



SYLLABUS

COMM 440: Political Communication

Fall 2019

Dr. Mercieca

Office: 202G Bolton Hall

Office Hours: M/W 10:00-11:00 and by appointment.

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Course Description:

Rhetorical analysis of messages, media, and speakers in political campaigns, institutions and movements. We will examine issues relevant to the public sphere, citizenship, democracy, and public argument by focusing on political campaigns and political rhetoric. We will examine recent scholarship on media and politics, political participation, political campaign tactics and strategies, presidential rhetoric, and propaganda in America.

Student Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the semester students will have the critical and analytic tools necessary to participate in the political process and will have experience in working as political campaign consultants and speech-writers.

Learning Outcomes:

- **Critical Thinking Skills** - to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information
- **Communication Skills** - to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication
- **Social Responsibility:** to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities

Required Readings:

All course materials are available as pdf files on eCampus. You will need the Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is available through any on-campus computer. We will discuss each reading in class on the day that it appears on the calendar.

Grading:

Your work in this class will be graded carefully and strictly. I assume that you are capable of writing mature, upper division-level essays. Plagiarism (including cutting and pasting from the internet without citing the original source) will not be tolerated. Because this is a writing intensive course, students cannot pass this course without passing the writing assignments. Your work will be graded according to the following scale:

Every paper you turn in will be graded according to the quality of your Prose, Intellectual Content, and Argument.

- 1) Prose: writing that shows both advanced academic writing and no grammatical errors.
- 2) Intellectual Content: insightful analysis, not mere summary.
- 3) Argument: you have made a clear argument and supported it with solid evidence.

A = **Exceptionally Strong Work** that demonstrates excellence in all three of the above categories.

B = **solid, strong work** that misses one category while still achieving excellence in two categories.

C = **work that addresses the criteria of the assignment** while exhibiting serious flaws in one or more categories.

D = **work that is poorly written and is structurally flawed.** Such work requires, at the very least, immediate office consultation with me.

Grading Scale (in points):

A = 89.51-100

B = 79.51-89.50

C = 69.51- 79.50

D = 59.51-69.50

F = 59.50 and below

Assignments:

Historical Campaign Assignment (sign up for date)	10
Speechwriting Assignment (due October 11)	30
Campaign Analysis Paper (due December 4)	30
In Class Assignments (various dates, see syllabus)	30

Total Possible Points = 100

Assignment Descriptions:

Historical Campaign Assignment (sign up for date): in class presentation in which you inform the class about a significant historical presidential campaign. Come prepared to discuss (bring a power point or other visual aid) with the class:

- Who were the candidates?
- What were the major issues of the campaign?
- Were there any noteworthy campaign controversies?
- Were there any major media or campaign innovations?
- Why is this campaign significant in American history?

Congressman Flores Speech (due: October 11): Drawing from our in-class readings as well as your analysis of Congressman Flores' rhetorical style and political positions, you will compose one five minute, double spaced, 15 point font Citizenship Address, Memorial Day Address, or Veterans Day Address to be delivered by Congressman Flores. Congressman Flores may pick one or more of these speeches to deliver. (see Appendix A)

Campaign Analysis Paper (due December 4): you will work with your Political Consulting Group to complete a campaign analysis/opposition research paper against Representative Bill Flores [ITX-17; <http://flores.house.gov/>] as if your client is former Representative Chet Edwards (D). Each group member will be responsible for one portion of the paper, but the group must work together to write a coherent analysis. Your group must peer review one another's work. Your paper will include: media market description, Flores voting analysis, talking points, advertising/social media plan, get out the vote strategies, and campaign fundraising strategies. Your final analysis paper will be no less than six double spaced pages. (see Appendix B)

In Class Assignments – various in-class assignments that you'll complete either by yourself or with your Political Consulting Group. Please bring your laptop with you to class to help you to do these assignments.

Course Policies:

Attendance:

The University views class attendance as the responsibility of an individual student. Attendance is essential to complete the course successfully. University rules related to excused and unexcused absences are located on-line at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>.

Good citizenship:

1. You are in class on time every day
2. You are ready to discuss the day's readings
3. You contribute to class discussions (not texting, chatting, etc.)

Special Accommodations:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Academic Integrity Statement:

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal or tolerate those who do." All syllabi must contain a section that states the Aggie Honor Code (as stated above) and refers the student to the Honor Council Rules and Procedures on the web: <http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees — including instructors — cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (<https://scs.tamu.edu/>).

Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	Historical Campaigns
M August 26	Course Introduction & syllabus.	Read the syllabus.	NONE
W August 28	Our Public Sphere is Broken: Mercieca, “Preaching Civility Won’t Save American Democracy,” 1-6.		1789: George Washington v Himself

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUET	Historical Campaigns
F August 30	Pew, "Public Highly Critical of State of Political Discourse in the U.S." 1-9 and Pew, "Trust and Distrust in American Politics," 1-15.	Take quiz: http://www.peoplepress.org/quiz/political-typology/	1796: John Adams v Thomas Jefferson
M September 2	Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Cyber War: A Theory of Communication that Posits Effects," 36-63.		1800: John Adams v Thomas Jefferson
W September 4	Pew, "Where Americans Get Their News," 1-13.		1816: James Monroe v Rufus King
F September 6	Our local media market	In class: analyze local media market, research KBTX, and Kathleen Witte. Write two questions for her to answer. (turn in for 3 points)	NONE
M September 9	Class Visit: Kathleen Witte, KBTX anchor.		NONE

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	Historical Campaigns
W September 11	KBTX Tour: meet at the KBTX Studio 4141 E 29th St, Bryan. If you're available, return at 5:30 to watch the 6PM news from the studio.	Meet at KBTX studio: 4141 E 29th St, Bryan	NONE
F September 13	On Speechwriting. Discussion of speechwriting assignment.	Choose which speech you'll write (Memorial Day, Citizenship, or Veterans' Day)	NONE
M September 16	Skype Visit: Andre Castro, Communications Director for Congressman Bill Flores		NONE
W September 18	Celeste Condit, "The functions of epideictic: The Boston massacre orations as exemplar," 284-298.		1824: John Quincy Adams v Andrew Jackson
F September 20	Congressman Flores' rhetorical style.	In class: analyze Congressman Flores' previous speeches & statements. What do you notice that you can use for your speech? (turn in for 3 points) https://votesmart.org/candidate/public-statements/116906/bill-flores#.XWGprehKiMo	NONE

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	Historical Campaigns
M September 23	Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, <i>Deeds Done in Words</i> , National Eulogies, 73-104.		1828: John Quincy Adams v. Andrew Jackson
W September 25	Barbara Biesecker, “Remembering World War II: The Rhetoric and Politics of National Commemoration at the Turn of the 21st Century,” 393-409		1840: William Henry Harrison v Martin Van Buren
F September 27	CLASS CANCELLED	Form Political Consulting Teams	NONE
M September 30	Political Campaign Assignment Explained		1860: Abraham Lincoln v Stephen Douglas
W October 2	“Edwards vs Flores in Texas’ Seventeenth Congressional District: The Perfect Storm,” 55- 77.		1876: Rutherford B. Hayes v Samuel Tilden
F October 4		Speechwriting draft due. Bring to class for peer review. (peer review worth 3 points)	NONE

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	Historical Campaigns
M October 7	Campaign Organization, 91-100.		1892: Grover Cleveland v Benjamin Harrison
W October 9	Campaign Strategies, 38-54.		1904: Theodore Roosevelt v Alton Parker
F October 11		Work with political consulting group: work on SWOT analysis. (turn in for 3 points) Speechwriting assignment due.	NONE
M October 14	“New Media, New Forms of Campaigning,” 113-143.		1912: Woodrow Wilson v Theodore Roosevelt v William Howard Taft
W October 16	<i>Electing the President 2012</i> , “Campaigns and the Press,” 48-80.		1932: Herbert Hoover v Franklin D. Roosevelt
F October 18		Work with political consulting group: work on district & media market description. (turn in for 3 points)	NONE
M October 21	<i>Electing the President 2012</i> , “Advertising,” 129-171.		1940: Franklin D. Roosevelt v Wendell Wilkie

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUET	Historical Campaigns
W October 23	"How the Obama campaign won the race for voter data," 1-9.		1948: Harry S Truman v Thomas Dewey
F October 25		Work with political consulting group: work on Flores voting analysis. (turn in for 3 points)	NONE
M October 28	On the attention economy: "Attention Shoppers!" 1-15.		1952: Dwight D. Eisenhower v Adlai Stevenson
W October 30	Overton Window: Russell, "An Introduction to the Overton Window of Political Possibilities," 1-6.		1960: John F. Kennedy v Richard Nixon
F November 1		Work with political consulting group: two questions for Congressman Flores. (turn in for 3 points)	NONE
M November 4	Class Visit: Congressman Bill Flores		NONE
W November 6	Political Framing: Lakoff and Duran, "Trump has turned words into weapons. And he's winning the linguistic war." 1-10.		1964: Lyndon Johnson v Barry Goldwater

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUET	Historical Campaigns
F November 8		Work with political consulting group: campaign talking points (turn in for 3 points)	NONE
M November 11	Claire Wardel, "Misinformation Has Created a New World Disorder," 1-15.		1972: Richard Nixon v George McGovern
W November 13	Philip N. Howard, Samuel Woolley & Ryan Calo, "Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election," 81-93.		1980: Jimmy Carter v Ronald Reagan
F November 15	CLASS CANCELLED	Work with political consulting group: advertising & media plan (turn in for 3 points)	NONE
M November 18	Watts, "How Every Campaign Will Have a Troll Farm of Its Own," 1-9.		1992: George HW Bush v William Jefferson Clinton v H. Ross Perot

