



**COMM 311: Communication and Publics**

4 Units

**Fall 2024** – M/W: 12:00-1:15 p.m.

**Section:** 20499

**Location:** ANN L101

**Instructor:** Jennifer Petersen (she/hers)

**Office:** ASC 307E

**Office Hours:** T 11-12 and by appt.

**Contact Info:** jpetersen@usc.edu

**TA:** Ana Bukowski (they/them)

**Contact:** howebuko@usc.edu

**Office Hours:** Wed. 3-4 on Zoom

**TA:** Sofie Haytin (she/hers)

**Contact:** haytin@usc.edu

**Office Hours:** Mon. 3-4 on Zoom

**Course Description**

What makes some issues public issues? What is public life and how does it relate to democracy? These are some of the questions we will address this semester, as we examine the role of communication in the public sphere. The course will introduce students to the concept of the public sphere, explore its role in democratic theory and practice, and to critiques of the public sphere. Along the way, we will discuss the uses of rhetoric in public life and politics and gain tools for analyzing rhetoric, in verbal, visual, and material forms. The course is designed to give students a foundation in the humanistic study of communication as it relates to democratic politics and contemporary public issues. It will prepare students for the Media, Law and Politics concentration as well as many other communication courses.

**Student Learning Objectives:**

At the end of the course, students will/will be able to:

1. Understand the differences between the public and private spheres of life
2. Identify prominent uses, sites, and techniques of rhetoric
3. Apply methods of rhetorical criticism to visual, linguistic, and material examples of rhetoric
4. Explain and apply the concepts of publics and counterpublics
5. Analyze contemporary issues and events drawing on concepts of publics and counterpublics, power, and rhetoric
6. Use evidence to support arguments in written assignments

**Course Texts:**

Catherine Helen Palczewski, Richard Ice, John Fritch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 2016. (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> edition) Strata Publishing. (This listed in the daily schedule as RCL)

The textbook is available via the campus bookstore and major online booksellers. All other readings are available on Brightspace. I expect you to come to the discussion posts and synchronous class sessions having read all the assigned readings and/or viewed the assigned asynchronous materials. The TAs and I will expect to see your understanding of these materials reflected in your posts, discussion and groupwork.

## Assessment

**Papers (60%):** There will be 3 short (6-7 page) papers throughout the course. These papers will ask you to apply and extend the concepts and methods of critique presented in the course materials and lecture and practiced in class activities and discussion posts. All papers should meet the **Common Standards for Course Papers** posted in the resources folder in the content area of the course Brightspace page and follow university standards for plagiarism and academic conduct (see below).

**Mid-Term (20%):** The mid-term will assess your understanding of the materials in the first 7 weeks of the course.

**Posts, quizzes, and assignments (10%):** There will be periodic quizzes on the readings and lectures as well as assignments designed to give you the opportunity to summarize, reflect on, apply or extend the concepts and issues in the lectures, discussion and reading. Some of these will be short posts to the discussion forum of Brightspace.

**Participation (10%):** Your participation is essential for your learning, and for the course's success. Participation is evidenced in attendance, completion of assignments, participation in discussions and activities during lecture, and office hours.

Assignment	% of Grade
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	20%
Paper 3	20%
Mid-term	20%
Posts and quizzes	10%
Participation	10%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

Unless instructed otherwise, you should submit all written assignments via Brightspace. All papers must be submitted in Word (not .pdf). All papers must be submitted on the due date in the syllabus. **Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will automatically be given a grade of F.**

## Grading Scale

Final grades will be determined on the following scale:

94% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 93%: 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

## Grading Standards

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent; demonstrates extraordinarily high achievement; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all expectations met and exceeded.
B	Good; moderately broad knowledge and understanding of subject matter; explicitly or implicitly demonstrates good, if not thorough understanding; only minor substantive shortcomings.
C	Satisfactory/Fair; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; most expectations are met; despite any shortcomings, demonstrates basic level of understanding.
D	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; more than one significant shortcoming; deficiencies indicate only the most rudimentary level of understanding.
F	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter; deficiencies indicate lack of understanding.

### Grading Timeline

I will strive to give you timely feedback on your work. In-class assignments should be assessed within the week; a reasonable turn-around time for papers is 2-2.5 weeks; if other teaching duties or travel makes it impossible for us to make this turn-around, I will let you know.

### Course Policies

**Respect:** My priority as your professor is to ensure a safe, respectful education environment where all students can learn and thrive. At times, we will discuss contentious issues that you and/or your classmates may have strong feelings and opinions on. As we do, it is important that, even in disagreement, we treat each other with respect. Disagreement can be useful and productive in a classroom, but disrespect never is.

