(Contemporary) Political Communication
COM 551 / POL 551

Mondays 9:30-12:20
CMU 242

Dr. Philip N. Howard
pnhoward@uw.edu
Department of Communication
School of Information
Jackson School of International Studies
University of Washington

9/27/2015

Investigating political communication is the process of asking and answering questions about what happens when someone tries to represent another person's interests. And studying political communication is exciting because of the social import of demonstrating the successes and failures in our leaders, institutions, and the technologies in supporting a healthy public sphere. Yet the analytical work of political communication research is tough because of the great variety in political actors involved, the wide range of evidence that is available on behavior, and the rapid development of new modes of communication and new means of manipulation.

This course is designed help students make definitional decisions in their own political communication research and look at how other scholars do such research. In this course, students explore contemporary political communication research by thinking about how to generate and test transportable theories. The readings used in the class will reflect the diversity of contemporary political communication research through a) an expansive understanding of the actors, sites and formats for political communication and b) a reading list drawn *exclusively* from the most contemporary scholarship. This effectively means that we will be generating and evaluating theories of political communication published in 2015 and drawn from the analysis of many kinds of actors, institutions, and artifacts, including people, parties, governments, institutions, texts, algorithms and software, and events.

Political communication research is a vibrant subfield because it involves a community of many kinds of scholars, from sociology, communication, and political science, and increasingly information and computer science. Focusing on the most contemporary research means that students will have a sense of the scholarly conversations that are ongoing, the modern publishing venues and opportunities, and the people and projects leading inquiry today.

Lectures will be used to present the origins and traditions in political communication inquiry, readings will be used to present the directions of inquiry. Everyone will still encounter big ideas and canonical works of political communication, but it will be through the instructor's lectures, reading each other's manuscripts, and reading how scholars use them in contemporary research.

This is less a course about what political communication has been—it is a course on what political communication research is and what it is becoming. Understanding past research is always important, and through the individualized assignment the instructor can help you come to understand what subareas of literature may be relevant for you. The risks in such an approach is that these contemporary theories may be underdeveloped, assumptions may not be well tested, and evidence may be flawed. But this is also a benefit to students: it is students who will be developing new theories, testing our current assumptions, and collecting better evidence. This course will help students understand contemporary problems in political communication research, and enable to situate your contributions to lively conversations.

This course has four objectives:

- to teach students about the assumptions, applications, strengths, and limitations of current political communication research;
- to give students a sophisticated methodological literacy, enabling them to read broadly and critically
- to engage with colleagues who have different approaches to political communication research, and to better interpret their own findings;
- to have students develop their scholarly identity through a political communication research agenda through manuscript development—a thesis proposal, an article draft, or thesis chapter as relevant for where they are in their graduate career.

By the end of this class, students should be able to assess the impact of analytical frames, data source, and methods choice on the findings of political communication research. As much as this is a class in what other people are doing in political communication research, it is also an opportunity for students to choose the questions and themes they find most interesting for their own projects. Students will leave with a sense of the contemporary book market for political communication research, an awareness of urgent problems in political communication inquiry, and the current topical demands of peer review journals.

EVALUATION
The first draft of a manuscript is due by week 5 (30 points). The nature of the draft will be negotiated with each student. The second draft of the manuscript, much evolved and accompanied by a formal presentation, is due by week 10 (50 points). Participation in class discussions will be evaluated weekly through the discussion of readings and whatever your peers passed around as their manuscript in development (20 points). When called upon to contribute you can "pass" if you haven't done the readings but do not do that too often! The participation grade will be determined by how you respond to questions, how you advance debates, and how you engage with your peers' ideas. There is no shyness component to the participation grade.

WEEKLY MEETINGS
October 5 – Introduction.

October 12 – Campaigns and Elections (Hersh 2015) OR (Pasek 2015; Lerman, McCabe, and Sadin 2015; Burnett and Kogan 2015).

October 19 – Media Elites (Usher 2015) OR (Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud 2015; Vesa, Blomberg, and Kroll 2015; Chou 2015). Watch Canadian Election returns.

November 2 – Social Media (Gerodimos and Justinussen 2015; Bastos and Mercea 2015; Song and Jr 2015).

November 9 Knowledge and Networks (Dixon et al. 2015; Southwell and Thorson 2015; Bond and Messing 2015).

November 16 Political Culture (Aronczyk 2015; Karpf et al. 2015; Schradie 2015).

November 23 – Standards and Protocols (DeNardis 2015) OR (Powers and Jablonski 2015).

November 30 – Parties and Activism (Gold 2015; Servaes and Hoyng 2015) OR (Wells 2015).

December 7 – Public Scholarship in Political Communication (Marczak 2015; Railton and Kleemola 2015; Horrigan and Rainie 2015). Note please look over the Pew survey instrument that came with this report.

