Course Description & Objectives

This course is a research-oriented course that will utilize the 2008 U.S. Presidential campaign as a foundation for exploring various aspects central to the study of political communication. As such, course content will include both lecture-based, scholarly material as well research-based seminar format discussion. Students will be introduced to prominent methods used to analyze a variety of forms of political campaign discourse and conduct team research projects that aim to understand the communication processes at work during the 2008 presidential election cycle. This includes analyses of the content and persuasive development of candidate speeches, the construction of candidate's political advertisements, the content and tone of coverage by the news media and public opinion about the candidates and their reception of candidate's campaign messages. The predominant focus will be on issues of race and gender within these various campaign dynamics and deal primarily with the Democratic Party field of candidates. By the end of this course, students should accomplish the following learning objectives:

1. To be able to identify, analyze and articulate how and candidates and the news media set the issue agenda during an election cycle and what interests that agenda serves;

2. To be able to understand and articulate how the race and gender of political candidates may influence the media agenda in comparison to traditional presidential election contests;

3. To understand and identify the variety of potential effects campaign discourse may have on public opinion and political decision-making.

4. To be able to collect, analyze and synthesize research data as a basis for explaining election outcomes in terms of public opinion/voting decisions.

Required Readings [Available via Blackboard]

Deborah Alexander & Kristi Andersen. Gender as a Factor in the Attribution of Leadership Traits. Political Research Quarterly > Vol. 46, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), pp. 527-545


Kimberly A. Neuendorf. The Content Analysis Guidebook. [Selections]


Jeffrey K. Tullis. (1987). The Rhetorical Presidency. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. (Chapter 1; Chapter 2; Chapter 7)
Assignments

Research Assignments
Each student will be assigned 3 separate research tasks as part of the overall 2008 Presidential Election Research Project. See Description at end of Syllabus.

Final Group Paper/Presentation
Each student will work as part of a group to provide a thorough analysis/explanation of the results of the Democratic Party primary election as it stands at the end of March, 2008. This will include making a formal presentation of the group’s analysis, as well as the production of a paper, which will be 25 pages in length. More details to follow.

Discussion Board Postings
Each student is required to contribute at least substantive post per week about some aspect of the 2008 presidential campaign. The postings can include commentary/questions made about the campaign/candidates, poll numbers, political ads, media, etc. or a substantive response to such by another student.

Grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Assignments 3 @ 50 Points Each</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Group Paper</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Group Presentation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Board Postings</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
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*Final grades calculated on 100-point, 10% decrease per letter grade scale.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Preparation
You are expected to come to class each week fully prepared, which means having read all assigned readings, and having done so in a way that demonstrates adequate comprehension of the material, not just a mere surface reading. It also means that you should come to class having spent some time having carefully reflected on course material, lectures and discussion in a way that allows you to develop a set of questions, critiques, and discussion points related to course material.

Participation
In line with the last point, I expect your preparation to be the basis for your full participation in each course. Participation includes contributing insights, questions, explanations, etc. to class discussions, contributing outside material at times, taking detailed notes on any class lectures, etc. Since each student will take some responsibility for the conduct of the course, I expect that you will be prepared to
engage with both me and your fellow classmates who, I will assume have valuable knowledge and perspectives on the course material being covered.

*Attendance*
Attendance is mandatory. You will be docked 20 points for each unexcused absence beyond three throughout the semester. Excused absences include: death or serious illness (a physicians note will be required in the case of illness; in case of death – well, I think we can forego the documentation, you will arguably have more pressing issues to deal with); a university-sponsored sporting or other competitive event (official documentation necessary); or a personal religious holiday (notify me beforehand of such). Your three unexcused absences are my act of benevolence for those rare days you can’t get out of bed, would rather spend the day with your significant other, take an unexpected road trip or otherwise just don’t give a damn about being in class. Choose wisely. In the event of an absence, late work will be accepted for full credit only with advance notification and approval from me or with documentation for an excused absence. Work turned in late that doesn’t meet these criteria will be docked 10% for each day it is late.

*Quality of Work and Academic Integrity*
You are expected to complete quality work reflective of your intellectual abilities, your fitness for admission to this university and to this department. This includes the amount of research and work put into your readings and assignments, your attention to details such as proper grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, writing style and format. You are expected to turn in your own work. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstances.** Critical works of various texts abound in the public arena, be assured that should you, in light of your failure to devote the requisite time and attention to your assignments, choose to rely on any of them without proper citation and referential use, you will be caught, and you will fail this course no questions asked.

*Reasonable Accommodation Policy*
If you have a disability that affects your performance in this course, please notify me at the beginning of the semester and necessary special arrangements can me made to accommodate you.
Course Schedule
[*Subject to alteration throughout the semester]

January 22  Topic(s): Course Introduction; Readings Due: None; Assignments Due: None

January 28  Topic(s): Agenda-Setting Theory/Framing Theory/Content Analysis
Reading Due: McCombs, Neuendorf; Assignments Due: None

February 4  Topic(s): Content Analysis, Cont., Race/Gender-Politics-Media, Digesting Super Tuesday; Reading Due: McIlwain, Gibbons, Aday & Devitt, Larson; Assignment Due: Content Analysis of Sample Articles [CA #1 Assigned]

February 11  Topic(s): Content Analysis, cont., Race/Gender Perceptions of Minority Candidates; Reading Due: Terkildsen, Siegelman, McIlwain, Koch, Alexander & Anderson; Assignment Due: None

February 18  No Class Monday; Wednesday Topics: Race-Gender-Media, Discussion of CA Results; Reading Due: None. Assignment Due: CA Newspapers Due.

February 25  Topic(s): Presidential Rhetoric/Communication Strategy; Readings Due: Tullis, Hart; Assignments Due: None [CA #2 Assigned]

March 3  Topic(s): The Gender/Race Card in Candidate Speeches; Readings Due: None; Assignments Due: None

March 10  Topic(s): The Gender/Race Card in Candidate Speeches, cont., Readings Due: None; Assignments Due: CA #2 Due

March 17  SPRING BREAK

March 24  Topic(s): Discussion of CA #2 Results; Readings Due: None; Assignments Due: CA #2 Due

March 31  Race/Gender & Media Effects, Conducting Experiments; Readings Due: Mendelberg, Gilliam & Iyengar, McIlwain

April 7  Conducting Experiments/Survey Design; Survey Launch

April 14  Topic(s) Political Advertising, Race-Gender Appeals; Readings: McIlwain,

April 21  TBA

April 28  TBA

May 5  TBA