ADV 6315: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION  
FALL 2016, CLASS #33465  
PROFESSOR ERIK BUCY

Media & Communication 269B (MC 269B)  
Thursdays 6:00–8:50pm  
Credits: 3

Professor  
Erik Bucy, Ph.D.  
Office: MC 205  
Office Hours: Tues & Thurs, 10:30 a.m. – noon; and, by appointment  
Office Phone: (806) 834-3346  
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I. Course Description

Political Communication (ADV 6315) offers a graduate level introduction to the expanding role of media in politics, focusing on the related processes of message framing, communication strategy, and political learning and persuasion. Evolving conceptions of citizenship are also reviewed. The first section of the seminar reviews models of political persuasion in relation to campaign advertising and message strategies. The prevalence of negativity in political news, advertising, and discourse is weighed as well. Definitions of news and the broader role of the media in democratic processes is also examined, with a contrast made between political science and communication approaches to research questions at the media/politics interface. The next section takes a broad view of civic participation and the campaign process, focusing on the historical development of political participation and competing conceptions about the nature of participation. Of particular interest here is the rise of new media platforms and “soft news” formats that facilitate increased citizen interest and involvement (sometimes inadvertently) in public affairs. The final section considers political information and the visual framing of candidates and issues. Although the primary focus is on the contemporary political scene, the seminar also examines historical transformations to the press and how changes in the political process have provided an increased role for the media, especially in recent decades.

II. Expected Outcomes

- Develop a conceptual understanding of the effects of media coverage on political audiences as well as political processes;
- Learn to critically analyze media practices considered problematic and explore potential remedies;
- Examine new developments at the media/politics interface, particularly campaigning and civic participation through online and social media;
- Develop an understanding of modern campaign practices, especially political advertising, campaign communication, and voter targeting strategies—and their effects on audiences;
• Trace the relationship between media institutions and political institutions, placing them in historical context; and,
• Read, critique, and apply major political communication concepts to research questions at the intersection of media and politics.

III. Methods of Assessment

Expected learning outcomes will be assessed through class discussion/participation, written assignments, a take-home midterm exam, an original focus group analysis and analytical paper, a peer review assignment, in-class presentation, and final strategic insights essay.

IV. Required Readings


Additional readings, including book chapters and journal articles, will be available through a Course Dropbox folder, which can be joined from a link sent to the class list by e-mail. For a list of specific readings by week, see section VII titled “Course Schedule” below.

V. Course Assignments and Grading (details on all assignments will be distributed)

Political Ad Analysis (10%)
The Political Ad Analysis requires each student to locate a political advertisement and write a structured 4-5 pg. structured essay due on Sept. 29 analyzing the elements of videostyle, emotional appeals, visual framing, and strategic messaging employed in the ad—concepts all to be discussed in class.

Seminar Facilitation (5%)
During the semester (from Sept. 15–Nov. 17) each student will be required to lead the class in a Facilitation, engaging the seminar in a 15-20 minute overview and discussion of a reading for a particular day. Facilitations must be completed by Nov. 17, so be sure to look ahead and select a reading that interests you.

Take-home Midterm (15%)
There will be a take-home midterm exam halfway through the course, due on Oct. 20, that will cover material from the readings, lectures, and discussions. Several questions will be posed, of which just one needs to be answered in a 6-pg., double-spaced response.

Focus Group Project (40%)
For the Focus Group Project each student will convene a group of 5 to 8 friends/family members to view and discuss a group of short, televised clips of “memorable moments” in televised politics, from 2016 and previous election years (digital video files to be provided). A 15-pg. paper based on a transcript of the recorded discussion is required, with the typed transcript attached. The paper and transcript are graded individually (10% for the transcript, 10% for the draft paper, 10% for the final paper, etc.)—but the paper is based on the transcript.