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUe	Historical Campaigns
W November 20	Siva Vaidhyanathan, <i>Anti-Social Media</i> , "The Politics Machine," 146-174.		2000: George W. Bush v Albert Gore
F November 22		Work with political consulting group: GOTV & fundraising strategies (turn in for 3 points)	NONE
M November 25	Siva Vaidhyanathan, <i>Anti-Social Media</i> , "The Disinformation Machine," 175-195.		2008: Barack Obama v John McCain
W November 27	CLASS CANCELLED	NONE	NONE
F November 29	CLASS CANCELLED	NONE	NONE
M December 2	"The Machine Always Wins," 1-10.		2016: Donald Trump v Hillary Clinton
W December 4		Political Consulting Group Presentations Political Campaign Assignment DUE	NONE

December 10, 3:30-5:30	FINAL EXAM		
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Appendix A

Speechwriting Assignment

DUE: October 11, 2019 (submit via turnitin link before class begins)

Draft due in class October 4, 2019

Drawing from our in-class readings about epidictic speeches as well as your analysis of Congressman Flores' rhetorical style and political positions, you will compose one five minute, double spaced, 15 point font address to be delivered by Congressman Flores for either a Citizenship ceremony, Memorial Day, or Veterans Day. Congressman Flores may pick one of these speeches to deliver.

Success in this assignment will require that you understand the generic constraints of your speech occasion and that you can adapt Congressman Flores' positions and rhetorical style to conform to those constraints. Your speech should be written in Congressman Flores' "voice."

For Memorial Day Speeches:

1. Give meaning to the loss of life: those who gave their lives represent American values.
2. Describe the audience's obligations as citizens.
3. Describe the audience's obligations to the nation and to honor the dead.

For Citizenship Speeches

Your paper should be three pages in length, well written, and include a works consulted page in Chicago Style (not necessarily works cited in your speech, but the materials you consulted in crafting your speech).

Watch Congressman Flores deliver COMM 440 student Ryan Vizant's speech on Naturalization Day, July 3, 2015. Watch Congressman Flores deliver a Veterans Day speech in 2014.

Appendix B

Campaign Analysis Paper

Due: December 4, 2019 (submit via turnitin link before class begins)

You will work with your Political Consulting Group to complete a campaign analysis/opposition research paper against Representative Bill Flores [ITX-17; <http://flores.house.gov/>] as if your client is former Representative Chet Edwards (D). Each group member will be responsible for their own individual sections the paper, but the group must work together to write a coherent analysis. Each person's contribution should be clearly

marked (with a table of contents listing each person's section); you will be graded separately, not as a group. Your group should only submit ONE paper. Your final analysis paper will be no less than six double spaced pages (they are typically longer). Your paper should be presentation ready, meaning that if this was your business, then this paper would be how you would earn clients. Therefore, spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules will be strictly applied. You will need to consult many sources to complete this assignment, make sure that you include a bibliography. Write it in "executive summary" style and make sure that you use your political consulting group as the "voice" (i.e. Team Consulting recommends, Air Force One Consulting argues, The Republic Consulting would suggest, The Party Consulting's analysis).

Your task is to research the incumbent's political record to identify potential weaknesses of the incumbent (Bill Flores) and suggest how those weaknesses might be exploited by the challenger Chet Edwards. This assignment **requires extensive research** and requires that you **turn that research into communication products**: talking points, ad scripts, slogans, and, etc.

Your paper will include:

1. An overview of your campaign strategy, based upon your SWOT analysis, which you should include in your paper.
2. District & media market description. Describe both the Congressional District and the media markets that cover the district. What are the major industries or agricultural concerns represented in the district? What are the important demographic characteristics of the district? (race, age of population, poverty level, unemployment level, average income, average home price, voter turnout, etc.). Present a brief overview of the available television, cable, radio, and print media of the district. Describe the audience for these media outlets. Which media have the largest audience? What does it cost to advertise with each media outlet?
3. Flores voting analysis. This section should include a brief biography about Bill Flores as well as his current assignments in Congress, and should also note if there are any weaknesses in his voting record that can be exploited by his challenger Chet Edwards. Are the incumbent's committee assignments appropriate given the profile of the district? Has the incumbent sponsored any legislation (has it passed)? What ratings has the incumbent received from relevant interest groups? What special interests provide the bulk of the incumbent's campaign finances? Are there any corporate or individual contributions whose association with the incumbent's campaign might be controversial? How much of the incumbent's campaign money comes from within the state or district?
4. Campaign talking points. This section should include your Political Consulting Group's recommendations for your client's campaign theme and the major issues that you think the campaign should focus on to get your candidate elected. What is your candidate's message to

the electorate? You'll have to learn a bit about your candidate (Chet Edwards) to make sure that what you've come up with matches his positions and interests.

5. Paid advertising/free media/social media plan. How will you implement your campaign's talking points? What will be your ad buy? Given budgetary constraints, which media outlets will best serve your client? What are your free media strategies? What are your social media strategies? What will your candidate's website look like? How will it function? Give several sample ad scripts (one representing each of your target demographics).

6. Get out the vote strategies. How do you plan to make sure that enough of your candidate's supporters go to vote on election day? This is the MOST IMPORTANT section of the paper. What is your plan to get your supporters to actually go and vote?

7. Campaign fundraising strategies. How do you plan to raise enough money for your candidate to do all that you recommend in this report? How much money do you estimate that they will need to raise? How can this money be raised?