

University of Western Ontario: Department of Political Science

POLITICAL SCIENCE 4209G/9767B

Political Strategy and Communication

Winter 2025

See course website for class time/location

Course Director

Dr. Adam Harmes

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Office Hours: Mondays 10:30-11:15 am or by appointment

Course Description

This course provides an advanced introduction to some of the practical skills involved in political campaigns including lobbying/advocacy campaigns by businesses and NGOs and election campaigns. It focuses on developing specific skills related to strategy, tactics, and communications using case studies and practically oriented assignments.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to: identify and apply key concepts related to political marketing; acquire and apply knowledge of political marketing research methods; and acquire and apply knowledge in various practically oriented media and communications skills.

Course Structure

The course consists of 12 sessions of approximately 2 hours each. Weekly classes are structured as two-hour interactive lectures as well as some class and group discussions and practical exercises.

PPT Notes

To assist with note taking, PPT notes sheets will be posted by afternoon on the day before the class in the PPT Notes Sheets folder.

Required Readings

All course readings are posted on the course BrightSpace OWL site on the Home page in the 'Readings' folder and then under the specific weekly topic.

Graduate students will also complete a book analysis assignment on one of the following five books which should be obtained through Western libraries, Amazon, Indigo, etc. as soon as possible:

Alex Marland. 2016. *Brand Command: Canadian Politics and Democracy in the Age of Message Control*. UBC Press.

Susan Delacourt. 2016. *Shopping for Votes: How politicians choose us and we choose them*. D&M Publishers, 2016.

Matt Price. 2017. *Engagement Organizing: The Old Art and New Science of Winning Campaigns*. UBC Press

Marland, Alex, and Thierry Giasson, eds. *Inside the Campaign: Managing Elections in Canada*. UBC Press, 2020.

Darren Tromblay. 2018. *Political Influence Operations: How Foreign Actors Seek to Shape U.S. Policy Making*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Evaluation

Undergraduate Students

Weekly Homework	20%	Due each Sunday night before class
Strategy Handbook	30%	Due Friday 14 February
Campaign Plan Essay	40%	Due Friday 14 March
Attendance/Participation	10%	

Graduate Students

Weekly Homework	10%	Due each Sunday night before class
Strategy Handbook	30%	Due Friday 14 February
Book Analysis	10%	Due Friday 28 February
Campaign Plan Essay	40%	Due Friday 14 March
Attendance/Participation	10%	

Weekly Homework

For every class, students must complete the weekly homework assignment based on the readings. Most weeks they will be 1 page, typed, single-spaced in length in sentence format with your name typed at the top. Each week's homework is listed in the weekly course schedule below. The main purpose of the homework is to demonstrate that you have read and engaged with or applied key points from the weekly readings.

Weekly homework is due on the course website by 11:59 p.m. on the day before the class. After that, each late submission will drop the overall grade by 2/100. All homework must be submitted as a PDF file. The weekly homework must be saved and then submitted as a single document, including the final week's homework, to turnitin.com through the course website by 11:59 p.m. on the day before the last class. Students will receive comments on their first weekly homework only to ensure they understand what is expected. Homework will be graded as a whole at the end of the term based on:

- the amount of detail included from the readings
- relevant quotations (not just short phrases) and page citations from the readings using the in-text, bracketed format with the author surname and page number: e.g. (Smith, 345) - no bibliography or endnotes are required

- showing good understanding of and/or application of the concepts
- some of your own analysis such as comparisons to other readings, concepts, types of campaigns as relevant
- don't overthink the homework: just answer the homework questions and show that you've done and engaged with the readings

Strategy Handbook

Each student will create one Strategy Handbook with 12 typed double-spaced pages of text plus a title page and endnotes as per the Citation Guide. The purpose of the handbook is for you to create a mini-textbook or instructional guide based on the material covered in the lectures and readings up to and including the week on Social Media Advocacy, Influence Operations, and International Lobbying.

