



COM499 POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Winter 2016

*“How I say it has as much of an impact on what people think of me as what I say.” –
Frank Luntz*

*“The idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal –
that you can gather votes like box tops – is, I think, the ultimate indignity to the
democratic process.” – Adlai Stevenson*

Dr. Jason Turcotte
Assistant Professor
Department of Communication
Email: jmturcotte@cpp.edu
Phone: (909) 869-3526
Office: 1-307

Class Time & Office Hours:

Class time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3-4:50 p.m., in 6-227.

Office hours: Tuesdays, 1-3 p.m.; Wednesdays, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Required Text:

Perloff, Richard M. (2014). *The Dynamics of Political Communication: Media and Politics in a Digital Age*. New York: Routledge.

Recommended Texts:

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

Issenberg, Sasha (2012). *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*. New York: Random House.

Course Overview & Objectives

Political communication refers to a communicative process utilizing language and symbols to influence political and/or civic outcomes. It is the study and practice of *strategic communication* in a socio-political context including the context of campaigns and elections, rhetorical governance, and nonprofit communication. This course introduces students to the political institutions and players influencing policy-making and campaigns, and cultivates an understanding of how candidates, public officials, and

campaign operatives craft messages and target various audiences in a swiftly-changing media environment. Course objectives include:

- Understand key concepts, theories, and strategies in political communication and how they are applicable to today's media environment.
- Understand how political communication can shape expectations and interpretations of current events, political actors, and the campaign process.
- Develop skills in decoding political messages and evaluating campaign information.
- Understand how campaigns are conducted through advertising, news management, and various communication technologies.
- Apply techniques of persuasion to real world problems and political issues; strengthen analytical and persuasive writing skills.
- Identify the ethical issues undergirding the intersection of media and politics, especially as they pertain to race, gender, and diversity.
- Understand key patterns and trends in political communication, including new affordances in digital and social media, big data, and microtargeting.

Expectations

This course is an upper division special topics seminar, meaning that instruction is discussion-based and coursework is reading intensive. Thus, you should be motivated and intellectually curious. You are expected to make contributions to class discussions and fully participate in all in-class activities. (Dead weight in the classroom is frustrating to me as well as your classmates). You are expected to complete all assignments and readings **on time**; all assignments and readings are due at the **start** of class on the date listed on the syllabus unless otherwise noted. Minimal lecture materials are provided on Blackboard; therefore, it is imperative that you are present in class, read assignments, and supplement lectures with your own notes.

Written Work

All written work must be single-spaced and formatted without tabs, using 1 line of space in between all paragraphs. Always type in 12-point Times New Roman font. All written work must be free of factual errors, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and typos. In any instances where I allow you to turn in assignments through Blackboard or email, the assignment must be attached as a Microsoft Word document.

Technology Policy

Computers are for note taking purposes only; however, students are strongly encouraged to take notes by hand given that studies have found that hand-written notes result in greater levels of comprehension and better exam performance. Social media diversions,

texting, gaming etc. will *not* get you very far in the course. Mobile devices must be on silent or remain off. All use of mobile technology is prohibited unless otherwise instructed; regardless of how discreet you think you are, texting is a distraction to the professor and other students. If it is an emergency, excuse yourself from the classroom.

Academic Integrity

I hold academic integrity to the strictest of standards. The work you turn in is yours – and no one else's. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to give an unfair academic advantage to the student (such as submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructors, providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on an assignment), or the attempt to commit such an act.

Plagiarism is defined as the unacknowledged inclusion of someone else's words, structure, ideas, or data. When a student submits work as his/her own that includes the words, structure, ideas, or data of others, the source of this information must be acknowledged through complete, accurate, and specific references, and, if verbatim statements are included, through quotation marks as well. Failure to identify any source, published in any medium (including on the internet) or unpublished, from which words, structure, ideas, or data have been taken, constitutes plagiarism.

