

COMM 429: Political Communication (10:30-11:50 TTH, KM 204)
Fall 2004
Dr. Kevin M. Minch

Instructor: Dr. Kevin M. Minch
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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday Noon-1:30 PM and 3-4 PM. Additional hours by appointment.

* Please feel free to call me at home. It does not bother me in the least. In the interest of everyone concerned, however, I would prefer that you confine such calls to the period between 9 AM and 10 PM. I do not consider myself bound by any answers or promises I make during late hours. As a general rule, you are more likely to find me at the office than at home. There is voice mail at both locations.

Course Objectives

Politics surrounds us, whether we choose to be engaged in the political life of the nation or not. Most people cannot avoid the influence of political advertising, bumper stickers, lawn signs, campus protests, and televised speeches. While studies increasingly show that Americans are detached from political reality, the subliminal effects of political discourse are ever present. For those actively interested in the decisions made by our political leaders, an understanding of the creation, maintenance, repair, and transformation of political messages is even more valuable.

This course inquires into the development and presentation of political messages for public consumption, including campaign discourse, political debates, and presidential rhetoric. Our focus will be on identifying the dominant theories and methodologies employed in the study of political communication and exploring the application of these to scholarly study and professional campaign work. Students will leave this course better able to critique political discourse, articulate explanations for the success or failure of certain political messages, and if they so choose, pursue applied work in political communication.

Evaluation of Performance

This course is designed to impart fundamental knowledge about an approach to inquiry as well as the critique of discourse. The exams and papers in this course are designed to: a) test students' understanding of fundamental concepts of the sub-discipline; and b) assess students' abilities to tie this knowledge together conceptually and articulate appropriate ways to apply it to certain rhetorical situations—either critically or professionally. Measurement of success in these two areas is achieved by two separate measures. The exams in this course are essay-based and designed to encourage the careful rearticulation and explanation of key concepts. The papers in this course are designed to serve a complementary function—to determine how well students can synthesize the material of the course and apply it to political artifacts and/or larger campaigns.

Course Materials (Tentative)

Trent, Judith S. and Robert V. Friedenberg. *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices*. 4th Edition. Westport, CT; Praeger, 2000.

Hellweg, Susan, et al.. *Televised Political Debates: Advocacy in Contemporary America*. New York: Praeger, 1992.

A course pack of critical readings in political communication theory, as well as political artifacts for analysis.

While not a required text, I strongly recommend that students invest in a style guide appropriate to their further study in this discipline. Students of rhetoric will generally find themselves writing in either the MLA or APA style. The library has limited online references to formats. Students will be expected to adhere to one or the other of these style manuals when writing.

Attendance and Work Completion Policy

I consider each of you to be adults. Consequently, I will not enforce a rigid attendance policy in this course. However, it should be clear to everyone concerned that there is always “collateral damage” when one does not attend class. **I will not accept assignments submitted by students who miss class the class period during which the assignment was due.** This has the net effect of imposing a penalty on non-attendance as there will be numerous smaller assignments throughout the semester. I will not allow students missing quizzes or tests to make up said work. I will not accept papers turned in via mailbox, e-mail, or fellow student courier if the student responsible for the work does not attend the class period during which the assignment was due. I will not supply notes or outlines to students skipping class. Since class participation is an element of the course grade, poor attendance will severely impact that grade. Some assignments are partially based on viewing video materials in class **that most likely cannot be obtained elsewhere.** The instructor will not be responsible for providing access to these missed materials or providing a substitute assignment if missed. Do not ask.

In the event that you have to miss class for a legitimate reason—University-sponsored activity, job interview, serious illness, etc.—I expect prompt notice (preferably advanced notice). Appropriate accommodations for the completion of the assignments involved will be made at the discretion of the instructor. Generally speaking, oversleeping, conflicts with other courses’ assignments, heavy semester workload, hangovers, and excuses not related to direct scheduling conflicts with co-curricular activities (not extra-curricular activities), medical excuses, or family excuses, will not be considered. Co-curricular activities are defined as University-sponsored activities associated with an academic program (such as athletics, forensics, Model UN, music and theater travel, academic conventions). Extra-curricular activities include events associated with clubs, fraternities and sororities, and other activities without direct academic ties.

All assignments in the course must be completed to receive a passing grade. In other words, you cannot “play the points.” If you have enough points to get a B going into the final and decide to skip it, your points to that point will be voided and your grade will drop back to an F.