Given the limited space, you must decide what is most important to include and how you want to organize the structure of the handbook. You need to cover the key strategy and communication techniques and how they apply across the different campaigns. You need to use details, extra concepts, examples, and quotations from the readings to flesh out the concepts from the lectures. No extra research is required but I expect the Handbook to be well organized to cover and synthesize as much detail as possible. The aim of the exercise is for you to demonstrate that you understand the concepts and how they apply across different types of campaigns and have engaged with the lectures and readings sufficiently to decide what is most important. Handbooks will be graded based on:

- the overall amount of detail from the lectures and particularly the readings
- the overall organization and your choices about what to include or not
- understanding of the concepts and how they apply across different types of campaigns
- use of relevant quotations (not just short phrases) and page citations from the readings using the in-text, bracketed format with the author surname and page number: e.g. (Smith, 345)
- citing lectures by a short version of their title
- professional presentation, writing, and proofreading

Late Handbooks will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day including weekends/holidays to a maximum of 10%. Extensions will only be given for documented illnesses, emergencies, etc. and will not be given for workload.

Book Analysis (Grad Students Only)

Each graduate student will complete a 6 typed double-spaced page analytical book review of one of the assigned books. The review should focus on summarizing key points from the book including using specific (and properly cited) quotations from the book. Here, you need to cover a good breadth of the book to show you have read it. The review should also discuss the relationship between the book and points discussed in class as well as make specific (and properly cited) references to the course readings where applicable. The review should also comment on how points in the book could be applied to other types of campaigns and the broader ethical and political implications of some of the techniques or points mentioned.

Late reviews will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day including weekends/holidays to a maximum of 10%. Extensions will only be given for documented illnesses, emergencies, etc. and will not be given for workload.

Campaign Plan Essay

Campaign Plan Essays must be 14-15 typed double-spaced pages of text plus a title page, endnotes, and bibliography as per the Citation Guide. Students have the option to write the Campaign Plan with a partner (undergrad with undergrad, grad with grad) at double the length with both partners receiving one overall grade. The purpose of the assignment is to demonstrate your understanding of the techniques covered in this course and your ability to apply them in a creative way to a specific campaign. Essays must be submitted on the course website (through turnitin) by 11:59 pm on the due date. Late essays will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day - including weekends, holidays, and reading week - to a maximum of 10%. Unless otherwise arranged, late essays not handed in by 11:59 pm on the day of the last class will receive a grade of zero.

Attendance/Participation

Each student can miss one class without supporting documentation. After that, supporting documentation must be provided to the course instructor or you will receive a penalty on your attendance grade. For any classes missed, you must still submit the required homework when you submit all your homework at the end of the course. Perfect attendance will result in a grade of 80 percent or the average of your other grades (whatever is highest). Students with above average participation will also receive a bonus mark.

Extension Policies

- ***The Campaign Plan is designated as ‘not eligible’ for a Request for Accommodation Without Supporting Documentation.***
- For undergrads, all requests for medical or compassionate extensions must go through the academic advising central portal only and must be no later than 48 hours following the due date. You can contact the course instructor about missed classes. The course instructor will NOT grant any extensions.
- For grad students, all requests for medical or compassionate extensions must be emailed to the course instructor and must be no later than 48 hours following the due date. Supporting documentation will be required. No extensions will be given for workload as this applies to all students.
- Students who have the ‘flexibility with assignment deadlines’ accommodation from Accessible Education do NOT need to email me. You must contact academic advising to have an extension approved and it will be for a maximum of 3 days. Longer extensions will not be granted.

WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE

Jan. 6 Introduction and the Components of an Election Campaign

The first part of the class will be used to introduce the general subject matter of the course and to outline the course structure, readings, and requirements. The remainder will be a lecture on the different components of the ‘air war’ and ‘ground war’ in election campaigns. The PPT Notes sheet is posted on the course website in the PPT Notes folder. There is one reading for this week but you do NOT need to submit any weekly homework.

Jan. 13 Election Campaign Strategy

This class examines key concepts related to election campaign strategy including: strategy vs tactics, campaign goals, the segmentation and targeting of voters, minimum winning coalitions, and how segmentation influences resource allocation related to the different components of the air and ground wars.

Homework

- Submit a one page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis on what the different readings say about how parties target specific groups of voters and how this helps them target their resources in terms of the different components of the air and ground wars. Be sure to include relevant quotes and page citations from the readings.

Jan. 20 Canadian Elections and Leadership Races

This class examines recent Canadian elections and party leadership races as well as the concept of positioning.

Homework

- Submit a one page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis on what you think are the most important lessons that emerge from the three leadership races covered in the readings. Be sure to include relevant quotes and page citations from the readings.

