

**Communication 431: Political Communication**  
**Fall 2018**

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Office Hours: TR 10-11 or appointment

**Course Materials**

- There is no required textbook, though I recommend picking up an APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition style guide (you'll need it for the writing portion of the course).
- All readings will be made available through either email or Blackboard.

**Course Description and Objectives**

The foundation of a liberal education is the assumption that one ought to live their lives as critical consumers of information, capable of responsible debate and civic engagement. These questions are central to the political process, as well, as they inform the way we organize, structure, talk about, criticize, and problematize politics.

As such, this class is designed to foster critical engagement in politics. By the end of this course, you should (1) understand the discursive and material reasons political institutions operate the way they do and (2) have a vocabulary with which to more effectively consume, create, and criticize political messages. When you finish the course you should become an intelligent user and consumer of political messages, understand relevant theories of political communication, and understand the structural and situational factors that influence political discourse.

**Teaching Philosophy**

My primary goal as a teacher is to cultivate what Kenneth Burke called “equipment for living” concerning the world around us. This group of skills, including media literacy, research competency, ability to craft an argument both orally and on the page, and capacity to engage opposing arguments with civility, asks students to consider their use of language to engage the people around them. These goals are grounded in a pedagogy that assumes students cultivate skills in large part to free themselves of needing to ask others for help. As a teacher, I want to offer my students tools with which they can engage the world responsibly and ethically, an eventual engagement that will take place with me absent.

In that vein, being obtuse or unclear about specific elements of the course does nothing for either of us. I will do my best to demystify, clarify, and otherwise assist in whatever I can concerning course material, course policies, and the feedback I provide to you. Understand that I have very high standards for writing, class research, and discussion, but I am not just throwing you in assuming you are all right with that. If there is ever a moment where my standards are unclear to you, or you are unsure how to proceed with a particular topic of conversation or action in an assignment, please email me or drop by my office. Ultimately, I know that you are capable

of rising to the expectations I set in this course, in part because from day 1 onward we will be working together to hone the skills that will empower you to rise.

## **Course Policies**

### **Title IX/Clery Act Notification**

Sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other nonconsensual behavior of a sexual nature) and sex discrimination violate University policies. Students experiencing such behavior may obtain confidential support from the PEACC Program (852-2663), Counseling Center (852-6585), and Campus Health Services (852-6479). To report sexual misconduct or sex discrimination, contact the Dean of Students (852-5787) or University of Louisville Police (852-6111). Disclosure to University faculty or instructors of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, or sex discrimination occurring on campus, in a University-sponsored program, or involving a campus visitor or University student or employee (whether current or former) is not confidential under Title IX. Faculty and instructors must forward such reports, including names and circumstances, to the University's Title IX officer.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty. At all times, you should document and be prepared to prove where you have retrieved research information — especially when drawing from that information to make your own argumentative conclusions. Willfully copying another's work and presenting it as if it were your own constitutes **plagiarism**, which is an offense that the University of Louisville, the Department of Communication and I take very seriously. If you are found to be in violation of this policy, you will receive a 0 on the assignment at a minimum, and additional action may be taken. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, intentional submission of someone else's work without credit either in part or as a whole, misuse of citations to conceal a source, use of other course work in this class, and other similar behaviors. All major writing assignments will be checked for plagiarism through SafeAssign. If you have questions about the UofL's plagiarism policy, please refer to the Student Handbook or ask me.

### **Accommodations**

Students with special learning needs are encouraged to discuss accommodations needs with me early in the semester. Student may be asked to contact the Disability Resource Center to determine academic accommodations (852-6938).

### **Assignment Due Dates**

All papers and exams must be completed on the date assigned. If you do not turn in an assignment on the day it is due, a significant late penalty will apply, up to and including receiving no points for the assignment. As is mentioned later in the syllabus, failure to turn in the take home exams within the 24-hour period will result in a zero. I'm not heartless, and I acknowledge that life can happen. As such, if an extenuating circumstance entirely outside your control creates a condition whereby you are unable to turn in an assignment on time, contact me.