**Communication:** I encourage you to speak with me individually about your interests, and of course any concerns you have about the class. I am happy to talk before or after class and in office hours. Email is the best way to reach me ([jpetersen@usc.edu](mailto:jpetersen@usc.edu)). I usually reply to emails within 48 hours; though note that I may not reply to emails over the weekend. I do at times suffer from email overload; if you do not receive a response within 48 hours please feel free to send me a reminder “nudge.” Each of you will also be assigned to a TA, who will be your primary grader and who can address many of your questions. Your TA will send you an email of introduction within the first 3 weeks of class.

**Grievance Procedure:** Occasionally, students are dissatisfied with evaluation of their work or some other dimension of a course. For concerns with specific grades, students should first provide a written argument in support of their position to their TA. All grade appeals on specific assignments must be made within one week of the return of the assignment. The TA will then review that petition and evaluate its merits. Dr. Petersen will consider grade appeals only after this process has been completed. You may, of course, approach any of the instructors with any general concerns.

## Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. *You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).* Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage. Plagiarism includes:

- The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student's own work, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.
- The submission of work that has been re-written by another person.
- Failing to acknowledgment sources in essays or papers.
- Using any portion of an essay, term paper, project or other assignment more than once, without permission of the instructor(s)
- Using a generative AI program such as ChatGPT without attribution

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university. For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#)

## Policy on AI use

Generative AI is permitted as a tool to extend student skills, not as a replacement for them. **You may not use AI to complete quizzes or exams.** You will need to do the reading and the analysis for your papers, but you may use AI as a tool to help you brainstorm, organize or outline, refine thesis statements, and edit/improve drafts that you have written. Be aware that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, biased, or otherwise problematic. It can also infringe on others' intellectual property. **You are liable for all errors, mis-representations, biases and plagiarism in any assignment you hand in.** Toward that end, check all facts, and read and evaluate any sources suggested by AI. Do not use AI to do your research for you. Rather, use it as a tool in your research. For more on using AI in assignments, see <https://libguides.usc.edu/generative-AI/scholarship-research>.

**If you use an AI program in constructing your paper, you must include a written disclosure at the end of the paper.** This disclosure should 1. Explain all the ways that you have used AI in the assignment, 2. Identify the AI program you used, and 3. Include links to chat history. For some ideas on how to do this, see <https://libguides.usc.edu/generative-AI/citing-generative-ai> or [https://www.monash.edu/student-academic-success/build-digital-capabilities/create-online/acknowledging-the-use-of-generative-](https://www.monash.edu/student-academic-success/build-digital-capabilities/create-online/acknowledging-the-use-of-generative-ai)

artificial-intelligence. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

**Please ask the instructor or your TA if you are unsure about what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.**

**Special Assistance:** Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with the Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure that the letter is delivered as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is open from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday and can be reached at (213) 740-0776 or at [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu)

### **Support**

Stress can creep up on us and it can affect your academic performance. If you are under stress, or if there is something going on in your life that is hampering your ability to fully participate in the course, please do not remain silent. Reach out to us. There are also a number of support services available to all students, listed at the end of this syllabus.

## **Course Schedule**

*All readings are listed and/or linked in the weekly content folders on Brightspace. Be advised that this schedule is subject to change in response to course progress, current events, and/or the availability of guest speakers*

### **Introduction: public life and the public sphere**

#### Week 1

8/26 Introductions; what is public life?  
Read: The syllabus!

8/28 Public and private spheres of life  
Read: Petersen, "Public"  
Read: Williams, "Private"  
Read: Brouwer and Asen, "Public Modalities" (pp. 1-8)

#### Week 2

9/2 NO CLASS: LABOR DAY

9/4 Public Opinion and "The Public": consensus, representation, and power  
Read Lepore, "A Tale of Two Conventions," *The New Yorker*  
Read: Igo, "America in Aggregate" from *The Averaged American*  
Read: Herbst, "Numbers and Symbolic Politics" from *Numbered Voices*

## Producing Political Issues and Publics: The role of communication

### Week 3

- 9/9 Public Opinion and Political Legitimacy: the emergence and significance of the public sphere  
Read: Habermas, "The Public Sphere," from *Rethinking popular culture : contemporary perspectives in cultural studies*
- 9/11 Communication and publics: the role of rhetoric  
Read: RCL, "Rhetoric as Civic Action" and "Rhetorical Resources and Constraints"  
Read: Watt, "Making Sense"  
Read: Aristotle

