

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

DEGREE: COMMUNICATION

ACADEMIC YEAR:

DEGREE COURSE YEAR: 2nd

CATEGORY: CORE

X COMPULSORY OPTIONAL

NO. OF CREDITS (ECTS): 6

LANGUAGE: English

TUTORIALS:

FORMAT: Lecture & Discussion

PREREQUISITES:

1-SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

Political communication is central to public opinion, modern democracies and informed citizenry. In turn, mass and new media are central to public opinion and political communication, both as information providers and as persuasive agents. Governments, political leaders, institutions, and social groups engage in informational and persuasive efforts via the media. This course first discusses the role of public opinion and political communication in democracy and the role of mass and new media in affecting opinions and behaviors of audiences. This provides a broad foundation based on which subsequent issues will be viewed. The course is later structured around several political and non-political factors that affect political communication in contemporary democratic societies. The course will focus on the social, psychological, and communicative processes involved in persuasion, analyzing how political messages function to persuade, and how communication campaigns are designed to achieve persuasive goals. It will also examine how public opinion and the political process are affected by fictional television shows, public opinion polls, public perception of public opinion, social movements, everyday political talk among the citizens, as well as other factors. The course will also scrutinize the role of new media technologies in public opinion and political communication as a field and practice. The course is designed to provide students with understanding of the ways in which political communication and public opinion are affected by mass and new media in contemporary democratic societies as well as with the conceptual tools needed to critically evaluate contemporary political campaigns and attempts to influence public opinion.

2-OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

- Get to know key issues, concepts and theories in political communication as research and practice
- Become familiar with strategies used in political campaigns designed and advanced by governmental actors (political parties, candidates) as well as non-governmental entities (social movements, citizen groups)
- Develop an understanding of key issues in political communication and public opinion
- See interconnections between various aspects of the old and new media environment and active citizenry
- Learn to apply these issues to contemporary cases in democratic societies
- Develop competence and ability to use social scientific principles to critically evaluate political campaigns, their effectiveness and their impact on society and public opinion.
- Use scholarly, theoretical, and empirical evidence to craft oral and written arguments about the interactions between communication and society.
- Develop ability to be an informed and critical citizen who actively engages with media content, sociopolitical system and pressing civic issues that affect various societies
- Pursue an ongoing conversation on such questions as: What is the relationship between mass and new media and politics and public opinion? Have mass and new media been causing substantial changes in political behavior and public opinion? If so, what implications might this have for democracy?

3-CONTENT

Session I & II. INTRODUCTION

Session III and IV. POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC OPINION

Topics: The role of public opinion and political communication in a democracy

Session V and VI. PERSUASION & INFORMATION PROCESSING

Topics: Models of Attitude Change, ELM, peripheral and central processing

Session VII and VIII. . ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Topic: Political effects of comedy shows and fictional media programs

Session IX and X. PUBLIC AND SURVEYS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Topic 1: Perceptions of public opinion influencing public opinion

Topic 2: opinions, attitudes, surveys

SESSION XI & XII. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Topic: Guest Speaker. Social movements and media coverage.

Session XIII and XIV. YOU ARE THE POLLSTER & REVIEW FOR THE MIDTERM

Topic 1: Presenting and discussing the survey results. What have we learned?

Topic 2: Review for the midterm

Topic 3: Final Team Project: preparational materials handed out, examples of good / bad papers handed out for a discussion; sharing ideas, hypotheses / research questions

Session XV and XVI. MIDTERM & FEEDBACK ON THE FINAL PROJECT

Session XVII and XVIII. DELIBERATION & PUBLIC DISCUSSION IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Topics: Deliberation, group discussion

Session XIX and XX. CAMPAIGNS & CONSULTANTS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Topic: Field trip - political consulting; Campaign strategy, getting your message across.

Session XXI and XXII. ADMINISTRATION & ITS PRESS OFFICE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Topic 1: Guest speaker, press office, communicating messages to the media and the public.

Topic 2: Final paper prospectus due. Peer-to-peer feedback on the prospectus

Session XXIII and XXIV. NEW MEDIA AND CAMPAIGNS

Session XXV and XXVI. NEW MEDIA AND CAMPAIGNS 2

Topic 1: Guest Speaker. Political campaigns and new media part 2

Topic 2: Team Project 4 -- Debate: Based on the readings and group preparation: One half of the class argues that the internet has profoundly changed the political process. The other half argues that existing political actors, processes and structures have not been affected by the internet. Evaluation is based on whether the arguments are theory –and research-grounded and whether the examples are relevant.

Session XXVII and XXVIII. CASE & GROUP PRESENTATIONS I

Topic: Team analysis – case study

Session XXIX and XXX. WRAP UP, GROUP PRESENTATIONS II

METHODOLOGY AND ECTS WEIGHTING

This course is designed an interactive lecture, with many elements of a seminar. A typical session might begin with an introduction of the covered topics and an overview of the assigned readings done by the professor. From there, a talk will follow with remaining time devoted to class discussion or – during this time – students will engage in team projects that entail analyzing a case study.

You learn through these introductory lectures, discussion and group work. Lectures present the concepts, which are then crystallized during discussions, and are made relevant by working on case studies and real-world events. You learn through (1) individual reading of the articles; (2) in-class discussion and group work and (3) team preparation of a final paper.

6 credits ECTS (6 x 25 h/credit = 150 h. student's work)

Activities	Classroom Hours	Sessions	Individual Preparation Hours	Total Hours	ECTS
Lectures	9	6		9	0.36
Seminars and Debates	18	12	28	46	1.84
Study, Readings, Viewings	6	4	35	41	1.64
Practical Assignments	6	4	35	41	1.64
Other Activities	3	2		3	0.12
Tutorials	1.5	1	1.5	3	0.12
Exams	1.5	1	5.5	7	0.28
Total	45	30	105	150	6

5-EVALUATION SYSTEM

5.1. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Evaluation is based on attendance to and participation, team projects, a midterm exam and a final team research paper.

