COMM 489: Campaign Communication
4.0 Units

I. Course Description

This course examines the theory and practice of political campaign communication in the United States. A democracy has always depended on open and direct communication between its citizens and those who govern them. In the United States, this has been true since Colonial times. But with the advent of mass technologies, the range, depth, and importance of political communication practices have changed in revolutionary ways. Today, every White House administration, Congressional office, governor and issue advocacy group requires a sophisticated press office, dynamic field offices and robust advertising and digital media teams to build and sustain credible brands. The political arena itself has transformed into a financial hotbed for spin experts, pollsters, think tank leaders, investigative reporters, media handlers, advertising executives, and lobbyists — spanning the entire nation, perhaps even beyond its borders. Every participant within this arena contributes to the marketing of a candidate, public official, political party, ballot initiative, issue/cause or organization. They achieve these results through precise communication and marketing strategies that often prevail in the corporate realm. We will study these phenomena with due diligence and enthusiasm, and we will participate in these practices through challenging projects that promote practical application.

This is a "citizen's course" that will challenge you to rethink your views of politics. Regardless of your political identification, this course will focus on the analytical aspects of effective campaign communication. You will never be penalized for respectfully advocating unique political perspectives nor for respectfully disagreeing with the readings or class discussions. Our primary goal in this class is to ask whether democracy is made better or worse, helped or hindered, by contemporary campaign communication practices and platforms. Students must be equipped to critically analyze and evaluate communication and marketing strategies that advance the goals of individuals and groups across the political spectrum. This course seeks to prepare students for such assessment, as well as season them to execute on their own.

The class will cover a variety of political campaign communication topics, allowing students to discover unique opportunities affecting political leaders and organizations of interest and to learn how to harness such knowledge. *All students will be evaluated using a Letter Grade scale. Lectures vary between PPT slides and discussions of reading material. Students must take notes (handwritten or typed). Audio/video recordings of lectures are not permitted.*

II. Student Learning Outcomes

This course will aim to achieve the following goals: **1)** To achieve excellence in constructing and executing political communication strategy; **2)** To acquire skills in managing platforms that affect campaign outcomes; **3)** To strengthen skills in developing concise and potent campaign messaging; **4)** To understand technique that can enhance a political brand and sell its value proposition to key stakeholders; **5)** To understand the strategic challenges facing political candidates, parties and special interest groups; **6)** To appreciate the unique dimensions and circumstances affecting presidential campaigns and elections.

We will demonstrate the highest attainable work ethic and discover within us that which is superior to circumstance. We will persevere this semester toward the most rewarding pursuit in higher education – the stimulation of thought, emotion, and soul. It is my duty to prepare you, as future leaders of the Free World, to integrate your communication skills into all fields of endeavor. As individuals and as a collective unit, we will dare to be great.

Required Preparation: N/A
Recommended Preparation: COMM 204, COMM 321, COMM 322

III. Course Attendance

Class will meet each Monday, Wednesday and Friday throughout the semester. You must complete ALL course requirements in order to earn a grade in this course. You are responsible for giving presentations on the dates when you are scheduled. You are required to participate in debates on the dates when you are scheduled. Since your participation in this course – both as a speaker and listener – is vital, any absences from class will affect your final grade. You are, therefore, required to notify me BEFORE missing class and provide corresponding documentation AFTERWARD. In the event that both of these criteria are satisfied, you will receive "make up" assignments/projects to suffice for time missed from class. Please note that I will record an unexcused absence if you miss any considerable portion of the class period (arriving late, leaving early) without my prior authorization.

IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments

Jeffersonian-Madisonian Exchange	With a partner, you will debate, via weekly e-mail correspondence, various political campaign topics – affecting presidential, gubernatorial, congressional or local elections – that you and your peer deem important.
Political Advertising Project	As a group, you will choose a political candidate, ballot initiative, political party or special interest group that has some stake in the 2024 election cycle (local, state, national), develop a 60-second video ad spot (narration and B-roll footage) for a preferred social media platform, and then submit a 2-3 page written proposal to key decision-makers (of the targeted political brand) on a key challenge they're facing, what they need to overcome that challenge and why this ad spot helps moving things in the right direction. You will direct this proposal to top decision-makers, depending on where it stands on the product lifecycle and its relevance to the voter segments that you wish to target. You will explain any relevant themes and messages, included in the ad spot, that will advance any specific outcomes/goals.
Focus Group Project	As a group, you will conduct qualitative research, via a Focus Group, on a particular 2024 election involving candidates or a ballot initiative. You will develop a Screener to determine the participants, a recruiting list, a Re-Screener to validate the correct participations, a Moderator's Guide and an Analysis of Key Findings & Strategic Recommendations.
Stump Speech	You will deliver a 5-8 minute Stump Speech to advocate in support or opposition of a political candidate, ballot initiative, political party or special interest group that has some stake in the 2024 election cycle (local, state, national). You will focus on how that individual/entity will better or worsen the interests of the affected constituency. You must use Monroe's Motivated Sequence design (template on Blackboard). In addition to having the class listen to your stump speech, you will invite at least two USC students (one who you expect will agree and one you expect will disagree with your position) to listen to you rehearse your speech (virtually or in-person).
Debate Analyses	As a group, you will write a report on the debate strategies, tactics and outcomes of one Presidential Debate or Vice Presidential Debate (assigned) to demonstrate your analytical prowess. As individuals, you will all participate in an in-class discussion of each debate, analyzing the strategies, tactics and outcomes of all three debates. You will focus heavily on analyzing the effective and ineffective executions of both candidates in your in-class analyses. The assigned group will serve as the primary analysts while the remaining class members will serve on the general panel.
Strategic Plan & SWOT Analysis	You will write a report to the chief decision-makers of a political candidate, political party or special interest group, formally endorsing a plan to advance concrete political action on behalf of that individual/entity that will culminate via a future election. The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate your understanding of the individual/entity itself, the value proposition to the targeted voters, and the impact of this victory on relevant stakeholders. You will write a 2-page executive summary, as well as a 4-8 page SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) on the individual/entity's behalf – including how the individual/entity is accurately perceived by targeted voters, what will make this individual/entity uniquely viable in the upcoming election cycle, which advertising mediums will be most effective, which branding challenges are most critical, which messages will resonate most, where voter interests/preferences are heading, and how the individual/entity will fare across the competitive landscape in meeting those interests/preferences.

V. Grading
a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation / Attendance	50	10.00%
Jeffersonian-Madisonian Exchange	50	10.00%
Focus Group Project	100	20.00%
Political Advertising Project	50	10.00%
Stump Speech	100	20.00%
Debate Analyses (40 x 1, 5 x 2)	50	10.00%
Final Strategic Plan & Analysis	100	20.00%
TOTAL	**500**	**100%**

b. Grading Scale

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 Level Grades	Demonstrates superior work performance and organizational skills, as well as mastery of subject matter and/or project requirements, including, but not limited to exceeding expectations in written/verbal communication, research methodologies, knowledge of material and practical application.
B Level Grades	Demonstrates commendable work performance and organizational skills, as well as a clear understanding of subject matter and/or project requirements, including, but not limited to reasonably meeting expectations in written/verbal communication, research methodologies, knowledge of material and practical application.
C Level Grades	Demonstrates basic level of work performance and organizational skills, as well as a basic understanding of subject matter and/or project requirements, including, but not limited to marginally meeting expectations in written/verbal communication, research methodologies, knowledge of material and practical application.
D Level Grades or Below	Demonstrates insufficient work performance and organizational skills, as well as an insufficient understanding of subject matter and/or project requirements; including a deficiency in fulfilling expectations in written/verbal communication, research methodologies, knowledge of material and practical application.

d. Grading Timeline

I make myself available to review any work, except exams and term papers, if student sends me a complete rough draft at least one week prior to the due date (or delivery date). Most projects are graded within one to two weeks of the assignment being completed by all students (note: presentations are not always delivered on the same date). I offer extensive feedback on my evaluation forms for presentations.

VI. Assignment Rubrics

Assignment rubrics are discussed individually during class.

VII. Assignment Submission Policy

All assignments are posted on Blackboard with detailed instructions and due dates. Students are expected to complete all assignments on time. Late work, if accepted, may be penalized. Typically, late submissions will result in 10% grade deduction per day late. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with me of any late assignment may result in the student receiving a grade of F for that late assignment. **Assignments must be submitted via e-mail with Word, PPT or PDF attachments** (not Google Drive, not Blackboard, not MAM).

VIII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Denton, Robert (2019). *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices, Ninth Edition.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Supplementary Materials (to be distributed):

Barone, Michael (1998). "It's a Wet, Wet, Wet World." *National Journal,* Dec 4, 1998, pp. 2836-2841.

Luntz, Frank (2007). *Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear.* New York, NY: Hyperion.

Morris, Dick (1999). *The New Prince.* Los Angeles, CA: Renaissance Books.

Marietta, Morgan (2009). "The Absolutist Advantage: Sacred Rhetoric in Contemporary Presidential Debate." *Political Communication*, 26: 4, pp.388-411.

