Syllabus—J496/596: Persuasion and Ethics

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Course Objective
To become familiar with the basic principles of persuasive communication through the examination of various aspects of popular culture—politics, mass media, advertising, the internet—as they exemplify and teach critical theories of persuasion. The course will focus on persuasion theory, research, and ethics and how a knowledge of language and critical thinking can make us better communicators as well as consumers of communication.

Assignments
All class assignments will be listed each week on the course web site.

Note: DATE AND TITLE EACH ASSIGNMENT

For I, II, and III below, no late assignments will be accepted for any reason. It is up to you to make sure you know what assignment is due on what date.

I. Thoughts for the day: A typed page with at least two or more of the following kinds of entries:
   • a question regarding the treatment of a specific concept or theory in the readings or in lecture;
   • a thought that runs counter to the reading’s observations regarding a specific example, concept, term, or theory;
   • an illustration of one of the points made in the reading (from family, friends, watching TV, or other source) that helps to apply a term, concept or theory;
   • a reference to a “show and tell” item (ad, video clip, etc.) that illustrates a relevant point in the reading. Bring in the item.

The purpose is threefold: to engage you in thinking about how the material applies to your own life experience/situation; to facilitate interaction during the class sessions (via class discussion); and to add to the overall knowledge base for the course. The entries will be handed in at the close of the day’s session; we may not get to all of the specific issues or examples contained in any one weekly entry. Those we don’t get to may be targeted for discussion at the beginning of the next class. (10%) 

II. Abstracts: A typed page abstracting (summarizing) the readings for that day. This assignment is to ensure that you are doing the readings and is a companion to the “Thoughts for the day” assignment. (10%)
III. Homework: Throughout the term, there will be homework assignments that relate to the readings: analysis, commentary, examples, etc. These will be announced along with the readings for the class in which they are due. Format for homework will also be clarified for each assignment. (40%)

All homework must be typed out and handed in at the end of class. I will accept no homework electronically, in my mailbox, under my office door, or anywhere else except in class the day it is due. IF YOU DO NOT ATTEND CLASS, I WILL NOT ACCEPT YOUR HOMEWORK. (See "Acceptable Absences" below for exceptions.)

Homework assignments will be handed back within approximately one week after they are turned in. It is in your best interest to keep these in case there is a discrepancy in your final grade at the end of the term.

IV. Persuasion and Ethics Paper: (40%)

- **Option 1:** With primary attention given to the discussion of Visual Persuasion, select a topic that you are able to relate to political or social uses of persuasion, to advertising, sales, information campaigns, or to other issues presented in class. The goal is to focus attention on the manner in which persuasive messages in the visual realm are utilized to convey attitudes and/or effect actions within society. Beyond presenting information in a descriptive fashion, the paper should contain a clear argument—what is your interpretation of the manner in which the message is constructed and relayed to an audience? The number of items to examine will vary depending on the topic chosen, but the expectation would be for a more formal 12-15 page paper.

- **Option 2:** The same as Option 1, except pay primary attention to Verbal Persuasion. Rhetorical theory would be especially to a paper on verbal persuasion.

- **Option 3:** With primary attention given to the discussion of Propaganda, select a topic that you are able to relate to political uses of persuasion in the past or present. You may chose to examine an entire campaign or individual examples of propaganda. If you chose individual propaganda techniques instead of a complete campaign, the number of items to examine will vary depending on the topic chosen, but the expectation would be for a more formal 12-15 page paper.

**PAPER SETUP REQUIREMENTS:**
- Use white paper only, printed on one side, stapled in the upper left-hand corner.
- Be sure your name and the title of your paper are clearly stated on a cover page.
- Number all text pages at the bottom.
- The page count does not include end notes or a cover page.
- Use some form of Times font no larger than 12 points.
• Margins should be set no wider than .75 top, .60 bottom, 1.25 left, 1.25 right.
• Do not place your paper in a cover or folder of any kind.

Class Participation
Class participation is greatly encouraged. Merely sitting in class is not participating. Part of what you learn in this class will depend on your level of involvement.

If for some reason class is cancelled (bad weather, instructor illness, etc.), there will be a message on the "announcements" page on Blackboard as well as an email directly to you from the instructor. It's in your best interest to check the announcements regularly and to keep your email address updated.

Acceptable Absences The ONLY acceptable absences are:

• students participating in University-sanctioned athletic or academic events,
• physician-verified illnesses,
• verifiable emergencies only if accompanied by a note from the office of academic advising.

Please e-mail the instructor IN ADVANCE OR AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE about your absence. Arrangements will be made for missed homework and other assignments.

Grading Criteria for written work—essays, research papers, homework, and other assignments.
F—Reveals you really have no clue what is going on, or are so carelessly inattentive to matters of style as to write an incomprehensible response.

D—Reveals less than adequate understanding of theory, concept, or other relevant information. Answer may also misapply concept, use an inappropriate or weak example in attempting to clarify an explanation, or may ramble on in the hope that something will eventually hit the intended target. Answer also may be more or less on target, but carelessly or sloppily written_proofed.

C—Provides an on-target recitation of the correct material from the text or other sources being consulted. Answer meets the basic expectations with respect to number of outside sources, or other conditions of a specific assignment. The writing, while clear and comprehensible, is otherwise non-exceptional, or gives evidence of inattention to basic matters of grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

B—Is not only on-target, but is written in a clear, well-organized style, with few errors (and indicates attention given to correcting spelling or punctuation mistakes). In addition, examples illustrate thought beyond recall or recitation of a text’s commentary and adds to the overall understanding of the theory, concept, or other materials being evaluated. There is evidence of having gone beyond the text to consult other sources of information that might be relevant.
A—Goes beyond that required for a “B” response to indicate critical analysis, offering evidence of a cogent, well-reasoned defense of a position or argument that is advanced relative to the object under consideration. In other words, the answer reveals a clear authorial voice in command of the material. In addition, the style is elegant, indicating careful attention to presenting a well-constructed, well-thought-out response that advances understanding, stimulates thought or is otherwise evidence of exceptional thinking. Note: These standards apply as general guidelines for the evaluation of assigned papers, essays, etc. [for speeches, simply read as if one were presenting report orally]. As should be clear, inattention to matters of style/format will result in a corresponding decrease in a grade, even when content is otherwise clear and on-target.

As a further explanation of these criteria, consider the following comments:
(1) A “C” answer is a good answer—it simply does not do any more than is being asked.
(2) A “B” answer is a better answer, but does not reveal depth of analysis that would be required to be considered exceptional.
(3) An “A” is an exceptional piece of work. Simply understanding the material is not the equivalent of an “A.”