READING LIST
Aronczyk, Melissa. 2015. "Understanding the Impact of the Transnational Promotional Class on Political Communication." *International Journal of Communication* 9 (0): 20.
Bastos, Marco T., and Dan Mercea. 2015. "Serial Activists: Political Twitter beyond Influentials and the Twittertariat." *New Media & Society*, May, 1–20. doi:10.1177/1461444815584764.
Bond, Robert, and Solomon Messing. 2015. "Quantifying Social Media's Political Space: Estimating Ideology from Publicly Revealed Preferences on Facebook." *American Political Science Review* 109 (01): 62–78.
Burnett, Craig M., and Vladimir Kogan. 2015. "When Does Ballot Language Influence Voter Choices? Evidence from a Survey Experiment." *Political Communication* 32 (1): 109–26. doi:10.1080/10584609.2014.894160.
Chou, Hsuan-Yi. 2015. "Celebrity Political Endorsement Effects: A Perspective on the Social Distance of Political Parties." *International Journal of Communication* 9 (0): 24.
DeNardis, Laura. 2015. *The Global War for Internet Governance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Dixon, Graham N., Brooke Weberling McKeever, Avery E. Holton, Christopher Clarke, and Gina Eosco. 2015. "The Power of a Picture: Overcoming Scientific Misinformation by Communicating Weight-of-Evidence Information with Visual Exemplars." *Journal of Communication* 65 (4): 639–59. doi:10.1111/jcom.12159.
Figenschou, Tine Ustad, and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud. 2015. "Qualitative Political Communication| Backstage Media-Political Elite Negotiations: The Failure and Success of Government Pitch." *International Journal of Communication* 9 (0): 19.
Gerodimos, Roman, and Jákup Justinussen. 2015. "Obama's 2012 Facebook Campaign: Political Communication in the Age of the Like Button." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 12 (2): 113–32. doi:10.1080/19331681.2014.982266.

Gold, Howard J. 2015. "Americans' Attitudes Toward the Political Parties and the Party System." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 79 (3): 803–19. doi:10.1093/poq/nfv033.

Hersh, Eitan. 2015. *Hacking the Electorate: How Campaigns Perceive Voters*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Horrigan, John B., and Lee Rainie. 2015. "Americans' Views on Open Government Data." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. Accessed September 10. http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/21/open-government-data/.

Karpf, David, Daniel Kreiss, Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, and Matthew Powers. 2015. "The Role of Qualitative Methods in Political Communication Research: Past, Present, and Future." *International Journal of Communication* 9 (0): 19.

Lerman, Amy E., Katherine T. McCabe, and Meredith L. Sadin. 2015. "Political Ideology, Skin Tone, and the Psychology of Candidate Evaluations." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 79 (1): 53–90. doi:10.1093/poq/nfu055.

Marczak, Bill. 2015. *China's Great Cannon*. Toronto, ON: Citizen Lab. https://citizenlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/ChinasGreatCannon.pdf.

Pasek, Josh. 2015. "Predicting Elections: Considering Tools to Pool the Polls." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 79 (2): 594–619. doi:10.1093/poq/nfu060.

Powers, Shawn M., and Michael Jablonski. 2015. *The Real Cyber War: The Political Economy of Internet Freedom*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Railton, John Scott, and Katie Kleemola. 2015. "Two-Factor Authentication Phishing From Iran." *The Citizen Lab*. Accessed September 9. https://citizenlab.org/2015/08/iran_two_factor_phishing/.

Schradie, Jen. 2015. "Labor Unions, Social Media, and Political Ideology: Using the Internet to Reach the Powerful or Mobilize the Powerless?" *International Journal of Communication* 9 (0): 21.

Servaes, Jan, and Rolien Hoyng. 2015. "The Tools of Social Change: A Critique of Techno-Centric Development and Activism." *New Media & Society*, September. doi:10.1177/1461444815604419.

Song, Hyunjin, and William P. Eveland Jr. 2015. "The Structure of Communication Networks Matters: How Network Diversity, Centrality, and Context Influence Political Ambivalence, Participation, and Knowledge." *Political Communication* 32 (1): 83–108. doi:10.1080/10584609.2014.882462.

Southwell, Brian G., and Emily A. Thorson. 2015. "The Prevalence, Consequence, and Remedy of Misinformation in Mass Media Systems." *Journal of Communication* 65 (4): 589–95. doi:10.1111/jcom.12168.

Usher, Nikki. 2015. *Making News at The New York Times*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Vesa, Juho, Helena Blomberg, and Christian Kroll. 2015. "Minimal and Massive! Politicians' Views on the Media's Political Agenda-Setting Power Revisited." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, March, 1940161215575391. doi:10.1177/1940161215575391.

Wells, Chris. 2015. *The Civic Organization and the Digital Citizen: Communicating Engagement in a Networked Age*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.