POLI 270-01
RHETORIC OF CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS
FALL 2010

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Office Hours: T and TH 3:30-5:00
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Course Objectives

When you run into me at Macalester Reunion Weekend 25 years from now, I want you to say, “Oh, Professor Christiansen! You’ve gotten really old. I never forgot you or the lessons you taught. For example, I learned that human beings make political choices on the basis of powerful narratives that resonate with their emotions and values, rather than on the basis of candidate resumes, experience, policy statements, or position white papers. I never forgot how you taught us that effective campaign persuasion requires careful audience analysis and audience adaptation. And I’ll never forget your admonition to “GET TO THE POINT!” As a result of taking your course, I became a much better writer. I learned how campaigns work and why certain candidates tend to win and others tend to lose. In fact, because of your course, I was inspired to run for President of the United States, run for office in my Congressional district, run for County Commissioner, run for City Council in my town, run for School Board Member, run for Park Board and volunteered for many candidates in my community. To thank you for all you taught me, Professor Christiansen, I want you to have a front row seat at my upcoming Inauguration.

By the time you leave this class in December you will also be:
⇒ More theoretically sophisticated and systematic in your political analyses
⇒ Better able to make sound arguments and marshal good evidence in their support
⇒ More persuasive
⇒ Able to tell a good story
⇒ Able to think visually
⇒ Able to use Adobe Photoshop
⇒ Able to create sound files using Audacity or Garage Band software
⇒ The proud owner of an impressive portfolio of rhetorical campaign artifacts that can help you find employment in or out of politics
⇒ Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound

Why this Course Focuses on Persuasive Writing and Speaking (aka Rhetoric)

The history of the liberal arts is grounded in an ancient Greek and Roman educational model known as the trivium (or three roads: grammar, logic, and rhetoric). The Macalester Statement of Belief and Purpose reflects this ancient foundation by promising Macalester students that they will get rigorous educational practice in developing writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills. Additionally, current employers of every kind repeatedly identify these three skills as essential to a successful work life:

“We believe that we do our best for students when we give them tools to be analytical, to be able to gather information and to determine the validity of that information themselves, particularly in this world where people don’t filter for you anymore,” Dr. Coleman says. “We want to teach them how to make an argument, how to defend an argument, to make a choice.” These are the skills that liberal arts colleges in particular have prided themselves on teaching. But these colleges also say they have the hardest time explaining the link between what they teach and the kind of job and salary a student can expect on the other end. . . .
The Association of American Colleges and Universities recently asked employers who hire at least 25 percent of their workforce from two- or four-year colleges what they want institutions to teach. The answers did not suggest a narrow focus. Instead, 89 percent said they wanted more emphasis on "the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing," 81 percent asked for better "critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills" and 70 percent were looking for "the ability to innovate and be creative."

"It's not about what you should major in, but that no matter what you major in, you need good writing skills and good speaking skills," says Debra Humphreys, a vice president at the association.

The organization has conducted focus groups with employers before and heard the same thing. With the recession, she says, they weren't sure the findings would hold. "But it's even more intense. Companies are demanding more of employees. They really want them to have a broad set of skills." She adds that getting employer feedback is the association service that "college leaders find the most valuable, because they can answer the question when parents ask, 'Is this going to help in getting a job?'"


Visiting with students is my favorite part about being a Macalester professor, second only to seeing students learn and grow intellectually. Watching students waste their waiting around to talk to me is one of my least favorite parts of teaching at Macalester. For these reasons, I will hang a sign up sheet for twenty-minute meetings during office hours on my door in Suite 338 DeWitt Wallace Library. You may always swing by my office and see if I am available to visit "on the fly," but signing up ahead of time is the best way to insure that I can meet your needs for assistance. I am very likely to be meeting with other faculty if you just stop by; I don't want you to you waste your time by fruitlessly waiting around till I'm free. You are also welcome to call me (x6714), email me and request an appointment outside of office hours, Google "chat" me when I am on line, or "Skype" me. You should not expect me to answer email after 7:00 p.m. or to reply immediately to your email during the day. But I will do my best to get back to you in a timely manner.

Required Texts:


Many other short readings will be made available to you through Moodle. Please make it a habit to check your Macalester email regularly and/or have your Macalester email account automatically forward email to your regularly checked account. I also highly recommend that you make a daily practice of reading the New York Times. The Times reports on many political campaigns around the country and these stories will enrich your learning in this course.