If you commit an act of academic dishonesty – including plagiarism – you will receive a zero for the assignment. Depending on the severity of the incident, you may also receive a zero for the course and/or be turned in to the Office of Judicial Affairs. Please see me if you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism or other examples of academic misconduct.

Attendance and Late Work Policy

I only excuse absences resulting from family emergency, illness, conference or other engagements I deem beneficial to your career; however, work shifts are no excuse for absences or late work. If you feel an extension is necessary, you must request one at least **24 hours prior** to the class in which the assignment is due. All **unapproved** late work receives a **letter grade deduction** if submitted within **24 hours** after the due date. Work turned in after 24 hours of original due date will receive a **zero**. No shows – meaning absences that were not discussed with the professor prior to the missed class – do not have the luxury of make-up work unless the absence is due to extreme circumstances (e.g. severe medical or family emergency). I reserve the right to require documentation for absences and make-up work. Note: more than **2** absences will adversely affect your participation grade.

Classroom Respect

There will undoubtedly be times when your classmates, or I, express views and opinions counter to your own. Every voice and opinion will be respected both within *and* outside the classroom. Discussions and disagreements must remain collegial, respectful, and germane to the topic. This rule is especially important given the personal nature of politics and will be strictly adhered to.

Assignments: (1,000-point scale)

Quizzes (5):	400 pts	40%
Op-ed:	200 pts	20%
Ad project:	200 pts	20%
Participation:	200 pts	20%

A = 930-1000	A- = 900-929	B+ = 870-899	B = 830-869
B- = 800-829	C+ = 770-799	C = 730-769	C- = 700-729
D+ = 670-699	D = 630-669	D- = 600-629	F = 599 or less

Quizzes

Brief quizzes will assess your understanding of the readings and key concepts learned in class discussions. The quizzes will follow a multiple choice format and 15-item Scantrons are required for each quiz. It is necessary to complete assigned readings on time and take notes during lectures to ensure strong quiz grades.

Op-ed

You will apply various strategic communication techniques – including issue framing, refutes, establishing credibility etc. – to write a persuasive op-ed piece on an issue of your choosing. You will deliver a convincing, concise, and compelling argument advocating a particular perspective, viewpoint, or policy solution. Students will be encouraged to submit their op-eds to local news outlets.

Participation

Given that this is an upper division seminar, participation is a crucial component of the class. Participation includes your attendance, contributions to discussions, and completion of in-class exercises. In other words, your grade is contingent on active engagement in the course and your willingness to contribute ideas and perspectives to the class. Posting relevant stories, clips, or anecdotes from the 2016 campaign to the course discussion board will also enhance your participation grade. More than **2** absences will adversely affect your participation grade. At any point during the quarter you may request a grade *estimate* for your class participation up to that date.

Ad Project

In lieu of a final exam, you will work collaboratively in teams as simulated political strategists on a presidential campaign. As strategists for one of the 2016 candidates, each group will create a candidate profile, a campaign strategy outline, and an original political ad that will be presented to the class.

Note: There will be an extra credit opportunity on Wednesday, Jan. 27 when political strategists James Carville and Mary Matalin speak at the Kellogg Lecture Series.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1: Defining Political Communication

- Tuesday, Jan. 5: Overview of course, introductions, and expectations. In-class activity: Pew political typology quiz.
- Thursday, Jan. 7: Read Chap. 2, “What is Political Communication?” (p. 28-43). Defining political communication and identifying key players and stakeholders.

Week 2: The Electorate

- Tuesday, Jan. 12: Read Chap. 4, “Media and Political Knowledge” (p. 73-94). Discussion on knowledge, citizenship, and political socialization.
- Thursday, Jan. 14: Read “The Unpolitical Animal” (on Blackboard). Discussion on attitude formation and voter behavior: What motivates and mobilizes the electorate?