I hold the final decision as to what is and is not considered an extenuating circumstance. While technological malfunctions are unfortunate, they do not necessarily constitute extenuating circumstances. Contact me as soon as possible regarding unforeseen absences.

## **Technology**

*Texting:* Your phone really shouldn't be out during class, and there are two reasons why. First, on principal: this class is scheduled to take place at the same time, every Tuesday and Thursday, for sixteen weeks. Life goes on outside the classroom, but you should be able to disconnect for 75 minutes twice a week (and the people in your life should understand that, meaning they will get it if you don't respond to their Snapchat). Second, phones are incredibly distracting to me, and to your classmates.

As such, please refrain from texting during class. Please set all phones to silent before you enter the classroom. Mistakes are made, and I will try not to take them personally, but diligence on your part will minimize disruptions.

*Laptops:* Laptops are allowed in class, as the readings will be digital, and I would like you to have access to them in class discussions.

I reserve the right to alter this policy if it becomes apparent that laptops are more a hindrance to the conversation than a help. What this means is, essentially, prove to me that laptops are not (as research suggests), harmful to the quality of discussion we will conduct.

*Recording:* Students do not have permission to record lectures, in part or in full, absent a prior conversation with me. Default to the assumption that you cannot record the lectures, and ask if an accommodation of some kind (in line with disability services, or for a specific purpose) is required.

## **Assignments**

### **Discussion Questions (Total of 100 points)**

For every class day, you will need to post a thoughtful question on Twitter the morning before class. You will have to use the hashtag #Coker431 in order to receive credit; that hashtag is how I will locate your Tweet. This question can be about clarifying the reading for the day ("I don't see how they came to x conclusion...why did they say x instead of y?") or something more broad ("The article mentions this theory in relation to x technology...what about y technology? Would the theory still work?"). The purpose of these questions is twofold. First, they are a check to ensure you are reading prior to class, and will be worth points. Second, and more importantly, I will select a few excellent questions from each course and feature them in class. The featured questions will be discussed with the group.

There is, obviously, the expectation that you attend every class period; a majority of what you will get out the course will come from in class discussions, lectures, and debates. Reading the

content of the course will only get you so far, as the in class sessions are designed to clarify and expand on the information provided in the readings. That expansion and clarification is impossible if you aren't here.

It is also pretty hard to have a good conversation if very few people have read the material for the day. To that end, students are expected to have read the assigned material carefully, and come to class with an open mind. Though I will take time to lecture periodically, I prefer to allow conversations over the material to happen at a pace dictated by you all. As such, the burden is on you to generate good conversations that I can shepherd and moderate. Otherwise I am just talking at length about topics that interest me (and likely me alone), which is less than ideal.

### **Exams (2 X 100 points)**

There will be a midterm and a final. These will be take home exams in the following format. You will be presented with three questions, and you will answer two of them. The expectation is that the answer to these questions will be grounded in research, appropriately thought out, and well argued.

On exam day, we will not formally meet for class. At 2:30 PM, I will send the class an email with the test questions attached. You will then have 24 hours to complete the exam, and turn it into me via email. Failure to comply with this deadline (turned in by 2:30 PM the following day) will result in a zero on the exam.

### **Position Paper (150 total points)**

You will be writing a position paper for this class. A position paper is a document, commonly used in law, politics, and the academy, outlining an individual or organization's stance on a particular issue. The paper presents the controversial topic and clearly articulates the argument for why a stance is held.

Position papers are often used in political campaigns to rapidly summarize the merits of a particular position, or to break down the first and second lines of arguments commonly used by one's political opponents. The ability to succinctly and effectively argue a case is not just useful in the abstract; this skill is valued by political practitioners, among others, and may prove useful in your chosen career.

The topic will be any issue of social consequence that falls within the parameters of government action. This could be as small as rolling garbage carts in Columbia, and as large as becoming a member of the International Criminal Court. The topic must be meaningful, however, and the position paper must include reputable evidence.

The paper will, by design, be short; no more than three double-spaced pages of argument, with no limitation on the amount of citations.

The points will be spread over a topic selection (10), a rough draft (50), a peer revision (10), and a final draft (80).