Shogan, Colleen J. (Dec 2009). "The Contemporary Presidency: The Political Utility of Empathy in Presidential Leadership." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp.859-877.

Todd, Chuck (2008). "The Power of Candidate Branding." *NBC News*, Jan 7, 2008. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/22541240

West, Darrell (2009). *Air Wars: TV Advertising in Election Campaigns, 1952-2008*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Additional materials are available via e-mail and/or the university's Blackboard course site

IX. 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.

X. Add/Drop Dates – N/A

Summer Semester 2024 (7 weeks: 5/15/24 – 6/25/24)

XI. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Schedule is subject to change, based on class progress, news events, activities, guest speaker availability, etc.

	Daily Topics/Activities Covered in Class	Assigned Readings (Denton 9th ed)	Assign Dates / Due Dates
Week 1 **May 15** **May 17**	Course Overview Campaign Communication: Understanding the Players & the Game Functions, Styles & Strategies of Political Campaigns	Chapter 1 Chapters 2 & 3	Assign JM Exchange Partners
Week 2 **May 20** **May 22** **May 24**	**CLASS ON ZOOM** Comparison of 2016 & 2020 Presidential Campaigns Public Speaking in Campaigns Principles of Campaign Communication & Messaging The Media's Role in Campaigns: From Information to "Fake News"	Chapter 14 "Wet World" (Barone) Chapter 7 Chapter 13	Assign Stump Speech
Week 3 **May 27** **May 29** **May 31**	NO CLASS (Memorial Day) Political Debates Debate Workshop: Hugging Opponents & Dominating the Dialogue	Chapter 9 Marietta article Morris Readings	Assign Debate Teams
Week 4 **June 3** **June 5** **June 7**	Political Advertising POTUS-1 Debate Analysis (or VPOTUS-1) POTUS-2 Debate Analysis **CLASS ON ZOOM** Discuss Political Ad Spots	Chapters 5 & 11 Chapter 12 Chapter 13	Assign Ad Project Debate Report DUE Debate Report DUE

Week 5			
June 10	Branding of Candidates & Parties Interpersonal Communication	Todd, C. article Chapter 10	Political Advertising Project DUE
June 12	Polling, Focus Groups, Research	Luntz Readings	Assign Focus Group Project
June 14	Deliver Stump Speech		Speeches DUE
Week 6 June 17	Media Training: Workshop		
June 19	NO CLASS (Juneteenth)		
June 21	**CLASS ON ZOOM** Social Media in Political Campaigns Journalism in Political Campaigns		JM Exchange DUE
Week 7 June 24	Conducting a SWOT Analysis		Focus Group Project DUE
June 28	Final Report		Final Report DUE

XI(b). 2024 Presidential Election Calendar

Date	State	Democratic	Republican
Jan 15			Caucus
Jan 23	NH	Primary	Primary
Feb 3	SC	Primary	
Feb 6	NV	Primary	
Feb 8	NV		Caucus
Feb 24	SC		Primary
Feb 27	MI	Primary	Primary
Mar 2	ID		Caucus
Mar 3	DC		Primary
Mar 4	ND		Caucus
Mar 5 Super Tuesday	AL	Primary	Primary
	AK		Primary
	(AS)	Caucus	
	AR	Primary	Primary
	CA	Primary	Primary
	CO	Primary	Primary
	ME	Primary	Primary
	MA	Primary	Primary
	MN	Primary	Primary
	NC	Primary	Primary
	OK	Primary	Primary
	TN	Primary	Primary
	TX	Primary	Primary
	UT	Primary	Caucus
	VT	Primary	Primary
	VA	Primary	Primary
Mar 12	Abroad	Primary	
	GA	Primary	Primary
	HI		Caucus
	MS	Primary	Primary
	NoMariana	Primary	
	WA	Primary	Primary
Mar 17	(PR)	Primary	
Mar 19	AZ	Primary	Primary
	FL	Primary	Primary
	IL	Primary	Primary
	KS	Primary	Primary
	OH	Primary	Primary
Mar 23	LA	Primary	Primary
	MO	Primary	
Apr 2	DE	Primary	Primary
	NY	Primary	Primary
	RI	Primary	Primary
	WI	Primary	Primary
Apr 6	AK	Primary	-
	HI	Caucus	-
	ND	Primary	-
Apr 13	WY	Caucus	-
Apr 23	PA	Primary	Primary
Apr 30	CT	Primary	Primary
May 7	IN	Primary	Primary
May 14	MD	Primary	Primary
	NE	Primary	Primary
	WV	Primary	Primary
May 18	ID	Caucus	-
May 21	KY	Primary	Primary
	OR	Primary	Primary
Jun 4	DC	Primary	-
	MT	Primary	Primary
	NJ	Primary	Primary
	NM	Primary	Primary
	SD	Primary	Primary
Jun 8	(VI)	Caucus	-
Jul 15-18	Republican Convention (Milwaukee, WI)		
Aug 19-22	Democratic Convention (Chicago, IL)		
Nov 5	2024 Presidential Election		
Dec 17	Electors Cast Their Votes		
	Dates unknown: (AS) (Mar), Guam (May) | Guam (Mar), IA (Mar), Missouri (Mar), NH (Jan) | NH (Jan), Northern Mariana (Mar), PR (Mar), (VI) (Mar), Wyoming (Mar)		

