

COMM 488/PS 488 – SEMINAR IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION
Syllabus for Spring 2007



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Office Hours: Tues & Thurs: 2:05pm-4:00pm; Mon: 10:30am-12:00pm; & by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the communication involved in the varied contexts of politics so that students may become more informed users and consumers of political messages. Students will be exposed to relevant theories and ideas and asked to apply this knowledge to current political activity. The mediated nature of modern political communication, the communication styles and strategies of campaign-related contexts, and the communication involved in governing will be examined. Supplementing this final area of concentration, we will more closely examine the communication involved in presidential leadership.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. become more informed users and consumers of political messages
2. understand relevant theories and ideas that aid in understanding the use and impact of current political activity
3. develop skills in evaluating and critiquing persuasive communication
4. analyze and understand the structural and situational factors that influence political discourse
5. gain a knowledge of and recognize the importance of political communication and how it shapes our lives

REQUIRED READINGS

- Denton, R. E., & Woodward, G. C. (1998). *Political communication in America* (3rd Ed.). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Hargrove, E. C. (1998). *The President as leader: Appealing to the better angels of our nature*. Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas.
- Additional readings will be assigned by the instructor and made available on Blackboard. See tentative schedule for assigned dates.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (5th Ed.). This should be on file in the reference section of the library. Please review and make copies of relevant sections for completing papers for this course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

ATTENDANCE

According to WKU Policy, “registration in a course obligates the student to be regular and punctual in class attendance.” In the spirit of this policy, regular attendance and punctuality is required in this course. You know in advance the dates and times scheduled for class—if you choose to have/attend another appointment/event scheduled for the time period reserved for class, you will not receive any extra opportunity to make up points made available that day. Although “attendance” will not be taken at every class period, the professor reserves the right to do so at any given time and without prior notice; attendance points gathered in this manner will constitute part of the class participation points. Given that we meet only once per week, it is important that you arrive on time and remain in class during the entire meeting time. Leaving class early or not returning from a break will be penalized with a loss of participation points.

- If a university sponsored event or religious holiday precludes your class attendance this semester, please notify me, within the **first two weeks** of class, about the date(s) you will be absent and we will make arrangements for retrieving information and turning in class assignments.
- Any student who misses more than 1/3 of the class meetings (4 classes) for any reason can not pass the class regardless of their graded assignments.

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

The general policy of this course is that no late work will be accepted. Any exceptions to this policy must be made by written petition and approved by the instructor before the date; computer or printer problems are not acceptable excuses for papers not turned at the time and date required. All papers/assignments immediately lose 10% of the possible grade when they are late (any paper not turned in at the beginning of the class in which it is due is considered late); an additional 10% will be deducted for each day they are late thereafter. It is NOT acceptable to miss class and Email me your assignment. If you choose to miss a class on the date an assignment is due, you will need to turn your assignment in **before** the due date or take a zero on any assignments due that day. If you are “sick” on the day an assignment is due, the assignment is due the day you return to class you must provide documentation of your illness in the form of a doctor’s note or you will not be allowed to turn in that assignment. Presentations must be given on the day assigned or you will receive no credit for the assignment.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

The appearance of your assignments signals the time and care with which they were prepared and, thus, how they are perceived. ***Do not underestimate the impact of careful presentation and proofreading on the reader’s evaluation of your work and on the grade you receive.*** Refer to the “Written Assignments” handout posted on Blackboard for more information.

QUIZZES

I reserve the right to administer quizzes over the reading material throughout the semester. If students do not appear to be keeping up with the reading (i.e., students are not participating in class discussion, sharing insightful comments, etc.), more quizzes will be used. Quizzes will not necessarily be announced in advance.

BLACKBOARD

In order to assist you in this class, I make use of the course Blackboard site as well as Email. If you are not familiar with Blackboard (often written as “Bb”) or do not have an active Email account registered with WKU, please utilize the appropriate campus resources to do so. If you have further questions, please contact me. I will expect you to check both Blackboard and your Email **at least once daily**. I will periodically send Emails out to the class for which you will be responsible for reading and acting upon. Please verify that the Email address registered on Blackboard is the address at which you wish to receive correspondence.

