

Draft Syllabus

The Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration

Spring, 2015

Course Number: PPPA 6085, Section 13

Course Title: Public Perception, Media and Communications

Time and Place: Mondays 6:10-8:00pm, MPA Building, 601Z conference room

Professor: Patricia McGinnis

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202-669-2990

Office hours: Monday or Tuesday after 2pm by appointment; other times can also be scheduled

Overview:

This course will examine the *public* dimension of public policy and public management. We will look at the role of the people (primarily in the U.S.), as customers and owners of government in a representative democracy. Understanding, engaging and communicating with the public effectively is often a key determinant of success in policy development, program management and the accountability of public leaders for progress and results.

We will explore, through case studies, readings and interactive discussions the use of a variety of methods, tools and approaches to understanding and communicating with the public. The case studies will illustrate the role of communications in policy successes and failures. The class discussions will be dynamic, with guest speakers invited to talk about real world examples of the use and impact of a variety of approaches, including survey research, media communications, social media and face to face interactions, on the development, management and outcomes of public policies. Insights and recommendations will be presented in short memos and class presentations and, throughout the course, we will develop a "public communications toolkit", as a resource for current and future public leaders (such as you).

At a time when public confidence in government and customer satisfaction with government services is at a low point, it is particularly important for public sector leaders and managers to

understand public priorities and concerns and to engage their customers and constituents in dynamic communications about the design, implementation and performance of government programs, and to foster learning, renewal and change in the public interest.

Objectives of this course are to:

- Examine strategies, concepts and tools to connect government with the public and their customers to promote mutual understanding, to offer relevant and user friendly channels for communication, and to improve government performance and public confidence;
- Analyze and discuss illustrative case examples of the development and implementation of effective communications in the public sector;
- Apply concepts and insights through interactive class discussions, short memos, and individual and team presentations.

Student Outcomes:

The course is designed to encourage and enable you to:

- Think imaginatively and strategically about communicating with the owners and customers of government in the development and management of public policies and programs;
- Work collaboratively as part of a team;
- Analyze issues, problems and solutions based on facts, trends and evidence;
- Understand the importance of context in communicating, leading, and managing effectively in the public arena;
- Write succinct, clear memos and communicate effectively through interactive class discussions, individual and team presentations;
- Understand how to hold yourself and your colleagues accountable for serving the public interest;
- Develop your potential to be a successful public communicator.

Course Requirements and Grading:

- **Class participation:** Overall class participation will be an important part of the assessment. Students must prepare for class and actively participate during class. A

downward adjustment in grades may be made if a student misses a significant number of classes or fails to actively participate in discussions.

- **Team exercises:** The class will be divided into teams to lead class discussions on case examples or course topics. More detail on team presentations will be provided.
- **Final Memorandum to a leader of a government or nonprofit organization:** Each student will write an 8-10 page memorandum to the leader of a government agency or a non-profit organization. The memo will analyze a significant problem or challenge the organization faces and propose a communications strategy to examine the problem, to consider possible solutions, and to choose and implement a course of action. Students will make short oral presentations of their memoranda at the end of the semester. More detail on the final memo and presentation will be provided.

Your final grade will be based on class participation, short and long written assignments and oral presentations. I will be using the +/- grade system.

- Short memos/team presentations 30%
- Final Memorandum* 40%
- Overall Class Participation 30%

*Final memorandum to be assessed half for oral presentation and half for written presentation.

Readings:

Links to the readings will be provided electronically for each class session (on Blackboard). You will not be required to purchase any textbooks.

Class Schedule and Assignments:

Session 1, January 12 **Introductions and Course Overview:** We will introduce ourselves, talk about our goals for the course, make team assignments and discuss the role of the public as citizens, partners and customers of government.

Readings: To be posted on Blackboard: Thomas article on role of the public in public management; Politico article, "US is Awesome".

Assignment: Please be sure to e-mail your resume and your response to the student questionnaire (posted on Blackboard) to pmcginni@gwu.edu by 5:30 pm on January 11.

Session 2, January 26

Case Study: Role of Communications in Civil Rights Movement

Reading: posted on Blackboard: NPR discussion of coverage of Civil Rights Movement and article by Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change".

Assignment: Be prepared to discuss role of communications in Civil Rights Movement after classroom viewing of documentary, "Come Walk in My Shoes".

Session 3, February 2

Understanding the Public: Review trust in government trends; Team presentations on a high priority issue (for example, ebola or Ferguson), including facts, public attitudes and context.

Readings: Link to trust data posted on Blackboard; facts and survey results on team topics to be identified and shared by teams.

Assignment: Each team to prepare 2-3 page memo and PowerPoint presentation.

Session 4, February 9

Political Communications in Theory and Practice: How People Process and Make Judgments about Political Information.

Readings: Articles by Popkin, Just and Asher to be posted on Blackboard

Guest Speaker: Dr. Maxine Isaacs, Harvard Kennedy School Professor and former Press Secretary to Vice President Walter Mondale

Assignment: Be prepared to discuss political communications with Dr. Isaacs.

Session 5, February 23

Case Study: How a political leader used opinion research, facts and values to make a critical decision

Reading: To be posted on Blackboard

Guest speaker: Peter Hart, pollster and consultant to NBC/ Wall Street Journal polls

Session 6, March 2

How public leaders and managers can use opinion research and facts to design, manage and communicate programs and raise confidence in government.

Readings: Health Care report and articles to be posted on Blackboard

Assignment: Be prepared to discuss health care reform as a case study.

Note: Topic and brief summary of Final Memo due by March 16

Session 7, March 16

State of the News Media: Trends and Changes in Content and How People Get and Share Information

Reading: Link to Pew Research Center report to be posted on Blackboard

Guest Speaker: Carl Fillichio, Director, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Labor

Assignment: Short memo on key insights about one or two key trends in news media, examples and how these insights can be used to design communications strategies.

Session 8, March 23

Social Media and Role of Entertainment Media on Public Perception

Reading: Pew Research report and Princeton Research study to be posted on Blackboard

Assignment: Team presentations on using social media and /or messages in entertainment media to inform or motivate a target audience about a topic of your choice.

Session 9, March 30

Serving the Public as Customers of Government

Reading: To be posted on Blackboard

Guest Speaker: from GSA Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies

Assignment: Be prepared to discuss effective customer driven communications with examples.

Session 10, April 6

Motivating the Public to Change Behavior or Take Action

Reading: Articles on Social marketing to be posted on Blackboard

Assignment: Team led discussion of examples of social marketing.

Session 11, April 13

Presentation/Discussion of Your Communications Toolkits

Reading: review course readings

Assignment: be prepared to present and discuss your communications toolkits.

Session 12, April 20

Final Memo Presentations

Session 13, April 27

Final Memo Presentations

Final memos due no later than May 5