XII. Additional Class Policies and Procedures
a. Technology
Using laptops and/or mobile device to access the Internet and/or e-mail during class time to partake in non-class-related activity is not permitted. **Any violation of this policy may result in the loss of all participation points for the entire semester, as well as other measures under university policy.**

b. Late Submissions
Late submissions on assignments will result in a 10% grade deduction for every day late.

c. Student Conduct
Class behavior will be predicated on an environment of mutual respect. Any level of disruptive or threatening student behavior is unacceptable. We are here to learn from each other in a non-threatening environment. You are encouraged to formulate and share opinions with due discretion, as well as be comfortable in practicing communication techniques and debating ideas in a safe environment. However, any behavior that is deemed disrespectful by the instructor will affect your participation points.

d. Lecture Slides & Notes
Lecture slides are not posted, so students are encouraged to attend all classes and take thorough notes. Students may request a review of prior material, which often occurs periodically throughout the semester.

XIII. Communication
Please e-mail, text or call me with any questions or concerns about anything related to the class and/or career planning, especially if you are unable to meet during my office hours. I typically respond fastest via e-mail (within 24-48 hours), and I'm interested in helping you with anything on your mind.

XIV. Academic Conduct and Support Systems
a. Academic Integrity & Conduct
The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's academic integrity code as detailed in the SCampus guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the academic integrity code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication major or minor. If you have any doubts about what is and is not an academic integrity violation, please check with me immediately. The University presumes that you are familiar with its standards and policies; should you be found to have committed a violation, ignorance of these standards and policies will not be accepted as an excuse. If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an "F" grade on the assignment, exam, and/or in the course.

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.

b. Use of Artificial Intelligence
You may use artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs to help you with assignments that indicate expressed written consent for the use of AI. You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Please review the instructions in each assignment for more details on how and when to use AI Generators for your submissions. Please ask me if you are unsure about what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an assignment or exam, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

c. Individual vs Group Work. In this class, you are expected to submit work that demonstrates your individual mastery of the course concepts. Unless specifically designated as a "group project," all assignments are expected to be completed individually.

d. 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. Please know that I care deeply about your mental health, and I want to make sure that you are receiving the full support of the university. Please let me know if you are struggling with any mental health issues. We all need support.

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
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
undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/
Please note that I am always open to meeting separately with my students through USC's Breaking Bread Program, which is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal academic 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! The meal can take place outside of the normal academic setting. The venue can be a restaurant or eatery, on or off-campus.

XV. About Your Professor: Michael Wissot

Michael Wissot has transformed political and corporate communication platforms in every major sector, serving as the choice expert for many Fortune 500 executives and top elected officials seeking strategic counsel. His expertise includes message development, crisis communication, market research, labor disputes, press conferences, political debates, speechwriting, branding and advertising. He has provided counsel for Coca-Cola, Kroger, Safeway, Pfizer, Miller Brewing, FOX Sports, Comcast, Thomson Reuters, News Corporation, Ameriquest Mortgage, Paramount Pictures, Universal, 20th Century FOX, MPAA, Wynn Las Vegas, MGM Mirage, Starwood Hotels, University of Phoenix, Los Angeles Dodgers, Milwaukee Brewers, San Francisco Giants, Baltimore Orioles, Arizona Diamondbacks, and National Football League. He has managed communication initiatives for Senator John McCain, President George W. Bush, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor Luis Fortuño, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and other world leaders. He has served as a political analyst on national television and radio. He co-authored a popular business book, "The 10 People Who Suck: A Positive Prescription for Improving Communication in the Workplace." He has taught at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism since 2010 after serving seven years as an adjunct professor at Pepperdine University. He has served as Chief Operating Officer at Van Dyk Health Care since 2016. He earned a bachelor of arts degree from James Madison University, a master of business administration degree from The University of Arizona, and a master of international management degree from Thunderbird Graduate School of Global Management.