

Contemporary Political Communication – COMM370 – Spring 2007

Course Description & Objectives: An examination of domestic (U.S.) politics in order to better understand how "political reality" is constructed through communication. To that end, the course will examine communication during particular political events, during acts of governance, and particular campaigns, and will discuss how that communication effects and is effected by the media. At the end of the course, you will be in a position to better understand American political messages and will be better able to critique those messages.

You will show your understanding of course concepts through journaling observations about political current events, through the development of your own political messages, and through participation in a class-wide mock election activity.

Texts & Course Materials: Textbooks have been ordered through the SUNY Potsdam bookstore, and they are available through online retailers.

1. Edelman, M. (1988). *Constructing the political spectacle*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-18399-8. *REQUIRED*
2. Hahn, D.F. (2003). *Political communication: Rhetoric, government, and citizens, 2nd edition*. State College, PA: Strata Publishing. ISBN 1-891136-08-9 *REQUIRED*
3. Other readings will be provided via handouts throughout the semester.

You will need a notebook to use for a journal. This should be a specially designated notebook, separate from the one you use for other classes and separate from the one you may be taking notes in. You will be turning this journal in regularly. (The notebook does not have to be any special kind and I don't care what it looks like.)

Assignments and Grading: Your final grade in this class will be the weighted average of the following assignments and activities. Due dates for assignments are clearly marked in the semester calendar and late work will not be accepted.

Reading: 0% Though completion of all reading assignments is not a factor in your grade, it is a factor in your overall success in and enjoyment of this course. Readings are due on the day they are noted on the calendar (attached), and your timely completion of them will help to ensure more lively and engaging classes, and less lecturing from me. [Note: Readings are marked as DFH and ME. DFH is the Hahn "Political Communication" book. ME is the Edelman "Political Spectacle" book.]

Campaign 2008 Journal: 30% Candidates are already entering the race for the 2008 presidential contest. As part of this class, you will be asked to follow the stories about the campaign (who's entering the race, who's gearing up for primaries, who's dropping out, who's considering it, etcetera.) You can use a variety of sources to get this information – Internet news sites, candidate Web sites, political party Web sites, newspapers, TV news, radio news, Blogs, etcetera. Your journals should contain mention of what's going on for the 2008 election and your reactions to it. Ideally, your reactions should be grounded in the concepts you are learning in this class – something that should get easier for you to do as the semester progresses. I will be looking for thoughtful, complete comments. You should make 2 journal entries per week, *each one no less than 1 page*. These can be typed or handwritten, but make sure you bring your complete journal with you to class each week.

"Election Day" Game Participation: 5% As a way to illustrate in a "real world" way the concepts presented in this course, we will be engaging in a computer -simulated campaign during regularly scheduled class meetings. Your active participation is required.

As a Speaking Intensive class, 40% of your grade must be made up of speaking activities. These activities are as follows:

Teaching Moments: 10% You will be assigned a portion of the reading for the semester to teach to the rest of the class, and will lead class discussion on that reading. This grade will be based on effort and preparedness alone, not on the “rightness” or “wrongness” of your presentation, and I will assist you in your teaching moment. (I foresee these teaching moments lasting no more than 20-30 minutes. You will not be expected to teach for the entire 3 hour class time.)

Speech 1: 20% You will present a speech about one of the potential presidential candidates for 2008. Your speech will be an examination of the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses and the challenges and benefits they face in the campaign. This analysis will be grounded in what you have learned to date in the class.

Speech 2: 20% You will present a surrogate stump speech (to be explained later in the semester) on behalf of your chosen 2008 presidential candidate. This will be a campaign-style speech in which you ask your audience to support the candidate. You will base your arguments on what you have learned about the campaign environment and about your candidate through your journaling, and on what you know of effective political communication from this (and maybe other) class(es).

Campaign Literature: 15% A chance to show off your creativity and to take a shot at being an advertising or public relations specialist. You will create some piece of campaign communication in support of your chosen 2008 candidate. You will base your arguments on what you have learned about the campaign environment and about your candidate through your journaling, and on what you know of effective political communication from this (and maybe other) class(es). This may be a palm card, newsletter, print ad, a script for a TV or radio spot, or something else more creative. Examples of possibilities will be shown in class.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: You are expected to uphold the college’s standards or academic integrity. Plagiarism of any kind is not tolerated in this class and will result in failure of the course.

Policy of Tolerance and Fairness: This course is about understanding the construction of political ideas and messages. It is a critical examination of politics in general. It is not a criticism of any particular political party or politician. Through this course, you should be able to learn to question and analyze political ideas, even the ones with which you agree. For these reasons, I ask that partisan biases and preferences be kept to a minimum. By setting these aside, you will not only be in a better position to critique *all* political messages, but you will also help to ensure that everyone in the class feels comfortable contributing to discussion. I do not want anyone to feel uncomfortable in the class for holding certain political beliefs; therefore, I will keep my personal political leanings to myself (and make fun of all political parties and politicians equally) and I ask that you strive to do the same.

General polite and respectful behavior is also anticipated.

Attendance: Attendance in class is mandatory, especially given the hands-on nature of the course material. (We will be making use of a variety of media sources, including a lot of pop culture movies and TV shows.) Your absence in the class is not only detrimental to your own learning and performance, but it can negatively effect your fellow classmates when we are engaging in group activities. Late arrivals and early departures are also unproductive and disruptive and will not be tolerated, except in emergency circumstances. Because this class meets only once a week, YOU ARE ALLOWED ONLY ONE (1) “FREE” ABSENCE (though any missed work will have to be made up by you); I recommend that you use it wisely, if at all. If you miss 2 classes, your final grade will be lowered by one whole letter. IF YOU MISS MORE THAN 2 CLASSES, YOU WILL FAIL THE COURSE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

In the event of an emergency or an extreme circumstance, please come to me immediately to discuss the situation, and we will consider alternatives in those events.

Semester Calendar – DUE DATES

DATE	CHAPTER
24-Jan	introduce class
31-Jan	DFH 1 & ME 1
7-Feb	DFH 2 & 3
14-Feb	DFH 4 & 5
21-Feb	ME 2
28-Feb	ME 3
7-Mar	<i>Speech 1</i>
14-Mar	DFH 6 & 7
21-Mar	DFH 8 & 9
RECESS	-----
4-Apr	DFH 10 & ME 4
11-Apr	DFH 11 & 12 <i>campaign lit due</i>
18-Apr	DFH 13 & ME 5
25-Apr	T&F chapter (handout)
2-May	DFH 14 & ME 6
9-May	<i>Speech 2</i>
EXAM	Overflow for speeches –NO EXAM

Contact: My office is Morey Hall 144.

Office hours: Tue/Thu 10:45 am – 12:00 pm & 2:30 pm – 4:00 pm, Wed 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm. And by appointment.

Email: knopfc@potsdam.edu (Please put “political communication” or COMM370 in the subject line so your message is not filtered as SPAM.)

Phone: 315-267-2883

Stay Tuned: I will be setting up a Web page for this course that will contain useful links and other information.