

Political Campaign Communication

Fall 2010 (12:15-1:30)

Professor: Dr. Michael Lee
Office: 9 College #303
Email: leem@cofc.edu
Phone: 843-953-8125
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-4:00pm
Wednesday 10:00am-12:00pm

This course examines political campaign communication in the modern era of U.S. presidential elections. Although portions of this course will survey the broader history of presidential campaigns and occasionally draw lessons from local campaigns, the class will pay special attention to the thirteen presidential elections since 1960. In lieu of proceeding chronologically, this course proceeds thematically and utilizes examples from these elections to illustrate a variety of lessons related to launching candidacies, attacking opponents, cultivating ads, and other campaign challenges. Many approaches to campaign communication emphasize speech making and exclude the importance of visual communication, the construction of powerful images. This course will balance the visual with the verbal in an effort to understand the *total process* of political campaign communication. In sum, this course combines perspectives from communication, political science, and history to paint a comprehensive picture of presidential campaigns in the modern era.

The two primary learning objectives of this course are *historical understanding* and the development of *critical abilities*:

1. The content of political campaign communication is reflective and constitutive; it says much about the goals, fears, and collective values of Americans. The results of individual elections speak to what mattered to Americans, both the winning and losing coalitions, at particular times. Presidential campaign communication provides an interesting window on American history.
2. Political communication is not a matter of taste alone; it can be evaluated by sets of standards. These standards (aesthetics, truth, and effects) have a shelf-life, but they also equip the critic with tools to understand and evaluate the workings of American political culture. As such, these techniques are essential to civic training and the development of an able, attentive citizenry.

Assigned Texts:

Thomas A. Hollihan, *Uncivil Wars: Political Campaigns in a Media Age* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2009)

Andrew E. Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right* (Kansas University Press, 2005)

* This book will be used for historical understanding primarily. Concentrate on those aspects of the book that deal with campaign's public messages and how political coalitions respond to those messages.

Additional readings will be made available via Desire 2 Learn (D2L)

* This course is part of a special testing group for a new "Learning Management" system that will replace WebCT. Please note that WebCT will not be used during this class. The syllabus, several readings, and assignment descriptions will be located on D2L.

Course Requirements:

Read the following policies carefully. Enrollment in the class constitutes agreement and understanding of these policies. Ignorance of these policies will not be an acceptable excuse for violating them.

Honor Code: At the College of Charleston, student conduct, including but not limited to academic honesty, is held to a high standard. Scholastic dishonesty is defined as any act violating the rights of another student in academic work or involving the misrepresentation of a student's own work. Students who violate the College of Charleston's guidelines on academic honesty risk earning zero points on the relevant assignment, an F for the course, and a permanent academic record mark. See http://www.cofc.edu/StudentAffairs/general_info/honor_system/ for additional details.

Tardiness: Come to class on time. If you must arrive late, please let me know in advance. The same goes for leaving class early.

Late & Unfinished Work – I only accept hard copies of papers. Turning work in late is highly discouraged. Any material turned in late will be reduced 10 points per calendar day late. Please arrange to turn in assignments early if you plan to be absent on the day an assignment is due.

Email – I check my email regularly during normal business hours and am usually prompt in responding to messages. When given an assignment, please anticipate problems in advance and talk to me about it in class or send me an email with some time allotted for a response. As a general rule, try to allot 48 hours for a response to your emails.

Grievance Procedure - Occasionally, students are dissatisfied with some dimension of a course. In such cases, students should make grade appeals on specific assignments within *one week* of the return of the assignment. After that period has expired, the grade issued is final.

Special Needs - The College of Charleston provides reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities, including learning disabilities, which may affect their capacity to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. If you have any such needs, please talk to me as soon as possible.

Assignments:

*Final course grades are the result of an entire semester of quality work. To ensure a satisfactory course grade, students must succeed throughout the semester.

Final Paper (10-12 pages, 400 points)

Although you will have a great deal of freedom in designing your paper topic, students will be expected to pick from one of three topics about political campaigns listed below and conduct a critical analysis of relevant texts. Students will be expected to employ a concept and/or theory discussed in lectures and readings and apply it to a key campaign text to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of how argumentative strategies work in a specific historical context. Although your paper will answer larger questions about political campaigns, focus your paper on *one* text or a *small set* of texts. This paper will require some outside research in order to fully account for the historical context in which the speech was presented. However, the vast majority of the paper should represent a critical analysis of the speech. At the most basic level, this paper is about proving a thesis and constructing a *standard or set of standards* from which a critic can thoroughly evaluate the arguments in the text. Students are encouraged to look for specific types of arguments and themes evident in the text as well as explain why the presence of these devices is important. To be clear, this assignment is a critical work and not a thorough summary of a text or campaign.