The project is broken down into different parts, each due between Nov. 3–Dec. 1, consisting of a typewritten transcript and completed questionnaires, followed by a draft paper, peer review of someone else’s paper, and development of your final focus group paper. A PowerPoint presentation based on your focus group findings is also required. Both are due on Dec. 1, so plan ahead! Each element of the proposal will be graded separately, as indicated in the summary below.
Election Reform Memo (10%)  
In lieu of a final exam, students will write a 3-5 pg. single spaced memo making a case for key reforms you feel would improve the presidential selection process. Reforms may pertain to the political system, the media system, or even citizen participation. There are no laws dictating that U.S. presidential elections must last 18-24 months, only traditions and political party rules that shape the election process that we have. Clearly, there is room for improvement—and many have been suggested over the years. Based on this year’s election, what key reforms would you recommend? Use citations where necessary and literature to justify your positions but follow a memo format and build a case for a few key, high-impact reforms that in your opinion would change the process of presidential selection for the better. Due Dec. 8 by midnight.

Seminar Participation (10%)  
Unlike undergraduate classes, graduate seminars require the active involvement of each seminar participant. Active participation entails asking questions, responding to questions posed by the instructor, integrating readings and commenting on what you’ve learned, presenting when assigned, and contributing meaningfully to seminar discussions throughout the semester. Active participation also entails regular attendance. In a seminar that meets just once a week, 3 or more absences over the semester will result in a lowering of your grade by one letter grade.

In summary, course assignments, grading percentages, and due dates are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Grade %</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Ad Analysis</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>September 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Facilitation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>September 15–November 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-Home Midterm</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>October 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus Group Project</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Questionnaires + Transcript</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>November 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Draft Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>November 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer Review</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>November 21</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consulting Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>December 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Final Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>December 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Reform Memo</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>December 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>All semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>100%</td>
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A Note About Grading 
Each of the above assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale. The grading scale is as follows: A 94-100; A- 93-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-84; B- 83-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-74; C- 73-70; D+ 69-67; D 66-64; D- 63-60; F 59 & lower. Any grade in the A range represents outstanding or exceptional work; work in the B range represents competent, but not quite brilliant, effort in the course. A grade of B- or lower in this (or any) graduate-level course suggests that the student’s work is lacking in some important way. Although a C traditionally means satisfactory at the undergraduate level, the standards in graduate school are such that a C represents seriously flawed work, and thus a failing grade. In this seminar that would mean doing the assignments but misunderstanding basic concepts or presenting them in an unacceptable form and not participating in seminar discussions. Any grade lower than C implies outright negligence of the course.
VI. Additional Course Policies and Rules

1. Americans with Disabilities Act
   Any student who has a disability that may affect his/her academic performance should contact the instructor as soon as possible so that necessary accommodations can be made. Students should present appropriate verification from Disabled Student Services in the Dean of Students Office (806) 742-2405.

2. Attendance
   Class attendance and active participation are expected in graduate school, and are a vital element of your individual success as a student. As mentioned above under Seminar Participation, 3 or more absences in this weekly course will result in a lowering of your grade by one letter grade. Absences will also lower your participation grade, and thus your overall grade. The instructor is not responsible for material missed due to an absence (PowerPoint notes, etc.). If you are having problems, let me know as soon as possible. If things go off-track early, chances are that I won’t be able to help you in the final weeks of the semester. And I don’t give automatic incompletes. If you have reasons for not meeting due dates, please contact me in advance.

3. Academic Integrity
   Cheating on exams or plagiarism or any form of violation of the University honor code is a serious offense and will receive a failing grade for that assignment. The work you turn in must be entirely your own. Do not submit the same paper to more than one class. All students are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars and professionals. If any questions ever arise as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, please visit me to discuss the situation or consult our College statement on graduate student conduct (http://www.depts.ttu.edu/comc/graduate/policieshandbook/studentconduct/), the Texas Tech Student Handbook (see http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentaffairs/), or the Academic Integrity section (OP 34.12) of the Texas Tech Operating Policies and Procedures website (http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/contents.php#34).

