430 POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

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Department Mission Statement

The role and mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies are to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, and societies. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages. The department's research, teaching, and service devote particular attention to understanding the ways in which communication erodes and sustains collaboration within and among local, national, and global communities.

Course Mission Statement

The purpose of this course is to help participants think critically about American political discourse. In pursuing this goal, the course is organized into four themes:

1. An exploration of the political myths (reoccurring cultural stories) that guide the invention of American political discourse.
2. An examination of the different ways liberals and conservatives talk about politics in America.
3. An analysis of the discourse of race in contemporary American politics.
4. An investigation of the manner in which the press covers and frames American politics.

Books


Course Requirements

1. **Essay one:** This is a ten-page essay. You will be given a choice of topics. This essay counts 20% toward the course grade (100 pts.).
2. **Group task and oral presentation:** The class will be broken into groups. Each group will be assigned a research task related to specific course themes. The group will report to the class on the results of their research. These reports will occur throughout the semester. This assignment counts 10% toward the course grade (50 pts.).

3. **Midterm examination:** This examination will consist of three or four essay questions covering material from the first half of the course. I will provide a list of possible items before the examination and from this list I will select the examination questions. The midterm counts 20% toward the course grade (100 pts.).

4. **Essay two:** This is a ten-page essay. You will be given a choice of topics. This essay counts 20% toward the course grade (100 pts.).

5. **Final examination:** This examination will consist of three or four essay questions covering material from the second half of the course. I will provide a list of possible items before the examination and from this list I will select the examination questions. The midterm counts 20% toward the course grade (100 pts.).

6. **Participation:** Participation has three components—regular attendance and participation in in-class activities. Attendance and participation count 10% toward the course grade (50 pts.).

**Grading scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>500-465</td>
<td>(93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>464-450</td>
<td>(90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>449-435</td>
<td>(87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>434-415</td>
<td>(83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>414-400</td>
<td>(80%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>399-385</td>
<td>(77%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>384-365</td>
<td>(73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>364-350</td>
<td>(70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>349-335</td>
<td>(67%)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>314-300</td>
<td>(60%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>299 and below</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Course Policies**

1. **Evaluation of student work:** A written evaluation will accompany essays, examinations, and oral presentations. If you disagree with your evaluation, feel free to come and speak with me. Please do this within a day or two of the time you receive your evaluation. I am not defensive about my grading and you should feel no apprehension about discussing the evaluation of your work. On occasion I have been persuaded to change a grade.

2. **Completion of assignments:** All major assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. If a student fails to turn in an essay, complete an oral presentation, or misses an examination, the student will receive an F for the final course grade regardless of the quality of other work.

3. **Late work and excused absences:** Extensions will be granted only where the student is able to document special circumstances and provide the instructor with prior notification. All other work will be penalized one letter grade for every 24 hours past the due date.

4. **Checking grades:** Your grades will be posted on Blackboard. You may always check your grade by going to Blackboard, clicking “Tools,” and then clicking “Check Grade.”

5. **Passing grade:** You must receive at least a “C” for the course to count toward the major. By university rule, a “C-” is an insufficient grade to count toward completing the major.
6. **Academic misconduct**: Violations of academic integrity are very serious matters and will result in automatic failure of the class, and referral to the proper university officials. The work a student submits in a class is expected to be the student’s own work and must be completed for that particular class and assignment. Academic dishonesty includes: handing in another’s work or part of another’s work as your own, turning in one of your old papers for a current class, turning in the same or similar past or current paper for two different classes, presenting a group project as your work solely, purchasing or otherwise obtaining research or papers written by another and turning that work in as your own. Using unauthorized notes or other study aids or otherwise obtaining another’s answers for an examination also represents a breach of academic integrity. Sanctions are applied whether the violation was intentional or not. You must keep all your original data for projects (i.e. articles, questionnaires, interview audio tapes) and be prepared to present them to the professor when asked.

Plagiarism means intentionally or knowingly representing the words of ideas of another as one’s own. Plagiarism includes quoting or paraphrasing from other sources without acknowledging/citing the source of your information or presenting quoted material as your own words. You must be very clear about attribution of sources and you must know how to cite sources in a paper. Students who are unfamiliar with how to cite sources should purchase a style manual such as the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Claiming lack of knowledge about standards for writing is not an acceptable excuse for committing plagiarism. Come to a faculty member for help if you are at all unsure about any of these issues or seek help at the UNL Writing Assistance Center (472-8803, Andrews Hall 129). No one wants to see you have these kinds of problems with your work, so please start assignments early and seek help when you need it.

**Due Dates**

Essay one: Week 7.

Midterm examination: Week 8.


Group task and oral presentation: Individual assignments will be announced.

Final examination: Finals Week.

**Schedule**

I. **Introduction**

Week 1  A discussion of class procedures, requirements, and evaluation.

“Everything I need to know about politics I learned in kindergarten”—a short note on political socialization.

Bill Clinton’s “Address to the Nation on Testimony Before the Independent Counsel’s Grand Jury, August 17, 1998”—a short note on the dialectical tensions in American political culture.

II. **Political Myths that Guide American Political Discourse**
Week 2

The nature and function of political myth.
Hughes, Intro
Myth of the Chosen Nation
Hughes, ch 1
Myth of Nature’s Nation
Hughes, ch 2
Myth of the Christian Nation
Hughes, ch 3

Week 3

Myth of the Millennial Nation
Hughes, chs 4-5
Mythic Dimensions of American Capitalism
Hughes, ch 6

Week 4

Frank Capra’s film, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939)
Bill Clinton’s campaign film, The Man from Hope
The myth of the small town
The myth of the Little Red Schoolhouse

III. Different Ways Liberals and Conservatives Talk about Politics

Week 5

Introduction to Moral Politics.
Lakoff, 3-64
Moral conceptual systems.

Strict father morality.
Lakoff, 65-107

Week 6

Nurturant parent morality.
Lakoff, 108-140
From family-based morality to politics.
Lakoff, 143-176

Week 7

The hard issues, I-II (social programs and taxes, crime and the death penalty, regulation and the environment, culture wars, models of Christianity, abortion, love your country and hate your government)
Lakoff, 179-280

IV. Midterm Examination

Review for midterm examination

Essay 1 is due

Week 8

Midterm examination

V. Race and Contemporary American Political Discourse

Reading and thinking about classic civil-rights discourse.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963, August 28). “I Have a Dream.”
Week 9  Fall Semester Break!!

A framework for thinking about American politics and race in the post-civil-rights era.

Week 10  Political discourse and race problems during the 2008 presidential election.

Bill Clinton, Remarks before the South Carolina Primary
Geraldine Ferraro, Remarks to a California newspaper
Jeremiah Wright, “The Day of Jerusalem’s Fall” and other discourses.

Race and the 2008 election continued.

Week 11  Obama speaks about race in Philadelphia speech, “A More Perfect Union.”

Race and the Obama presidency.

Rev. Joseph Lowery and the controversy over the Inaugural Benediction.
Professor Gates, Officer Crowley, Barack Obama, and the “Beer Summit.”
Shirley Sherrod speaks to the NAACP

Week 11  Drawing conclusions.

VI.  The Press and American Politics

Thinking about media effects.

Week 12  No class!! National Communication Association Convention in San Francisco.

Framing political events and the press.

Week 13  Setting the political agenda and the press.

Thanksgiving holiday!! Enjoy a fine turkey.

Week 14  Politics and the world of cable news television.

Politics and the blogosphere

*Essay 2 is due*

Week 15  Summing up.

VIII.  Final Examination
Review for final examination.
Course evaluation.

Finals Week  Final Examination.