### Week 4

- 9/16 How Rhetoric Shapes Public Issues and Debate: Language  
Read: RCL, "Language"  
Read: Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric* (selection)  
Listen: NPR, "The Rhetoric that Shaped the Abortion Debate"
- 9/18 Producing Publics: political speech and constitutive rhetoric  
Read: Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric"

### Week 5

- 9/23 How Rhetoric Shapes Public Issues and Debate: Pictures as Visual Rhetoric  
Read: RCL, "Visual Rhetoric"  
Read: Hariman and Lucaites, "Public Culture, Icons, and Iconoclasts" from *No Caption Needed*  
**Paper 1 due**
- 9/25 Analyzing Visual Rhetoric  
Read: Johnson, Davi, "MLK's 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event"  
Read: DeLuca and Demo, "Imagining Nature"  
Suggested: Brunner and DeLuca "The Argumentative Force of Image Networks"

### Week 6

- 9/30 Arguments and Argumentation  
Read: RCL, "Arguments"  
Read: Gutman, *Deliberative Democracy*  
Read: Olson and Goodnight "Entanglements of consumption, cruelty, privacy, and fashion: The social controversy over fur." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 80, 249-276.
- 10/2 Technical Knowledge and Manufactured Controversies  
Read: Goodnight, "Science and Technology Controversies"  
Read: Ceccarelli, "Manufactured Scientific Controversy"

## Week 7

- 10/7 Contemporary media, fragmentation and a vanishing public sphere?  
Review: RCL, "Audiences"  
Read: Anderson, C.W. (2011). Deliberative, agonistic, and algorithmic audiences: Journalism's vision of its public in an age of audience transparency. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 529-547.  
Read (for in-class activity): MLK, Letter from a Birmingham Jail
- 10/9 Rhetoric, publics, and the election  
Guest lecture: Tom Hollihan  
Read: Bennett, L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739-768.

## Week 8

10/14 **Mid-term**

### Rethinking the Public Sphere: Counterpublics

- 10/16 Rethinking the public sphere: how to think about public life and discourse in conditions of inequality  
Read: RCL, Chapter 9

## Week 9

- 10/21 Problems of visibility: race, gender, sexuality and the public/private divide  
Read: Warner, "Public and Private", pp. 21-44  
Read: TBA
- 10/23 Counterpublics: a response to the problems of inequality and power in public communication  
Guest lecture: Sofie Haytin  
Read: Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy"

## Week 10

- 10/28 Publicity, technology, and the Black public sphere  
Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere"
- 10/30 Publicity, violence, and technology  
Read: Richardson, "Bearing Witness While Black"  
Read: Clark, "A brief etymology of so-called 'cancel culture'"

## Week 11

- 11/4 Body Rhetorics and Counterpublic Performances  
Read: DeLuca, "Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First, Act Up, and Queer Nation"

**Publics, Counterpublics, and Public Memory:  
Monuments and Memorials**

- 11/6 Constructing images of “the public” and a shared past: mythologizing and forgetting  
Read: Flores “The Public Construction of the Past” in *Remembering the Alamo*  
Read: Miranda, “Remapping LA” <https://www.guernicamag.com/remapping-la/>

Week 12:

11/11 NO CLASS: VETERAN’S DAY

- 11/13 The Politics of Memorialization  
Read: Doss, *Memorial Mania* (excerpt)  
Read: Wagner-Pacifi and Swartz, “The Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past”  
Optional: Dickinson, “Memories for Sale: Nostalgia and the Construction of Identity in Old Pasadena”  
**Paper 2 due**

Week 13

- 11/18 Material rhetorics  
Read: Blair, “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality”  
Read: Clark, “Rhetorical Experience and the National Jazz Museum in Harlem” in *Places of Public Memory*
- 11/20 Counterpublics and Countermemorials  
Read: Sturken, “Conversations with the Dead: Bearing Witness in the AIDS quilt”  
Read: Bennet, “A Stitch in Time”

Week 14

- 11/25 Case Study: 9/11 Memorial  
Read: Paliewicz & Hasian, “Mourning absences, melancholic commemoration, and the contested public memories of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum”
- 11/27 🦃 HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Week 15

- 12/2 Recent controversies and the future of public memory  
Read: Thompson, excerpts from *Smashing Statues*  
Read: TBA
- 12/4 Conclusions; wrap up  
Read: TBA



## **12/13 FINAL PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT ON BRIGHTSPACE**

### **University Resources and 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](http://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 Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776*  
<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*  
[uscsa.usc.edu](http://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](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://annenbergsuccessfund.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

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

*Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]*

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

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