4. Civility Policy
   The University supports an environment of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. It does not tolerate statements, behavior, or tokens that deride or disparage an individual or group because of race, ethnicity, creed or personal lifestyle. In line with maintaining a professional learning environment, please be respectful of and attentive to fellow seminar participants. The quality of the class relies on engaged discussion and debate. Consequently, please turn off mobile devices while in class and use laptops or tablets for academic purposes only.

5. Late Assignments
   Late assignments will be accepted only under extreme circumstances on a case-by-case basis, and will be subject to a point deduction. No late work will be accepted a week past the due date.

6. Incompletes
   The only way to qualify for consideration of an incomplete is for extreme cause, to be determined on a case-by-case basis.
7. **Originality of Seminar Work**

Students should not submit work, even modified work, completed during a previous semester, whether at this institution or another university or college. Instances of “double dipping” will receive a zero. All seminar work is expected to be original, unique to this course, and the sole product of the individual seminar participant.

**VII. Course Schedule**

*Note:* This course schedule is not fixed in stone. The instructor reserves the right to adjust the readings, due dates, and topics as necessary as the course progresses.

### Week 1

**September 1**  
**Introduction & Overview: The Political Media Landscape**

*Readings*  
*Media Politics*, Ch. 1

### Week 2

**September 8**  
**News, Advertising, and Politics: The Uneasy Relationship**

*Readings*  
*Media Politics*, Chs. 3, 6 (pp. 160-194)  
*Media Power in Politics*, Ch. 35

*Assignment*  
Political Ad Analysis Guidelines Distributed (due Sept. 29)  
Seminar Facilitation Guidelines Distributed (Sept. 15-Nov. 17)

### Week 3

**September 15**  
**Air Wars and Candidate Videostyle**

*Readings*  

*Assignment*  
Seminar Facilitations Begin

### Week 4

**September 22**  
**Negativity in Political Messaging**

*Readings*  
Ansolabehere & Iyengar (1995), “Going Negative”  
*Media Power in Politics*, Ch. 18

### Week 5

**September 29**  
**The Nature of News: Hard and Soft**

*Readings*  
*Media Power in Politics*, Chs. 2, 3, 5, 9

*Assignment*  
Ad Analysis Papers Due
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Week 6 | Media Biases and the Struggle for Control | *Readings* Media Politics, Ch. 6 (pp. 149-160), 10  
*Media Power in Politics*, Chs. 8, 19  
West (2001), “The Objective, Interpretive, & Fragmented Media”  
Bennett (2012), “Four Information Biases that Matter”  
Scheuer (1999), “The Politics of Electronic Information” | Focus Group Project Guidelines Distributed |
*Media Power in Politics*, Chs. 4, 33 | Take-home Midterm Guidelines Distributed |
| Week 8 | New Media, New Forms of Campaigning | *Readings* Media Politics, Ch. 5  
*Media Power in Politics*, Ch. 16  
Bucy & Gregson (2001), “Media Participation”  
Lunt & Livingstone (1993), “Rethinking the Focus Group” | Focus Group Transcripts + Questionnaires Due |
Week 11

**November 10**  Visual Framing and Image-Bite News: Who Gains, Who Loses?

*Readings*

Week 12

**November 17**  Media Effects on Public Opinion

*Readings*
- Media Politics, Ch. 8
- Media Power in Politics, Chs. 7, 10

*Assignment*
- Draft Focus Group Papers Due; Peer Review Guidelines Distributed

Week 13

**November 24**  Thanksgiving (no class)

Week 14

**December 1**  Evaluating Media Politics

*Readings*
- Media Politics, Ch. 11
- Bennett (2012), “The End of a Journalism Era”

*Assignment*
- Final Focus Group Papers Due; Campaign Consulting Presentations

Week 15

**December 8**  Election Reform Memos due (by midnight)


**VIII. References & Additional Readings**