### **Campaign Analysis**

We are, as this class commences, in the middle of a midterm election. As such, there are over 500 races worth talking about in the United States right now; 36 seats are up for State Governor, 35 Senatorial races will be held, and lets not forget the 435 House of Representative races all across the US. Some of these are more exciting than others, to be sure, and your job is to pick one and tell us all about it. This assignment will have you writing a paper that will include the analysis of campaign context and polling; the campaign messaging strategies including speeches, an advertising, debates, and media appearances; and media coverage of the campaign.

The paper will be split into multiple parts to avoid paralysis and ensure high quality. Points will be assigned to the campaign selection, research plan, initial draft, peer revision, and final draft. The project will require a substantive amount of reading, research, and analytical work on your part. It will test your ability to locate and synthesize research while adding your own intellectual contribution.

The grading breakdown will be Campaign Selection (10), Research Proposal (50), Two peer revisions (20 points each), an Initial Draft (100), and a Final Draft (150).

### **Grading Scale**

Twitter Questions	100
Midterm	100
Final	100
Position Paper	
Topic Selection	10
Initial Draft	50
Peer Revision	10
Final Draft	80
Campaign Analysis	
Campaign Selection	10
Research Plan	50
Peer Review	20
Initial Draft	100
Peer Review	20
Final Draft	150
<b>Total:</b>	<b>800</b>

\*The course will use a +/- grade scale, excluding A-. The percentage of 90.0> will be recorded as an A.

## Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

<u>Day and Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
T 8/21	Meet and greet, general course expectations
TR 8/23	Talking about politics (News Articles)
T 8/28	Denialism and Evidence (News Articles)
TR 8/30	Kaid (2004) Book Chapter 1
T 9/4	Defining Polarization: Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes (2012)
TR 9/6	Polarization and Media Use: Stroud, (2010), Garret et al (2010) *Position paper assigned
T 9/11	Polarization and the Political Other: Iyengar and Westwood (2015) *Position paper topic due to email
R 9/13	Presidential Communication: Stuckey (2010)
T 9/18	The Public Sphere: Habermas (1989), *Position paper initial draft due, Assigned peer review partner
R 9/20	Revisiting the Public Sphere: Fraser (1991) Heller (2016) *Peer review position paper, due
T 9/25	<b>OUT OF CLASS MEETINGS</b>
R 9/27	<b>OUT OF CLASS MEETINGS</b>
T 10/2	Spiral of Silence: Neumann (1974), Hampton et al (2014)
R 10/4	Agenda Setting: McCombs & Shaw (1972), Walgrave & Aelst *Position paper final draft, due *Campaign Analysis assigned
T 10/9	<b>NO CLASS—FALL BREAK</b>
R 10/11	Framing & Priming: Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) *Campaign Selection due
T 10/16	<b>MIDTERM ASSIGNED</b> (due Wednesday, 10/17, at 2:30)
R 10/18	Political Debates: McKinney & Carlin (2004)
T 10/23	Political Comedy: Baumgartner & Morris (2006), Hart & Hartelius *Research Plan due, peer revision assigned
R 10/25	Political Ads: Franz & Ridout (2010), Murray (2016), Prumak (2016)
T 10/30	Activists: Lipsik (1968), Amenta (2016) *Peer Revision Due
R 11/1	Social movements: Baily and Leonard (2015), Reynolds (2015)

T	11/6	Gender & Politics. Greenwood & Coker (2016)
R	11/8	Race & Politics: Gunn & McPhail (2015) *Campaign Analysis initial draft due, peer review assigned
T	11/13	Class & Politics. Gilens (1996)
R	11/15	<b>NO CLASS-TRAVEL</b> *Peer review due
T	11/20	Political Correctness (News articles)
R	11/22	<b>NO CLASS-THANKSGIVING</b>
T	11/27	Money: Levitt (2010) Bai (2012), Barret (2015), Green (2016)
R	11/29	Public Memorial & Politics: Blair, Dickinson, & Ott (2010)
T	12/4	<b>NO CLASS-READING DAY</b>
R	12/6	<b>CLASS MEETING TBA</b> *Campaign Analysis final draft due