- This is the most fun for everyone if everybody completes the readings for each session and devotes some time to thinking through the arguments (especially whether certain points are consistent with whatever personal experiences you may have with various communication technologies and politics). Thus you should complete listed readings, attend all sessions and be prepared to participate in discussions of key topics and research findings.
- In small groups, you analyze and evaluate events or case studies related to the concepts

5.2. EVALUATION AND WEIGHTING CRITERIA

The final evaluation is determined on the basis of:

- **Attendance and Informed Participation (15%):** You are expected to come to class and make active and informed contributions to class discussion. The quality of your contributions to class will be evidenced by keeping up with the readings, sharing examples, asking appropriate questions, and providing feedback to other students throughout the course.

Your contribution to the seminar will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- Introduce substantive points – a substantive point is one that is clearly a result of thoughtful reading and thinking about a text and a discussion and becomes a focus for group exploration lasting several minutes

- Identify essential issues or questions from the text / class
 - Point to the authors main hypotheses, claims and supporting arguments and evidence
 - Point to important passages that need to be understood
 - Explain the complexities faced in exploring the text or understanding the class, concepts, lecture
- Deepen the discussion – help the seminar process with contributions that lead the group to discover new insights and understanding of assigned readings
 - Provide additional supportive quotes, explain relevance, ask clarifying questions
 - Share the thought process that was personally used when developing an idea
 - Paraphrase what the author meant in a specific passage or what a theory or discussed issue may be relevant to
 - Summarize the arguments being presented
 - Identify similarities and differences in positions being argued, in the text, during class discussion, between one discussed theory/issue and others, etc
 - Challenge an idea or present an alternative interpretation of a reading, data, findings, theory premises
 - Connect ideas from several participants and other readings, lectures, concepts
 - Formulate insightful questions that spark group response
 - Facilitate group exploration
 - Help to identify the goals and format the group process, keep the group on task, focus group back to the reading, lecture, theory/concepts discussed
 - Summarize for the group what has been discussed
 - Bring closure to one point and make a transition to a new one
 - Paraphrase someone's comments, identify what you don't understand and / or formulate specific questions
 - Encourage non-participants by being alert to who wants to speak or who hasn't spoken and help them get the floor
- **Team Debates and Case Studies (20%):** You will be assigned to small teams and will participate in 5 projects during the semester. Each team will take on the topic and, as a team, will develop and present an evidence-based argument in defense of this position. A one-page summary handout of each team's arguments and key points of evidence will be due in class the day of the scheduled debate. Specific details about the format and requirements will be provided. There are 5 projects; each is worth 4% of the grade. Your participation will be evaluated based on the review of the relevant concepts, theory and evidence, the demonstrated understanding of these concepts, extending and applying them to contemporary issues and events and producing questions that generate in-class debate. Because you will be working in teams, each student will also evaluate every other member of the group in terms of effort, collegiality, and product.

- **Public Opinion Polling / Survey Design analysis exercise (20%):** in teams you will design a public opinion survey, and will later conduct it among a selected sample (either online or face-to-face in Segovia). You will also in class present your results and experiences. Preparational materials will be handed out, we will also discuss the process in class. Evaluation will be based on how suitable is the survey method to your research questions / hypotheses, how well you have integrated the class and preparational materials and the feedback, whether the survey questions were methodologically and conceptually sound, how diverse was your sample as well as the thoroughness and appropriateness of your presentation.
- **Midterm Exam (20%):** A closed-book, in-class exam will cover the readings, lectures, and discussions. It will assess whether you have done the work and understood the course ideas. The exam will include multiple choice, true/false, short-answer, and essay questions.
- **Research Paper (25%):** You are required to write a paper on a topic of particular interest to you. The paper may take one of two forms: (1) a simulation of the first steps in the development of your own political campaign that shows how the covered concepts can be applied; or (2) a report that analyzes how a political entity (party, an NGO, a candidate) have used the covered concepts towards influencing opinions or behaviors. The instructor is available to meet mid-semester to discuss the contours of the paper and to consult about its progress.

A successful final paper consists of the following components:

a. Problem definition and analysis. What problem does a campaign target? Who does the problem affect? What are the specific goals of the campaign?

b. Audience analysis. Who is the target audience? What are their characteristics? What kinds of media do they consume? What prior attitudes and values do they have? What problems would there be or are there in reaching this audience - cognitively, socially, and physically? The first two components are worth 50% of the final paper grade.

c. The Theory-Message-Outcome portion. Assess or design media campaign, strategy and/or messages, analyze whether and how the campaign and messages address a campaign problem (attack by a counter-candidate, election, and so forth), whether and how they fit the target audience, whether they are likely to be or were effective.

It is a good idea to start thinking about potential paper topics early in the semester and come see me to discuss your ideas. A description of specifications for the paper will be distributed and discussed in class later in the semester.

MAKE-UP EXAM. In the case a student receives a failing grade in the class, the student will be able to make-up for the failing grade during “convocatoria extraordinaria” in July. The make-up exam will consist of two parts: (1) an oral examination on the material covered throughout the semester and (2) the final research paper as required of everyone in the class.

Each student can take 4 exams per subject in 2 consecutive courses. Grading for the students on make-up exams will be subject to the following rules: Those students who failed the subject in the first round of exams, pass to the 2nd session, except those who do not comply with the percentage of attendance to class, 70%, and go directly to the 3rd session. The maximum grade that a student may obtain in the 2nd exam session is 8.