Political Communication
Fall, 2008
E59.1013, Tuesdays, 3:30-4:45

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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


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

Others, TBD.
Assignments

Group Response Presentations
In response to each of the major lecture/discussion modules, groups of students will coordinate a response presentation that should address the major points of the preceding lecture and provide additional analysis, refutation, expansion, etc. of the particular topic under discussion. The presentation can make use of any resources or technology available, including power point, audio/video, etc. In addition to a 30-45 minute presentation, students should be prepared to respond to questions and lead discussion following their presentations. Each student will also be responsible for completing a self-report of the work they were responsible for in the group, as well as an evaluation of each of the members of their work group.

Final Group Paper/Presentation
Each student will work as part of a group to provide a thorough analysis/explanation of the results of the 2008 election. This will include making a formal presentation of the group’s analysis, as well as the production of a paper, which should be no less than 25 pages in length and no more than 35 pages. More details to follow.

Grading: There are four assignments, two group assignments separated into both individual and group parts. Grades will be assigned based on the satisfactory completion of each of the assignments. Individuals’ whose group assignments are satisfactory and whose individual production in the group is satisfactory, will receive an A. Grades will decline by one letter grade after that.

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
The individual and collective success of this course is highly dependent on your attendance and full participation. While you will not be penalized for your absence, you will lose valuable information and insight, especially given that we meet only once per week. If you know ahead of time that you will not be able to attend class, I would appreciate a heads up, as it may have a bearing on how class time is
structured. Unless you have an unbelievable exceptional excuse for missing class on the day that a presentation or other assignment is due, you will be penalized 35% of your grade for that assignment.

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 be made to accommodate you.
Course Schedule
[*Subject to alteration throughout the semester]

September 2
Brief Course Introduction

September 9
Introduction to Political Communication, Presidential Politics & the 2008 Presidential Campaign.

September 16
Module #1 – Racial Appeals in the 2008 Campaign
Readings: McIlwain, McIlwain & Caliendo, Mendelberg, Sigelman et al., Terkildsen ('93)

Major Topics
- How are racial appeals constructed?
- How do racial appeals operate psychologically?
- How do racial appeals function differently for Black vs. white candidates/voters?
- How do racial appeals affect candidate perception & public opinion on political issues?
- How have the candidates utilized racial appeals in the election?
- Is Race a legitimate basis on which to make voting decisions?

September 23
Response Presentation/Discussion/Recap

September 30
Module #2 – The Role of Gender in Presidential Elections
Readings: Koch; Bystrom; Dolan

Major Topics
- Are female candidates perceived differently than men?
- Are there political benefits/detriments to conceptualizing “women’s” issues separately from “Men’s” issues or “universal” issues?
- Do female candidate make gender appeals?
- How do such appeals operate psychologically and how do they differ from racial appeals?
- What kinds of gender appeals have been made in this election?
- Is Gender a legitimate basis on which to make voting decisions?
- How have racial and gender politics conflicted with and/or positively worked together in the 2008 election?

October 7
Response Presentation/Discussion/Recap

October 14
2nd Presidential Debate; NO CLASS
Module #3 - Presidential Leadership & the Rhetorical Presidency: Candidate Image, Issue Agendas & Public Opinion.
Readings: Tullis, McIlwain ('07), Alexander & Anderson

Major Topics
- What is the relationship between presidential power, public opinion, and presidential rhetoric?
- How has leadership developed as both a presidential ideal and important presidential candidate trait?
- How has the turn towards the rhetorical presidency positively/negatively impacted the current presidential candidates throughout the primary and general elections?
- How have the candidates constructed their image vis-à-vis this ideal of presidential leadership?
- Do the candidates exhibit different leadership styles?

October 28

Major Topics
- How have the candidates in the 2008 election presented their issue agendas?
- To the degree that the candidates’ issue agendas differ, how has each candidate tried to strategically frame themselves and their opponent with respect to particular issues and the issue agenda as a whole?
- How have the candidates’ agendas changed over the course of the campaign?
- Besides the media, how are non-candidate interest groups trying to influence the issue agenda and frame the image of the candidate the support, as well as their opposition?
- In what way are the candidates, their campaigns, and supporting organizations utilizing polling information in the days leading up to the election?
- What veracity can and should we place in public opinion polls leading up to the election?

November 4
Election Night Watch Party! Details TBD

November 11
Response Presentation/Discussion/Recap

November 18
Module #4: Media Influence in Presidential Politics: Covering Race & Gender in the 2008 Election.
Readings: Caliendo & McIlwain ('06), Gilliam & Iyengar; Terkildsen & Damore; McCombs; Larson

Major Topics
- What is the ideal role of the media in a democracy?
- What limits should be placed on media influence in presidential and other elections?
- How has the proliferation of media outlets and the diversity of media content impacted the political process?
- To what degree has race and gender been part of the media agenda in this presidential election?
- What role has alternative media forms – internet based, viral video, social networking sites, etc. – played in this election?
- Has the media unfairly framed presidential candidates and their campaigns in terms of race, gender, age or religion?
- To what degree has the media agenda and framing of the presidential candidates coincided with candidates’ own campaign communication?

November 25  Module #5: Assessing the Results of Presidential Campaigns
Readings, etc., TBD

December 2  Response Presentation/Discussion/Recap

December 9  TBD