

The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

M.P.S. in Political Management

Summer 2018

May 21 - July 28

Opposition Research

PMGT 6462.10

3 Credits

Monday Nights, 7:10-9:40 PM

Funger Hall, Room 210

BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Instructor

Brett C. Di Resta

Contact Information

bcdiresta@gmail.com

Communication

Please reach me via e-mail, I will get back to you in 24 hours.

Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site throughout the semester, as Blackboard will be the primary venue for outside classroom communications between the instructors and the students. Students can access the course site at <https://blackboard.gwu.edu>. Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or helpdesk.gwu.edu.

Academic Integrity

All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and competence in their academic work. Students have a special responsibility to acquaint themselves with, and make use of, all proper procedures for doing research, writing papers, and taking exams. Members of the community will be presumed to be familiar with the proper academic procedures and will be held responsible for applying them. Deliberate failure to act in accordance with such procedures will be considered academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Acts of academic dishonesty are a legal, moral, and intellectual offense against the community and will be prosecuted through the proper university channels. The University Code of Academic Integrity can be found at <http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity>.

University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

- Students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance.

- Faculty should extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.
- Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday should arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities

Support for Students with Disabilities

GW's Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS to facilitate academic access for students with disabilities. Please notify your instructor if you require accommodations. Additional information is available at <https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/>.

In the Event of an Emergency or Crisis during Class

If we experience some an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location until we hear that we can move about safely. If we have to leave here, we will meet at **[fill in proximate location]** in order to account for everyone and to make certain that everyone is safe. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University's operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/>.

Attendance Policy

[Please state your class attendance policy.]

Out-of-Class/ Independent Learning Expectation

Over the course of the semester, students will spend at least 2 hours (100 minutes) per week in class. Required reading for the class meetings and written response papers or projects are expected to take up, on average, 7 hours (350 minutes) per week. Over the course of the semester, students will spend 25 hours in instructional time and 87.5 hours preparing for class.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the semester, students will be given the opportunity to evaluate the course through GW's online course evaluation system. It is very important that you take the time to complete an evaluation. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting any/all of the following:

Dr. Michael Cohen
Deputy Director, Political Management Program
michaeldcohen@gwu.edu | 202-994-5512

Dr. Jack Prostko
Associate Dean for Learning and Faculty
Development
College of Professional Studies
jackp@gwu.edu | 202-994-3592

Suzanne Farrand
Director of Academic Administration, GSPM
sfarrand@gwu.edu | 202-994-9309

THE COURSE

Political Management Program Objectives

A Political Management degree prepares students to win campaigns for elective office and policy positions, and to do so in a manner that benefits democracy and society as well as their organization and clients.

In completing the degree, students will be able to:

1. Assess a political environment, develop a strategy to achieve specified goals, and execute that strategy;
2. Draw upon a repertoire of effective campaign communication skills;
3. Collect, evaluate, and incorporate empirical evidence to shape and optimize the strategy;
4. Find, engage, and motivate the right leaders, professionals, and citizens;
5. Recognize and work through recurring political dilemmas in a manner that upholds ethical standards and professional conduct.

Graduate School Expectations

Students enrolled in a graduate program should take their academic responsibilities seriously and be prepared to meet the following expectations:

1. Utilize effective time management skills so as to complete and submit their assignments on their required due dates and times.
2. Have attained a mastery of written communication skills including proper sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and word usage.
3. Understand how to properly format in-text citations and references for resources and information integrated into their written assignments.

GSPM prepares students for careers in the professional political world. In politics, words and deadlines matter. Excellent written communication skills are essential for success. Every word used, whether it is in a television or radio ad, direct mail piece, social media, or a press release, will be scrutinized. Similarly, deadlines are important. Election Day does not get postponed because a candidate and their campaign are not prepared. There are no “do-overs” because a direct mail piece did not arrive to its intended recipients until after the election was concluded. Students will be best positioned for success in the practical political world if they have developed and exercise excellent written communication and time management skills.

Course Description and Overview

The phrase “opposition research” conjures up all sorts of images – a man in a trench coat, envelopes changing hands in darkened parking lots, whispers to intrepid news reporters. While colorful, none of these images are anywhere close to the mark. On the contrary, political research is the factual foundation for any campaign.

The course will be more than a simple “how to” course. To be successful, a campaign must use research to inform their strategy. So while students will learn how to perform opposition research, they will also learn the role research plays during the course of the campaign.

Course Learning Objectives

The goal of this course is to dispel the false notions by teaching the class how to perform campaign and policy research. By the end of the course, the students will:

- **Understand How To Gather Information** – The only way to perform quality research is to understand how to effectively gather all publicly available information. The class will review techniques on how to collect information, both electronically and in person, for candidates at the federal, state and local level.
- **Delineate Between Offensive And Defensive Materials** – While most people think that research is all about attacks, the truth is that research is also used to defend. Students will learn how to prepare research for their own candidates, known as a defensive project or vulnerability study, as well as opposition research tactics.
- **Be Able To Analyze And Synthesize Materials Into Campaign Ready Documents** – The students will learn how to break down the material down for the campaign. This will include finding common themes throughout the research (e.g. Al Gore is a serial exaggerator) as well as preparing response materials.
- **And Ultimately, Disseminate Information** – If the campaign cannot disseminate their research, all they have is a very interesting (and somewhat expensive) paperweight. The students will learn how to get research out to voters, via both paid and unpaid methods. Further, the students will learn how to integrate the research into the campaign, including activities like debate prep.