Week 3: The Political Agenda

- Tuesday, Jan. 19: Read Chap. 6, “Agenda-Setting” (p. 119-126; 129-135). Read Chap. 7, “Agenda-Building” (p. 136-151). Discussion on agenda-setting functions of news and the process of agenda-building.
- Thursday, Jan. 21: Read “Why Americans Hate the Media” (on Blackboard). Discussion of the news media’s political agenda; overview of political strategy narratives, the “horserace” and game-frames. **Quiz 1**

Week 4: Issue Framing

- Tuesday, Jan. 26: Read Chap. 8, “Framing” (p. 155-174). Discussion on issue framing and techniques in message formation; Frank Luntz’s “21 Political Words and Phrases You Should Never Say Again.”
- Thursday, Jan. 28: Read “A Conversation about Welfare and the Media” and “News Coverage Conveys Strong Momentum for Same-Sex Marriage” (on Blackboard). Continued discussion on framing of domestic policy issues. Introduction to op-ed writing and message formation techniques.

Week 5: Persuasion & Rhetorical Governance

- Tuesday, Feb. 2: Read “Digital Diplomacy” and “Why Do World Leaders Still Write Op-Eds?” (on Blackboard). Discussion on rhetorical governance and symbolic leadership. In-class viewing: The West Wing, Season 5: “Shutdown”.

- Thursday, Feb. 4: Read Chap. 14, “Persuasion and Political Campaigns” (p. 316-335). Discussion on persuasion tactics and effective campaigning. **Quiz 2.**

Week 6: The Campaign Process

- Tuesday, Feb. 9: Read Chap. 11, “Political Campaigns Past and Present” (p. 235-255); “Experiments Show This is the Best Way to Win Campaigns. But is Anyone Actually Doing It?” (on Blackboard). Discussion on the history of campaigning, and the functions of campaigns.
- Thursday, Feb. 11: Read Chap. 12, “The Main Players in Political Campaigns” (p. 257-267; 270-278). Discussion on the campaign influence of political strategists, polling, and money; implications of the Citizen’s United decision. **Op-ed due.**

Week 7: Advertising & Debates

- Tuesday, Feb. 16: Read Chap. 15, “Political Advertising” (p. 338-363) and “How Quickly We Forget: The Duration of Persuasion Effects From Mass Communication” (Blackboard). In-class viewing: Kathleen Hall Jamieson dissects 2012 Obama-Romney ads. In-class activity: group ad analysis.
- Thursday, Feb. 18: Read Chap. 16, “Presidential Debates” (p. 364-381; 384-386). Discussion on debate effects, post-debate coverage, strategy, and social media partnerships. **Quiz 3.**

Week 8: The Web & Microtargeting

- Tuesday, Feb. 23: Read “How the Web Invented Howard Dean” and “Here’s How the First President of the Social Media Age Has Chosen to Connect with Americans” (on Blackboard). Discussion of online campaigning and social media management.
- Thursday, Feb. 25: Read “Here’s How Presidential Campaigns Track Who You Are and What You Do” and “All Politics is Customizable” (on Blackboard). Discussion on the role of market research in campaigns. **Quiz 4.**

Week 9: The Role of the News Media

- Tuesday, March 1: Read Chap. 9, “Behind Political News: Myths and Realities” (p. 196-206) and “A Short History of Whether Obama is Black Enough” (on Blackboard). Discussion of the news media as a political institution; unpacking partisan, gender, and racial biases of the press.
- Thursday, March 3: Read Chap. 13, “Nominations and the News” (p. 283-304; 309-313). Discussion on presidential primaries and news influence over the nominating process.

Week 10: Campaigns & Entertainment Media

- Tuesday, March 8: Read “Media: From News to Satire (p. 106-112) and “Kate McKinnon’s Genius Hillary Impersonation” (on Blackboard). Discussion on leveraging entertainment media and humanizing political candidates. **Quiz 5.**
- Thursday, March 10: Read “Donald Trump is Saving Our Democracy” (on Blackboard). Final thoughts, and discussion on the democratic implications of the blurring between entertainment and politics.

Note: Readings and/or assignments subject to change;

Ad Presentations: Tuesday, March 15 @ 1:40-3:40