/2- 12/6	STUDY DAYS
	Monday, 12/11	FINALS PRESENTATION

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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 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 [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

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 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 for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086
eeotix.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.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symlicity.com/care_report

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

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776
osas.usc.edu

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710
campussupport.usc.edu

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

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (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.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

ombuds.usc.edu

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-3340 or otfp@med.usc.edu

chan.usc.edu/otfp

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Appendix: Academic Responsibility and Dishonesty

Academic Responsibility. Students, faculty, and administrative officials at the University of Southern California, as members of the academic community, fulfill a purpose and a responsibility.

The University must, therefore, provide an optimal learning environment, and all members of the University community have a responsibility to provide and maintain an atmosphere of free inquiry and expression. The relationship of the individual to this community involves these principles: Each member has an obligation to respect:

1. THE FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS OF OTHERS
2. THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS BASED UPON THE NATURE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS
3. THE RIGHTS OF THE INSTITUTION

Academic Dishonesty. The following statements and examples explain specific acts of academic dishonesty.

1. Examination Behavior: Any use of external assistance during an exam is considered academically dishonest unless expressly permitted.
 - a. Communicating in any way with another student during the examination.
 - b. Copying material from another student's exam.
 - c. Using unauthorized notes, calculators or other devices.
2. Fabrication: Any intentional falsification or invention of data or citation in an academic exercise will be considered a violation of academic integrity.
 - a. Inventing or altering data for a laboratory experiment or field project.
 - b. Resubmitting returned and corrected academic work under the pretense of grader evaluation error, when, in fact, the work has been altered from its original state.
3. Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the theft and subsequent passing off of another's ideas or words as one's own. If the words or ideas of another are used, acknowledgement of the original source must be made through recognized referencing practice.
 - a. Direct Quotation: Any use of a direct quotation should be acknowledged by footnote citation and by either quotation marks or appropriate indentation and spacing.
 - b. Paraphrase: If another's ideas are borrowed in whole or in part and are merely recast in the student's own words, proper acknowledgement must, nonetheless, be made. A footnote or proper internal citation must follow the paraphrase material.
4. Other Types of Academic Dishonesty:
 - a. Submitting a paper written by another;

- b. Using a paper or essay in more than one class without the instructor's express permission;
- c. Obtaining an advance exam copy without the knowledge or consent of the instructor;
- d. Changing academic records outside of normal procedures;
- d. Using another person to complete homework assignment or take-home exam without the knowledge and consent of the instructor.

The above information is taken directly from *SCampus* and the Academic Affairs Unit of the Student Senate in conjunction with the Academic Standards Committee.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY SANCTION GUIDELINES

VIOLATION

RECOMMENDED SANCTION (assuming first offense)

Copying answers from other students on exam.

F for course.

One person allowing another to cheat from his/her exam or assignment.

F for course for both persons.

Possessing or using extra material during exam (crib sheets, notes, books, etc.)

F for course.

Continuing to write after exam has ended.

F or zero on exam.

Taking exam from room and later claiming that the instructor lost it.

F for course and recommendation for further disciplinary action (possible suspension).

Changing answers after exam has been returned.

F for course and recommendation for disciplinary action (possible suspension).

Fraudulent possession of exam prior administration.

F for course and recommendation for suspension.

Obtaining a copy of an exam or answer key prior to administration.

Suspension or expulsion from the university; F for course.

Having someone else take an exam for oneself.

Suspension or expulsion from the University for both students;
F for course.

Plagiarism.

F for the course.

Submission of purchased term papers or papers

F for the course and recommendation

done by others.

for further disciplinary action.
(possible suspension)

Submission of the same term papers to more than one instructor where no previous approval has been given.

F for both courses.

Unauthorized collaboration on an assignment.

F for the course for both students.

Falsification of information in admission application (including supporting documentation).

Revocation of university admission without opportunity to apply.

Documentary falsification (e.g., petitions and supporting materials medical documentation).

Suspension or expulsion from the university; F for course when related to a specific course.

Plagiarism in a graduate thesis or dissertation.

Expulsion from the university when discovered prior to graduation; revocation of degree when discovered subsequent to graduation.

Please refer to *Trojan Integrity: A Faculty Desk Reference*, for more information on assessing sanctions. You may also consult with members of the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards at any point in the process, (213) 740-6666

Use of Generative AI - Since creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.