Jan. 27 Message Development

This class examines key techniques related to message development including: target audience research; customizing policies, leaders, and messages; creating and building narratives; and the use of framing/branding language to brand opponents and issues.

Homework

- Submit a one page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis on what the different readings say about how and why parties use poll and focus group research to customize policies and messages to target audiences. Also, what role has framing language played in the abortion debate and can you think of any recent examples of how politicians use framing language to describe issues, their opponents, etc.?

Feb. 3 Lobbying and Advocacy Campaigns

This class examines key concepts related to strategy, the air war, and the ground war in the context of a major lobbying campaign by the oil and pipeline industries.

Homework

Drawing on the readings, submit a 1 page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis that identifies examples of air war and ground war techniques in the oil sands and/or pipelines cases.

Feb. 10 Social Media Advocacy, Influence Operations, and International Lobbying

This week examines the techniques employed by social media advocacy groups and foreign intelligence influence operators as well as the international lobbying efforts of governments.

Homework

- Drawing on the readings, submit a 1 page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis that answers the following questions:
 - Which techniques used by social media advocacy groups such as Canada Proud, as well as Canadian and US political parties, do you think are most effective and why?
 - How have Russian influence operators used similar techniques against the West?

- How do governments such as Canada and Saudi Arabia engage in campaign-style lobbying in the US?

Feb. 14 FRIDAY – STRATEGY HANDBOOKS DUE ON OWL BY 11:59 PM

Feb. 17 Reading Week - No Class

Feb. 24 Long-Term Campaigns

This class examines the long-term public opinion campaigns by social movements and political parties. This includes: the use of stigmatization and normalization by advocacy groups as well as targeted outreach by political parties to new voter groups.

Homework

- Drawing on the readings, submit a 1 page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis that identifies the key techniques related to stigmatization and normalization with examples.

Feb. 28 FRIDAY – GRAD STUDENT BOOK ANALYSES DUE ON OWL BY 11:59 PM

Mar. 3 Student and Riding-Level Campaigns

This class will take the form of group and class discussion of campaign strategy in the context of student elections and the riding-level campaigns of individual politicians. There are no PPT Notes this week.

Homework

- Drawing on the readings, submit a 1 page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis that identifies some of the insights related to local campaigns and canvassing and what aspects of them, if any, can be adapted to student council election campaigns.

Mar. 10 Message Distribution

This class examines different message formats such as talking point memos, op-eds, press releases, etc. as well as different types of media events.

Homework

- Submit a one page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis on what the different readings say about key types of media materials such as media/press releases, media kits, op-eds, and social media copy. Also, which two of Luntz's 10 rules do you think are most important and why?

Mar. 14 FRIDAY – CAMPAIGN PLAN ESSAY DUE ON OWL BY 11:59 PM

Mar. 17 Direct Lobbying Tactics

This class examines techniques related to the direct lobbying of decision-makers and influencers through private meetings as well as tactics related to townhalls and public consultation meetings. It also examines how interest groups have also sought to influence elections.

Homework

- Drawing on the readings, submit a 1 page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis that identifies examples of how different lobby groups/third parties have sought to influence elections.

Mar. 24 Media Interview Techniques and Issues/Crisis Management

This class examines key concepts and techniques related to issues management and crisis communications including media interview techniques.

Homework

- Drawing on the readings, submit a 1 page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis that outlines some of the characteristics and examples of war rooms discussed in the readings. Second, based on the Crisis PR reading, how do you think political parties can prepare for potential crises?

Mar. 31 Media Interviews Exercise

This class applies key concepts related to media interview techniques through an interview practical exercise. There are no PPT Notes this week.

Homework

- ***Reminder: Submit all homework from the course, including this week, as a single document.***
- Drawing on your lecture notes from last week and the Interview Exercise Instructions, submit a 1-2 page, typed, single-spaced summary/analysis that helps you prepare for the interview exercise. Check the instructions for which group you are in to find out if you are taking the company or protestors' side. Your summary/analysis should include: a brief outline of the basic situation; a holding statement for your side; your side's goal for the interview, target audience, overall narrative; some key messages/soundbites for your side; and a few tough questions you may be asked by the journalist. Also include a few tough questions you could feed to a journalist to ask the other side.