Digital Submission of Assignments

All papers must be submitted digitally—in Microsoft Word format. Please send the paper via-email attachment before the commencement of the class period upon which it is due. Keep a spare copy on hand for your own use. A reply message will be sent upon receipt of your paper. If you do not receive a message verifying receipt of your paper by 5 PM the evening the paper has been turned in, you should immediately contact the instructor. It is your responsibility to verify whether a paper has been correctly submitted. Use of “Spell check” and “Grammar check” are highly recommended, as this will be one of the tools used to check format, spelling, etc. You should also be aware that papers will likely be scanned by Eve2, a plagiarism detection program.

Work Format Policy

Spelling and grammar **do count.** As Cicero and Quintilian explained, the study of language and grammar are an integral part to becoming a good practitioner of the art of rhetoric. I will grade your writing as carefully for spelling, style, and grammar as I do for content. Samples of effective writing are included on my Website. The site also contains suggestions about various stylistic pitfalls to avoid. Errors in style, spelling, and grammar in excess of ten will result in automatic grade reductions. Basic style factors such as headers, page numbers and margins count as well. Your first nine errors are “free.” Once you hit error #10 your grade drops one point for every error. Every subsequent error results in a one-point reduction. On shorter assignments this can quickly turn an A into an F. Once a paper has enough errors to be an F I will

stop reading it—whether I am one page in or a paragraph from the end. Proofread VERY carefully. If you are not willing to commit the time to check your work I am not the instructor you want to have class with. Repeating errors count every time the error occurs.

Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

I have no tolerance for academic dishonesty. Cheating is not just copying off of someone else’s paper or exam. Representing someone else’s ideas without attribution, copying word-for-word without using quotations marks, or excessive paraphrasing without attribution, can all be forms of plagiarism. Be sure to carefully site any information you quote—even if it is from a primary source like your class textbook. DO NOT, under any circumstances, considering using the “Buy a Paper” services on the Internet. I have them all book marked on my browser and check for duplicates on every assignment. The penalty for academic dishonesty in my class will be severe, including failure in the course and referral to upper administration for further action.

Appealing Grades

This is a course that emphasizes the practice of arguments. Complaints will not constitute an appropriate grade appeal. If you have a problem with your grade (in other words, if you feel you have been graded unfairly or incorrectly) you must wait at least twenty-four hours after the grade was returned—do not approach me when you are “hot headed.” Using the **principles discussed in this course and other rhetoric courses**, provide **written arguments** in support of your appeal. Arguments should be supported with evidence, be well reasoned, and when appropriate, should refer to appropriate precedents. Appeals will be disposed of within forty-eight hours of receipt of the written appeal.

Students With Special Needs

If you have any special needs, such as a physical disability, learning disability, hearing or speech impairment, etc., please let me know at the earliest possible convenience. I will do whatever I can to address your needs within the confines of the law.

Grading

I grade on a straight scale of 1000 points. Students with 900-1000 points at the end of the semester receive an A. Students receiving 800-899 points inclusive will receive a B, and so forth. Students with a total of 599 or fewer points will receive an F. Unless specifically announced as an extra credit opportunity for all students, there will be no opportunities to earn additional extra credit.

Assignments and their point values are distributed as follows:

Final Exam	250 Points
Class Participation	100 Points
Political Debate Focus Group	100 Points
Semester Research Project	250 Points
Quizzes (4 of them)	200 Points (50 points each)
Website Criticism	100 Points
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	1000 Points Total

Course Schedule

All Reading is to be complete before the class period under which it is listed. Course schedule subject to change during election years as developments in the campaigns warrant.