Three Example Topics:

Topic 1: Don't Go Negative?

- Is it wise to go negative against an opponent? Does it matter who goes negative?
- Relevant texts: Vice Presidential convention speeches, stump speeches, campaign ads, efforts of extraneous organizations

Topic 2: Candidate Rhetoric

- What kinds of persuasive devices to candidates deploy in different contexts?
- Relevant texts: the convention speech, the stump speech, the book, the *Foreign Affairs* article

Topic 3: Candidate Media

- What is the architecture of the images campaigns disseminate?
- Relevant texts: the web site, the blog, Myspace/Facebook pages, special infomercials (Reagan '80, Perot '92, Obama '08), television ads, internet ads

Election Assessment (5 pages, 200 points)

Students will assess the communicative dynamics of one presidential election (excluding 2008). In order to account for the candidates' major communication strategies during the election, students will be expected to select one of the books listed on the *election assignment book list* that will be distributed during the first few weeks of class. Although this is not a book report, students should mine the book for the essential rhetorical features of the campaign (key phrases,

pivotal ads, gaffes, debate quips, problems with persona, etc.). Organization and clarity of argument are essential to producing a quality election assessment. You do not need to cover every aspect of each candidate's communication strategy. You also do not need to detail every single communication event during the election; use your thesis to isolate advantageous or disadvantageous election themes for one or both candidates. In general, this paper should feature two sections, one large section and one small one:

- First, discuss the candidates' strategies. Using the categories of the descriptive analysis method (discussed in class) that you find important in the election you have chosen, explain how the candidates sought to define their qualifications and frame the historical moment as ripe for their brand of leadership. Explain how the candidates used particular rhetorical phrases, slogans, or images to dismiss their opponent as unworthy or incapable of the demands of the office.
- Second, engage the counter-factual. Include a smaller section where you imagine how the contest might have been different if one of the candidates altered their strategy. How might a more potent attack on George H.W. Bush as a "creature of Washington" or a "Washington insider" have accentuated Michael Dukakis' strengths and highlighted Bush's weaknesses in 1988? Could 2008 have turned out differently if McCain had stuck to the critique of Obama as a "celebrity" rather than abandoning that ad months before the election?

Finally, please note that this paper concerns the rhetorical factors in a particular election; feel free to make passing references to one candidate's monetary advantages or how one benefitted from accidents in history. Nevertheless, concentrate the bulk of your paper on rhetoric: what the candidates said, what they did not say, and what they might have said to change the game.

Final Exam (300 points)

Test questions will take a variety of forms including multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and essay. This test will be cumulative. I will provide a thorough review sheet.

Leadership Exercise (200 points)

This is a collaborative assignment featuring **three** partners. Students will select a topic/date listed on the syllabus for which they will be responsible for distributing a brief *position paper* and *leading class discussion*. Use the readings as a springboard to generate your thoughts about the topic. The position paper, a **3-4 page** paper that uses that day's readings to make a clear argument, should be distributed **24-hours** in advance so that the class has a chance to read it. The position paper should make a claim (i.e., voters are cynical, politicians lie, there is a culture war in the U.S., etc.) rather than summarize the reading or detail a historical event. Put simply, you have total freedom to make any argument relevant to the reading, but you must make an argument and support it thoroughly and carefully. Students may need to do some *limited* historical research when writing the position paper. The class leaders should also attach **five** discussion questions to the leadership essay. Class leaders are welcomed to show brief clips, distribute handouts, etc to aid discussion. Class leaders will be responsible for 15-20 minutes of class time. This is a group grade, and each partner should contribute equally to the paper and the class presentation. These are not required, but please feel free to submit peer evaluations of yours and your partner's efforts if you feel that the workload was balanced unevenly.

* Students will be evaluated on the quality of the leadership paper as well as the facility with which they lead discussion. As many discussion leaders quickly discover, asking the audience a question is often not enough. You need to prime the audience, get them interested in your particular question, and transition effectively between questions to keep momentum going while moving on to explore new topics. A good list of discussion questions is also critical to sparking class conversation. Good discussion questions do the following:

1. Compare and juxtapose arguments in different readings
2. Play devil's advocate to help us understand how issues could be presented differently
3. Utilize course concepts in discussion questions
4. Will not be of a descriptive or factual nature (For example: Who did Nixon defeat in 1968?). These questions should provoke, extend, challenge, compare, or deny arguments in the readings.

Class Participation, Class Activities, Quizzes (100 points)

This course is designed to provide students with a clear method to understand campaigning. As such, we will discuss controversial political questions during the semester. In a general sense, the success of this process depends on the willingness of students to read before class and be ready to discuss the readings. Students who do not attend class regularly will receive lower participation grades. Students who attend class without being ready to participate will receive a lower class participation grade. The highest participation grades are reserved for those students whose attendance and comments about the readings and course materials are regular.