The schedule of daily readings can be found in Moodle.
Use of Computers, Smart Phones, and Cell Phones in This Course
I have rarely seen a student bring a laptop to class for a legitimate educational purpose. More frequently, student laptop use during class is focused on email, surfing the web, checking FaceBook, YouTube and other forms of "social network loafing." Such behavior makes you less fully a participant in class, makes you "unavailable" for answering questions, keeps you from listening carefully to the ideas of your classmates and me, and can quite negatively affect your performance and ultimately your grade. Even worse, your online social loafing tends to distract the students who sit next to you because they will not be able to stop themselves from watching what you are doing. For these reasons, I reserve the right to ban all laptops from my classroom if these behaviors negatively affect the environment of the course. Until that happens, you are welcome to use your laptop in this class. Ditto for smart phones. Please be sure to turn your mobile phone off during class because its ringing and buzzing distracts your classmates and me.

Academic Misconduct
Plagiarism means to pass off as your own the work and ideas of others. This is considered serious academic misconduct at Macalester and other institutions of higher education. Even in the non-academic world, plagiarizing has besmirched many politicians' careers and reputation, for example, Edward Kennedy, Joe Biden, and Martin Luther King. You grades will be severely diminished and you might even fail the course in egregious cases if I catch you plagiarizing. This includes taking (without permission or attribution) graphical materials, images, sound files, and text files.

Attendance and Participation
Attendance in this course is required. Students who routinely miss class tend to be the students who earn the lowest grades because of their lack of familiarity with course materials, discussions, and lectures, including guest lectures. Your attendance, participation, preparation of required readings, and thoughtful questions and contributions will enliven the course and enhance everyone's learning. I especially like your participation in class when you have, in fact, read the day's assigned materials. I recommend that ill-prepared students (those who have not read the day's assignment) use that class period to carefully listen and learn during the lecture and discussion.

Late Assignments
All assignments are to be turned in to me in class on the date they are due. Late assignments will be docked by a full letter grade per day that they are late. I will make special arrangements to accept late assignments if you have a genuine crisis in your life, (such as the death of family members or your own serious illness). In the event of an emergency, you should call and leave a message at my office (696-6714) or drop me a brief email notice. Please leave a number where I may reach you.

Disability Accommodations:
Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Contact the Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, at 696-6220 to make an appointment. It is important to meet early in the
semester with her to ensure your accommodations are approved and to ensure you begin the semester successfully.

Grades and What They Mean:

A 92 or above = **Outstanding** achievement in completing course requirements.
B 82 - 91 = Achievement of course requirements **significantly above** expectations.
C 72 - 81 = Course requirements are met in every respect.
D 62 - 71 = Worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
NC 61 or below = Represents failure. Signifies that the work was completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit.
S Achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better.

**Graded Assignments:** Throughout this semester, you will act as if you have been hired as the communication consultant for one real world U.S. candidate who is currently running for elected office. Each of the assignments in this course build upon each other (known as intellectual “scaffolding”) and assume a great deal of familiarity with your candidate, his or her opponent(s), the respective race, district, prior voting patterns, social norms, socio-economic character, media outlets, and hot-button issues in that community. Without question, you will have to do a lot of reading and research on these persons and community characteristics in order to complete the following assignments. It is, therefore, a very good idea to select a campaign occurring in a community with which you are already familiar or are willing to discover. If you are unfamiliar with the United States, I recommend that you select a candidate who lives in the Twin Cities.

I recommend that you select a candidate who interests you (rather than annoys), as you will be working on their hypothetical “behalf” the entire fall term. You may work on behalf of a candidate at any level all the way up to State Representative or State Senator, but you may not select a Congressional candidate or a candidate in a statewide race (Governor and US Senator). These races are considerably bigger, and the issues are much larger and more difficult to analyze in a single semester course.

You may work on behalf of a candidate from any major or minor political party. For a man or a woman. Young or old. For an incumbent or a challenger. Sometimes, students pick a candidate from a party that they do not identify with in order to create a set of richer intellectual challenges for themselves. I endorse this strategy and encourage you to try it. All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in this course.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 Readiness Assurance Tests (over required readings)</td>
<td>10 questions each</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Mini-Writing Assignments</td>
<td>1 page each</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
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  • Your Personal Story
  • Tell you candidate’s story
  • Where are your votes?
  • Tell your candidate’s story
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Pages/Item</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues, Candidate and Opposition Brief</td>
<td>4-5 pages</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mon, Sept. 20th</td>
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<td>Key Message and Rationale Memo</td>
<td>1 page</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Monday, September 27th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Plan</td>
<td>8-10 pages</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mon, October 11th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campaign Graphic (walking card, mailer, literature for a doorknob)</td>
<td>item + 1 page</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mon, October 18th</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Minute Stump Speech</td>
<td>4 pages</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Friday, November 5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus for Institutional Donors</td>
<td>4-6 pages + 1 page rationale memo</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Monday, November 22</td>
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<td>30-Second Radio Advertisement</td>
<td>recorded ad + 1 page rationale memo</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Monday, November 26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Press Release Responding to Candidate “Catastrophe”</td>
<td>1-2 pages</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Friday, December 4th</td>
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Total: 100 Points