PLAGIARISM AND DOCUMENTATION

Plagiarism is the act of presenting other people's work or ideas as your own. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. Plagiarism exists in multiple forms such as using another's ideas as your own or copying someone else's work. Plagiarism is serious, serious business, and can result in both failing the course and expulsion from the university. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how to reference particular kinds of materials, please feel free to contact me. You will be asked to review and sign the *Policy on Originality of Student Work* that is posted on Blackboard. This is due the second day of class (Tuesday, January 30).

MOBILE PHONES, ETC.

Learning best occurs when our attention is focused. To best ensure that you are focused on the matters at hand in this class, you should ensure minimal distractions during our meeting time. Please turn off all mobile phones, beepers, etc. during class (a phone on “vibrate” is also a distraction). If your phone rings, you should be prepared for stares from your classmates and the instructor. The instructor also reserves the right to answer your phone if it rings during class or to direct you to answer the phone and report on your phone conversation. If you continue to allow your phone to disturb you during class throughout the semester, you will be asked to leave. Additionally, phones should not be out during class at all. There is no need to text message someone or check game scores during class, so just don't do it.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In compliance with university policy, students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services in DUC A-200 of the Student Success Center in Downing University Center (745-5004). Please **DO NOT** request accommodations directly from the professor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I look forward to working with you in this class and learning from each other. I strongly encourage you to make some time to talk with me if you have any questions, concerns, or difficulties with the course. I cannot help you if you do not ask for help! If my office hours are not convenient for your schedule, simply Email me and we will work to find a better time to meet. I want this class to be as beneficial for you as possible. If you are having difficulty with the material or assignments, or your life simply becomes complicated and you start to fall behind, please come see me as soon as possible. I will be glad to try to support you. Dealing with the issue early is always the most helpful approach.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Additional information will be posted on Blackboard for each assignment

EXAM

There will be one exam (100 points) in this course. The exam will cover readings from the textbook, assigned readings, and in-class discussions. See tentative schedule for exam date.

QUICK-WRITES

Throughout the semester, brief in-class writing assignments (quick-writes) will be given that are designed to direct your focus on the day's discussion/lecture topic. They will take no more than 5 minutes and will always be done in the first 5 minutes of the class. A total of 5 quick-writes will be assigned throughout the semester, and 4 of the 5 will count toward your final grade. These will not be announced in advance, and if you miss class that day or arrive late to class you will not be allowed to make them up under any circumstance.

GROUP PRESENTATION

Students will be placed into groups for a presentation to be made at a scheduled point in the semester. Your group will be responsible for introducing to the class the assigned topic of the day by providing a case-study of current or recently past events that illustrate the topic. These presentations should take no more than 25 minutes.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to read all assigned materials, attend all scheduled classes, and make informed contributions to the class discussion. Although "attendance" will not be taken at every class period, the instructor reserves the right to do so at any given time and without prior notice; attendance points gathered in this manner will constitute part of the class participation points.

In-class activities will constitute another portion of participation. Periodically you may have a group or individual task to be conducted in class that will not be announced in advance. You must be present to obtain the points, no exceptions. Class participation also includes participation during your classmates' group presentations.

FINAL PROJECT

This will serve as your final exam in the class, and the completed project will result in a 10-15 page paper due during the time allotted for our final exam. The project's focus must be approved by the professor, and will include completion of a **proposal** and **one update memo** (details to follow). Expectations for the content of this analysis will be high and you must apply relevant concepts and theories discussed in this course. Paper format guidelines will be provided. Email versions of your paper will NOT be accepted.

GRADING

Exam	100 points
Group Presentation	60 points
Quick writes	40 points (10 points each)
Final project	150 points (proposal: 15, update memo: 35)
Participation	100 points
Total	450 points