Participation grades will be taken very seriously and I highly encourage all students to actively participate in course discussions and activities throughout the semester. Quizzes will be given only if I become convinced that the readings are not directing class discussion.

Participation grading scale

A participation = Demonstrates thorough engagement with course readings and relevant media – Consistently asks challenging questions and makes informed judgments that draw distinctions between relevant concepts discussed in course readings, media, and lecture concepts – Asks questions that challenge core assumptions of readings, pundits, and course concepts in innovative ways – Is assertive about working comments and questions into discussion – Demonstrates that comments and discussion questions have been prepared in advance – Relates comments to other group's discussion questions

B participation = Less frequent and challenging than A level participation - Demonstrates good grasp of lecture topics, readings, and relevant media – Comments are well-informed

C participation = Average demonstration of knowledge of course concepts – Sporadic participation – Comments are not well-prepared or organized in advance – Comments are of a descriptive rather than critical nature - Is present and on-time for each class

D participation = Very infrequent participation – Primarily descriptive comments

F participation = If I have a hard time remembering your name well into the course, you risk a failing participation grade.

Paper Grading Criteria

*In addition to argumentative content, I have high expectations for the quality and clarity of written assignments. In order to clarify these expectations, I will distribute several writing handouts throughout the semester that explain basic writing principles and tactical suggestions.

Additionally, the following grade definitions should serve as a preliminary indicator of how your paper will be judged.

A paper - Paper offers a succinct and clearly stated thesis that guides the essay. Your thesis should be provocative, possibly addressing an issue from a perspective that most readers have not considered, perhaps even changing the way they look at it altogether. To construct such a thesis, investigate the full range of positions on your issue. Carefully examine the underlying assumptions, values, ethos, and use of evidence in your sources, instead of taking them at face value. As always, you should demonstrate a command of written style, voice, mechanics, and syntax. The paper is clearly outlined within the first few paragraphs with a thorough preview that assists the reader in following the paper's major arguments. Paragraphs are fully developed and follow naturally from what precedes them; the introduction brings the reader into the case and the conclusion reinforces the reader's confidence in the writer's control of the paper. The style is appropriate to the writer's audience and purpose; stylistic variety is used for emphasis; the prose is clear, apt, free of errors and occasionally memorable. Evidence and citations are used effectively and are formatted correctly. A papers skillfully integrate necessary descriptiveness with critical analysis.

**Students sometimes feel that the best papers are those that are written in the most complicated prose. More often than not, complicating a clear paper with confusing prose or syntax reduces the coherence of the paper as well as the student's grade.

B paper - Often, this is the kind of paper that revision could have made into an A paper. The paper fits within an effectively defined scope, providing a clear thesis and strong textual evidence to support the argument. The prose of a B paper is persuasive and controlled, containing few major syntactical or grammatical errors. Paragraphs are cohesive. Some transitions may be weak or mechanical. The logic of the paper is clear but not as sophisticated as that of an A paper. Interpretations of theories are plausible and supported with textual evidence; more than one source is considered. The arguments may be on the obvious or predictable side, though the writer does not consistently settle for the obvious. The reasoning is better than adequate; it is thoughtful, with some awareness of other points of view. The introduction and conclusion are clear, but perhaps not as forceful or appropriate to the case or audience as they could be. Paragraphs follow well and are appropriately divided. The expression demonstrates attention to sentence-level concerns. Not only is sentence structure correct, but subordination, emphasis, sentence length, and stylistic variation are generally used effectively. Some sentences could be improved, but it would be surprising to find serious sentence errors - comma splice, fragments, or fused sentences--in a "B" paper.

**Papers that slip into the B- range may have a simplistic thesis or develop sections of the paper that are unrelated to the thesis. Evidence may be lacking in key sections of the paper. Limited conceptual/theoretical problems may also result in a B- grade or lower. Writing and/or organization may negatively affect readability. B- papers may be overly critical without evidence, rely too much on unsubstantiated or undocumented information, or be too descriptive without developing a critical edge.

C paper - C papers take a clear stand on one debatable claim and provide sufficient evidence to support that position. Paper responds adequately to the essay topic, providing an argument that may be general or somewhat obvious. The thesis may be too broad or too general, or the writer

may not have expressed a clear exigence for the paper's intended audience. Though an effort has been made to support the case with arguments, the arguments may be obvious or predictable; the paper may even lack some pertinent information. The paper may lack sufficient or appropriate textual evidence. The paper may need work on organization, paragraph development, and transitions. The logic of the paper may be strained and/or inconsistent. C (average) papers reflect average writing. Sentence structure is generally correct, although there may be a lack of elements such as subordination, sentence variety, and stylistic devices to achieve emphasis. Comma splices, unintentional fragments, fused sentences, subject/verb disagreements, and other mechanical errors may bring an otherwise fine paper into the low C or even D range.

