

The Graduate School
of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

M.P.S. in Political Management

Summer

May 16-July 22

Course Name

PMGT 6462.10 (Opposition Research)

3 Credits

Monday 7:10-9:40 PM

Rome 206

The Not-So-Dark Art Of Campaign Research

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://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>.

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 www.gwu.edu/~dss.

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

Class attendance and participation is mandatory.

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. Lara Brown
Director, Political Management Program
larambrown@gwu.edu | 202-994-4545

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.

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

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
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 officials. Of importance will be how the information was gathered		15%

	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		30%

	campaign strategy.		
Total			100%

Following is the grade scale for all GSPM classes:

Grade*	Grading Standard
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 some 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).

<i>Schedule:</i>	
<i>Date:</i>	<i>Topic and readings:</i>

May 16	<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>

May 23	<p>2: Research In The Modern Age – Researching Databases and the Internet</p> <p>Research In Person</p>
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June 6	<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 13	<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

<p>June 20</p>	<p>5: Oral Reports – Mid-term Projects</p>
	<p>Oral reports for group project given. Groups must present reports and answer questions from opposition, fellow students and professor</p>

<p>June 27</p>	<p>7: Debate Preparation</p> <p>Class learns how to prepare a candidate for a debate with opponents.</p>
	<p><i>Reading</i></p> <p>http://content.thirdway.org/publications/532/Third Way Memo - Debate Prep Memo.pdf</p>

<p>July 11</p>	<p>8: Rapid Response and How Research Integration to a Campaign,</p>
	<p><i>Assignment:</i></p> <p>Final Research project is discussed.</p>

Debate Prep Memo Due

July 18	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.