Course Requirements

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| Class Participation | 15% |
| Paper One | 15% |
| Group Project | 20% |
| Debate Prep Project | 20% |
| Final Project | 30% |

Evaluation and Grading

| Assignment | Learning Objective(s) Addressed | Due Date | Weight |
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| Class Participation | Research is a hands-on discipline, and the only way to be hands-on is to appear in person and participate. And while I do enjoy hearing myself talk, occasionally I will want to hear what students think. | | 15% |
| First Paper | Over the first couple of weeks, the class will learn gathering techniques for research materials. The first paper will require students to demonstrate those techniques on certain public | | 15% |

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| | officials. Of importance will be how the information was gathered and the process in which it was gathered, as well as the analyzing and presentation of the material. | | |
| Group Project | The class will be broken up in teams of 3 or 4, depending on class size. Students will each research a particular politician. However, one team will be analyzing the politician from a defensive standpoint, while the other will research the elected official from an opposition standpoint. In addition to traditional marks for professionalism, grammar, and writing skills, papers will be graded on the thoroughness of each project, with bonus points awarded to the team that provides the better case for or against the politician | | 20% |
| Debate Prep Project | Debates can be a turning point in a campaign (see 2012 Presidential race). Students will learn how to prepare candidates for a debate, and will be required to create debate prep materials. | | 20 |
| Final Project | At the end of the course, students will be asked to write a research project on an agreed-upon elected official. The project will be the culmination of the course. Students will be expected to utilize everything they learned, from collecting the data, to analyzing the data, to suggestions on how to disseminate the information and ultimately, and most importantly, how their research should affect campaign strategy. | | 30% |

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| Total | | | 100% |
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Following is the grade scale for all GSPM classes:

| Grade* | Grading Standard |
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| A 94-100 | Your work is outstanding and ready for submission in a professional environment. Your material, effort, research, and writing demonstrate superior work. |
| A- 90-93 | Represents solid work with minor errors. Overall, excellent work. |
| B+ 87-89 | Very good. Represents well-written material, research, and presentation, but needs some minor work. |
| B 83-86 | Satisfactory work, but needs reworking and more effort. Note that although not a failing grade, at the graduate level, anything below a “B” is viewed as unacceptable. |
| B- 80-82 | You’ve completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all of the requirements. |
| C+ 77-79 | Needs improvement in content and in effort. Shows a lack of motivation and concern. |
| C 73-76 | Needs reworking, improved effort, and additional research. Shows minimal motivation and concern. |
| C- 70-72 (lowest grade to pass) | Poor performance. Major errors, too many misspellings, problems with accuracy, etc. |
| F Below 70 | Unacceptable performance, or inability to submit the assignment. |

*Please note that you may be penalized for late submission of assignment(s).

Required Text and Learning Materials

[A Users Guide to the Dark Art of Politics](#)

Tentative Course Calendar*

*The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar.

Schedule:

| <i>Date:</i> | <i>Topic and readings:</i> |
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| May 21 | <p>1: Introduction/Overview: What Is Research, What Is Its Role On A Campaign - http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/07/opinion/campaign-stops/a-users-guide-to-the-dark-art-of-politics.html?_r=0</p> <p><i>Reading:</i></p> <p>In class reading What We Are Not - http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brett-c-di-resta/opposition-research_b_1395448.html,</p> |
| June 4 | <p>2: Research In The Modern Age – Researching Databases and the Internet</p> <p>Research In Person</p> |
| June 11 | <p>3: Records Analysis</p> <p><i>Assignment:</i></p> <p>First Paper</p> <p>Analyze federal voting record of selected members of Congress</p> |
| June 18 | <p>4: Defensive research – Protecting your candidate; Offensive Research - Protecting your candidate and finding weaknesses in your opponents</p> |

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| | <p><i>Reading:</i></p> <p>Campaigns and Elections – Campaign Takedowns (June 2009)</p> <p><i>Assignment:</i></p> <p>Class gets divided up into groups. Half get to provide a defensive report on a candidate while the other must create an offensive report on the same candidate.</p> |
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First Paper Due

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| <p>June 25</p> | <p>5: Oral Reports – Mid-term Projects</p> <hr/> <p>Oral reports for group project given. Groups must present reports and answer questions from opposition, fellow students and professor</p> |
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| <p>July 9</p> | <p>7: Debate Preparation Class learns how to prepare a candidate for a debate with opponents.</p> <hr/> <p><i>Reading</i></p> <p>http://content.thirdway.org/publications/532/Third_Way_Memo_-_Debate_Prep_Memo.pdf</p> |
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| <p>July 16</p> | <p>8: Rapid Response and How Research Integration to a Campaign,</p> <hr/> <p><i>Assignment:</i></p> <p>Final Research project is discussed.</p> <p>Debate Prep Memo Due</p> |
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| July 23 | Corporate, Lobbying and Policy Research |
| | Final Project due |

Copyright Statement

Unless explicitly allowed by the instructor, course materials, class discussions, and examinations are created for and expected to be used by class participants only. The recording and rebroadcasting of such material, by any means, is forbidden.