D paper – Paper may lack a clear thesis or coherent argument, or fail to offer supporting evidence from the text. The prose of a D paper may exhibit significant grammatical and/or stylistic problems. Lack of proofreading may turn an otherwise adequate paper into a D paper, *regardless* of the quality of reasoning present. The logic and/or structure of the paper are difficult to follow. The D paper demonstrates a limited sense of purpose. Necessary arguments or evidence may be out of order and/or missing; irrelevant arguments may instead be present. The introduction may be unclear or nonexistent, paragraphs may not be well developed or arranged, and transitions between paragraphs and/or ideas may be confusing or missing.

F paper – The paper displays a lack of understanding of basic principles that guide scholarly endeavors. Examples include but are not limited to gross mistakes in citing source materials as well as significant errors in framing the paper. The case study or supporting arguments may be seriously flawed and unable to withstand even casual scrutiny.

Grading Scale - Final course grades are assigned on the following scale

93-100 % = A	80-82 % = B-	67-69 % = D+
90-92 % = A-	77-79 % = C+	63-66 % = D
87-89 % = B+	73-76 % = C	60-62 % = D-
83-86 % = B	70-72 % = C-	59 % and below = F

Course Schedule:

***Students will need to access WebCT to find some readings listed on this schedule. Those readings will need to be *printed* and *brought* to class. The following course schedule may be changed according to the flow of discussions, assignments, or current events. Students will be given ample warning in the event of a change. Also, as I learn more about your interests, the readings may change slightly. Thus, it is always helpful to tell me about your impressions of the readings during discussion.

Section I: Campaign Strategies

This course is divided into three sections: 1) Themes, 2) Elections, and 3) Perspectives.

Section One: Themes in American Presidential Elections Since 1960

T – 8/24 – Overview

R – 8/26 – Three Theses about Political Campaigning

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 1

T – 8/31 – The Power of Narrative I

Read:

Trent and FriedenberG (D2L)

R – 9/2 – The Power of Narrative II

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 2

T – 9/7 – The Stump Speech

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 7

R – 9/9 – The Anatomy of a Political Event

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 4

Danner (D2L)

T – 9/14 – The Party Convention I

Read:

Trent and FriedenberG on Conventions (D2L)

R – 9/16 – The Party Convention II

Read:

Stuckey (D2L)

T – 9/21 – Campaigns and the News Media I

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 5

R – 9/23 – Campaigns and the News Media II

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 8

Trippi (D2L)

T – 9/28 – The Debates I

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 9

R – 9/30 – The Debates II

Read:

Carlin (D2L)

T – 10/5 – Advertising

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 6

ELECTION ASSESSMENT DUE

R – 10/7 – Overcoming Specific Obstacles

Read:

Kennedy, Houston Ministerial Association (D2L)

Clinton, American Legion (D2L)

Romney, Faith in America (D2L)

Obama, Race in America (D2L)

T – 10/12 – no class (Fall Break)

Section II: Modern Elections in Focus

R – 10/14 – The 2008 Election

Read:

Newsweek (D2L)

Axelrod (D2L)

T – 10/19 – George Bush and Karl Rove: 2004

Read:

Kerry (D2L)

R – 10/21 – The McCain Mystique in 2000

Read:

Wallace (D2L)

T – 10/26 – Bill Clinton and the Ragin' Cajun: 1992

Read:

Clinton Persona (D2L)

R – 10/28 – The Reagan Revolution: 1980

Read:

Introduction through Ch. 3 of *Reagan's Victory*

T – 11/2 – 1972: Richard Nixon's America

Read:

Black (D2L)

R – 11/4 – The Quagmire: 1968

Read:

Perlstein (D2L)

Section 3: Perspectives on Presidential Campaigns and American Political Culture

T – 11/9 – Gender and Presidential Candidates

Read:

Gendered Politics (D2L)

R – 11/11 – Gender and Presidential Candidates II

Read:

RPA (D2L)

T – 11/16 - Democrat Winners in the Modern Era

Read:

Jarvis (D2L)

R – 11/18 – Republican Winners in the Modern Era

Read:

Complete Chapters 4 through 6 of *Reagan's Victory*

T – 11/23 - Campaigns and Citizens I

Read:

Patterson (D2L)

R – 11/25 – no class (Thanksgiving)

T – 11/30 – Campaigns and Citizens II

Read:

Hollihan, Ch. 11

R – 12/2 – Review for final

FINAL PAPER DUE

Final Exam: Tuesday, Dec. 14, 12:00pm – 3:00pm, same classroom