Seminar in Political Communication  
MCC-GE 2175-001

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on the essentially communicative aspects of American governing processes, surveying research that analyzes the way in which political candidates at various levels of government are chosen, how they shape their personal image, the process of constructing persuasive message appeals, and their interaction with voters. It will also focus on how elected officials set political and legislative agendas, use public relations strategies to shape public policy, and otherwise engage in the process of political deliberation. The media in which these processes take place will be an additional focus, including the influence of news outlets, political campaign advertising, and the work of political advocacy groups of various kinds. More specifically, this course has a dual structure. The first half of the course focuses on providing a common theoretical and conceptual foundation for exploring central themes in the field of political communication. The second half requires students to explore these central themes by examining specific case studies. The central objective of the course is for students to become conversant in longstanding and more recent debates in political communication, and develop baseline knowledge of the research findings, evidence and questions that animate the field.

REQUIRED READING

**All reading will be posted as PDF’s using GoogleDocs. Reading may be added over the course of the semester.


• Mancur Olson, “The Free-Rider Problem.”
• Doug McAdam, “Recruits to Civil Rights Activism.”
• Goodwin & Jasper, “Introduction.”
  • Bruce Bimber, “How Information Shapes Political Institutions.”
  • Denis McQuail, “The Influence & Effects of Mass Media.”
  • Michael Schudson, “Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press.”
  • Everett Rogers & James Dearing: “Agenda Setting Research.”


  • Eric Alterman, “Out of Print: The Death & Life of the American Newspaper.”
  • Paul Starr, “Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers (Hello to a New Era of Corruption).”
  • Robert McChesney and John Nichols, “Down the News Hole.”
  • Nikki Usher, "What's the incentive to save journalism?”
  • Yochai Benkler, “Giving the Networked Public Sphere Time to Develop.”
  • Rodney Benson, “Public Funding and Journalistic Independence: What Does Research Tell Us?”


ASSIGNMENTS/LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Weekly Critical Questions (25 Points)
Each week, you will be required to develop and turn in three “critical questions” about the set of assigned readings. The purpose of this is to help you synthesize disparate, yet related texts, arguments, evidence and conclusions and to be able to understand their significance in the context of a particular topic of research/discussion/debate. In essence, I want you to be able to read a body of texts and determine “what is the question?” Good critical questions: asks about assumptions; examine reasons and evidence; and, most importantly, suggest implications. For more information about what constitutes good questions, see the posted handout. You must also provide context for your questions, not just state the question itself. Finally, for the First SIX sets of questions, you should identify an object that illustrates/helps to contextualize one or more of your questions. This can be a video, blog post, editorial, an image, etc. Your questions, and the objects you identify to contextualize them will figure prominently into each weeks’ discussion. These questions must be typed and handed in at the end of class each week.

Case Study Individual/Group Panels (35 Points)

To explore an area more thoroughly and in depth, you, working in selected groups, will produce a panel discussion on the assigned class period. The panel includes the development and circulation of preparatory materials for the class; individual cases examined by each group member; a synthesis of cases, as well as a synthesis of cases with preparatory material and prior reading; and directing Q&A and discussion. The panel conducted should cover the entirety of the class period. More specific instructions will be provided at the time you are assigned to your groups in Week 3.

Final Annotated Bibliography and Research Essay (40 Points)

Based on a set of at least thirty, and no more than forty sources, you are required to produce an annotated bibliography, and – separately – a 1,500 – 1,800-word, thesis-driven essay. Two-thirds of the sources should be scholarly (a research article, book chapter, white paper), and one-third should be from “popular” sources, (magazine articles, blog posts, etc.).

Evaluation Rubric
A= Excellent
This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B= Good
This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C= Average
This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory
This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F= Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

A = 94-100
A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B = 84-86
B- = 80-83
C+ = 77-79
C = 74-76
C- = 70-73
D+ = 65-69
D = 60-64
F = 0-59

Grade Appeals
Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.

General Decorum
Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the Internet, doing homework in class, eating, etc. are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course.

Laptop Policy
If you have one available, you should always plan to bring your laptop to class and try to make sure it is powered up. Given the nature of the course, access to the internet and various tools for in-class work will be necessary and valuable. However, as mentioned in the previous section, laptops are supposed to be used for class work and to further class discussion. Extracurricular use will diminish your participation grade for the course.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism
“Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do…you violate the principle when you: cheat on an exam; submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home that calls for independent work; or plagiarize. Plagiarism, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions…” (see http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity)

Student Resources
• Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with disabilities (http://www.nyu.edu/csd/)
• Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. Schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.

COURSE SCHEDULE

*This schedule is subject to change throughout the semester.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Assigned Reading</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/5</td>
<td>Course Introduction:</td>
<td>NONE</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/12</td>
<td>Social Influence, Public Opinion &amp; Propaganda</td>
<td>Katz &amp; Lazarsfeld, Lasswell, Ellul, Althusser, Chomsky,</td>
<td>Key Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/19</td>
<td>The Rhetorical Presidency</td>
<td>Tullis, Jamieson &amp; Kohrs-Campbell, Friedman, Stuckey</td>
<td>Key Questions; Groups Assigned</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/26</td>
<td>Media Effects &amp; the Politics of News</td>
<td>Alterman, Bimber, McQuail, Rogers &amp; Dearing, Schudson, Gilliam &amp; Iyengar, Starr, McChesney &amp; Nichols, Benkler, Usher, Benson</td>
<td>Key Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/3</td>
<td>Race, Identity Politics, &amp; Policy</td>
<td>Omi &amp; Winant, Morning &amp; Sabagh, Gonzalez &amp; Torrez, Glasser et al., Winant,</td>
<td>Key Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>Social Movements</td>
<td>Morris, Snow &amp; Benford, Olson, McAdam, Klandermans, Gamson(A), Gamson (B) Lerner, Goodwin &amp; Jasper</td>
<td>Key Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/17</td>
<td>Digital Activism</td>
<td>Bennett &amp; Sergerberg, Howard &amp; Parks, Bimber et al., Earl, Garrett, Karpf, Tufecki et al.</td>
<td>Key Questions</td>
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<td>10/22</td>
<td>Case Study: Social Influence</td>
<td>Determined By Panelists</td>
<td>Key Questions; Panel</td>
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<td>10/31</td>
<td>Case Study: Presidential Rhetoric</td>
<td>Determined By Panelists</td>
<td>Key Questions; Panel</td>
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<td>11/7</td>
<td>Case Study: The Politics of News</td>
<td>Determined By Panelists</td>
<td>Key Questions; Panel</td>
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<td>11/14</td>
<td>Case Study: Race Politics</td>
<td>Determined By Panelists</td>
<td>Key Questions; Panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/21</td>
<td>Case Study: Social Movements</td>
<td>Determined By Panelists</td>
<td>Key Questions; Panel</td>
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<td>11/28</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/5</td>
<td>Case Study: Digital Activism</td>
<td>Determined By Panelists</td>
<td>Key Questions; Panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/12</td>
<td>Research Topics</td>
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<td>12/24</td>
<td>Final Essay Due</td>
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