Date	Topic / Reading	Assignments
Aug. 31	Introduction to the Course	
Sept. 2	Fundamental Concepts	Trent and Friedenber, Chs. 1-2; Nimmo and Sanders
Sept. 7	The Media and Campaigns: An Introduction	Trent and Friedenber, Ch. 4
Sept. 9	The Media and Campaigns Continued (Agenda Setting, Priming and Framing)	McCombs and Shaw; Iyengar and Simon; Kenski
Sept. 14	Political Campaign Debates: The History of Political Debates	QUIZ ON MEDIA Hellweg, Pfau, and Brydon, Ch. 1
Sept. 16	NO CLASS—DEBATE TEAM IN WYOMING	NONE
Sept. 21	Political Campaign Debates: Theories of Format and Debate Effects; “The Debate Over the Debates.”	Hellweg, Pfau, and Brydon, Ch. 2-4; Carlin, Howard, et al.; Carlin, Stanfield, et al (Kevin has copy).; Carlin & McKinney
Sept. 23	Political Campaign Debates: Educational and Voting Effects of Political Debates	Hellweg, Pfau, and Brydon, Ch. 5; Gallup; Apker and Voss
Sept. 28	Rhetorical Dimension of Politics: The Power of Definition	QUIZ ON DEBATES Graber; Edelman
Sept. 30	Rhetorical Dimension of Politics: Deciding When to Speak	Trent and Friedenber, Ch. 6
Oct. 5	Rhetorical Dimension of Politics: Political Speech Genres	Trent and Friedenber, Ch. 7
Oct. 7	Rhetorical Dimension of Politics: The Art of Saying Nothing	Orwell – Easy to find using Google
Oct. 12	Websites as Political Rhetoric	QUIZ ON RHETORICAL DIMENSIONS
Oct. 14	Websites as Political Rhetoric	
Oct. 19	Speechwriting: The Ethical Dimensions and Collective Writing Process	Einhorn; Bormann; Seeger; Haiman
Oct. 21	NO CLASS—DEBATE TEAM IN COLORADO	NONE
Oct. 26	Presentations on Website Criticism	
Oct. 28	Presentations on Website Criticism	
Nov. 2	Presentations on Website Criticism / Election Day	
Nov. 4	Election Debriefing	Watch Election Coverage Before Class
Nov. 9	NCA CONVENTION—NO CLASS Political Advertising: Strategies	Trent and Friedenber, Ch. 10
Nov. 11	NCA CONVENTION—NO CLASS	
Nov. 16	Political Advertising: Types and Functions	Trent and Friedenber, Ch. 5
Nov. 18	Political Advertising: Strategies	Trent and Friedenber, Ch.10

Nov. 23	Political Advertising Critiques	Work In Class
Nov. 25	THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS	NONE
Nov. 30	Professional Consulting—Demographics/Polling	QUIZ ON POLITICAL ADVERTISING Work on Papers
Dec. 2	Professional Consulting—Media (Narrowcast and Broadcast)	Work on Papers
Dec. 7	Professional Consulting—Speech, Debate and Message	Work on Papers
Dec. 9	Safety Valve*	Work on Papers
Dec. 13 (MON)	FINAL EXAM (9:30-11:20)	THE EXAM
<p>* During an election year there will likely be several days in which the course needs to stop regularly planned activities to critique a debate, debrief on campaign developments, attend an event, etc. These three days will be used to provide the needed flexibility to do such activities.</p>		

Assignments

Political Debate Focus Group

In conjunction with televised debates for President and Vice-President (in appropriate election years), state-wide office, or Congress, you will organize, recruit participants, and facilitate an informal focus-group. Your guests will view a debate, discuss the debate with you after its conclusion, and provide written and oral feedback on their perceptions. You will prepare a written summary of your findings to be returned to me and briefly presented in class. Dates will vary depending on the schedule of debates for the election cycle (100 points).

Website Criticism

Using some of the critical perspectives and theories of political communication discussed in class, as well as information you have learned about the effectiveness of certain political website design strategies, complete a critique of a campaign or special interest group website. You will conduct a ten-minute presentation of your findings in class. If warranted by course enrollment, your presentations may be done in teams. (100 Points)

Semester Research Project

Develop a research project of significance, worthy of presentation at the Undergraduate Research Symposium, submission to an undergraduate publishing opportunity, or presentation at an academic conference. You may prepare a rhetorical criticism of an artifact of political discourse (a campaign speech, a historical piece of political public address, a website, or a broader campaign), a social-scientific study based on focus group or survey research related to political debates, a content-analysis of campaign artifacts (such as advertising, television appearances, or broadcast news), or other appropriately rigorous analysis of a political communication artifact. Another option is to build a campaign strategy document based around a hypothetical candidate (such as a Truman professor, a community leader, or other person willing to have themselves subjected to this.) This is intended to be a semester-long project, meaning that you should plan to research thoroughly, write extensively, and revise frequently. Early in the semester you will be asked to provide a paper proposal, intended outline, and proposed thesis statement. At various stages throughout the course you will be asked to submit segments of your work for review and revision as well as submit drafts to fellow classmates for feedback. The final product should be approximately 15-25 pages in length, depending on the artifact or project.