Description:

This course works from the premise that perhaps the most important variable for successful politicians is their ability to effectively communicate and connect with audiences. Toward that end, this course includes the teaching of state-of-the-art techniques for delivering a great speech and for successfully taking charge of and winning difficult communication settings like interviews or debates. Thus, this course teaches students, regardless of their proficiency in public communications or their experience as a public speaker, how to be the strongest possible communicators by concentrating on delivery techniques in communication settings. The course does this through extensive media training and communications delivery lectures as well as hands on communication deliveries by each student including delivering speeches, being interviewed, and culminating with each student performing in mock presidential debates. All of these speeches, interviews and debates are critiqued on an individual basis by the professor for each of the students.

While the course is designed to develop these skills in a political setting, the techniques are applicable in any communications setting regardless of the occupation of the communicator. Moreover, the skills are empirically proven communication techniques across cultural and geographic boundaries and as such apply to students from the United States as well as to students from any nation on earth. Indeed, the instructor has taught these techniques to candidates around the world including candidates in the United States and from Asia, Africa, Latin America, South America and Europe.

The communication tools taught include extensive training in the use of body language and voice techniques to make students better speakers as well as a litany of word “techniques” to make a speaker’s presentation and message come alive. These techniques include the use of emotion and passion in delivering communication messages. The course will show students how to “win” an interview and get the story they want. It will train students on how to perform in high pressure debates and how to message properly and will show them how to always stay on message.

Because the course is designed to encourage students to consider public service careers, the course begins by dissecting the right and wrong reasons people run for office and which skill sets give politicians the greatest ability to communicate an effective message and to succeed electorally. The instructor has worked with political candidates and political parties around the world and believes that the best political candidates anywhere in the world are those who understand the importance of public service and leadership and the course works
hard to offer a design for potential candidates to develop their own leadership skills as they
develop their political and communication ones.

Following lectures giving students a foundation in the importance of leadership skills, the
course shifts into a variety of lectures on how to make any politician a skilled and effective
communicator. Through a series of lectures and exercises where students are tested on their
communication skills, the instructor hopes to make students familiar with new and effective
communication techniques while he demystifies various communication activities in which
candidates regularly will have to participate. It explores the nuances and importance of
media training and preparing the candidate for public appearances and speeches. It assesses
how to write a good speech and more importantly how to deliver a good speech while
making sure a candidate understands the various audiences to which a speech appeals and
how a candidate can best “connect” with his or her audiences.

To assist in this individual effort, students will be required to deliver speeches and
interviews in a class setting that will be videotaped both at the beginning of the semester and
then again near the end of the semester. These speeches and interviews will be critiqued by
the professor for and with the individual students to determine progress made as good
communicators.

In addition to these activities, early in the semester, the entire class will be divided into
“campaign teams” with each team selecting a candidate, a policy director, a communications
director, and a campaign manager. Each of these members will, near the end of the semester,
debate their counterparts from the other campaign teams. These debates will be videotaped
and critiqued by the professor for each student’s individual performance.

Finally, the campaign teams, with their selected candidate, will hold a semester’s end Mock
Presidential Debate complete with war rooms and spin rooms in which the various
campaign teams will work to win the debate and the election. Campaign staffers will be
judged on their specific and particular assigned roles. This exercise has become one of the
most popular, demanding and rewarding student activities at the Kennedy School each
semester. Awards will be presented to each debate winner.

In addition the course offers a specific lecture section designed for women candidates to
help women understand the different pressures placed on them in a political
communications setting and to show male students what these differences mean if they were
to be running against women candidates. Throughout the semester the instructor along with
the class will review specific student interviews and speeches to give students a firsthand
look at how the techniques learned in class can be put to use in the real world of political
communications.

Assignments and Grading:
The class will be asked to complete a combination of three individual or group assignments during the course of the semester plus a midterm exam. Class attendance is required.

**Exercise 1:** First, early in the semester, each student will be asked to write and deliver a short speech for assessment by the professor as to the communication skill level of each student. The speech will be video-taped and critiqued by the professor for and with the individual students. Then late in the semester, each student will be asked to deliver the same speech again, following their extensive media training in class. The speech will again be video-taped and critiqued by the professor assessing how the student advanced from his or her first speech to the second one – thus it does not matter what the level of communication skills possessed by the student during the first speech. The ultimate grade for this exercise will be determined by how far the student has progressed from the first to second speech. This exercise will be worth 20 percent of the student’s final grade.

**Exercise 2:** Second, early in the semester each student will be interviewed as though they were a candidate for political office or are already an elected official. Questions will be generic in nature and will deal with issues of the day or big picture philosophical positions of the student. The goal is to see how students react on camera, how quick they are on their feet and generally how well they handle the interview session. These interviews will be videotaped for critique by the professor for and with the individual students and will be given a numerical grade that will be used as a non-binding guide to see how far the students progress by semester’s end. Then later in the semester, the students will be interviewed again with some generic questions as well as some “gotcha” questions fabricating a scandal on the part of the student as politician. These interviews will come after media training techniques for interviews have been taught and will again be videotaped for critique by the professor for the individual students. These interviews will be given numerical grades that will count toward the student’s final grade. This second interview assignment will be worth 20 percent of the student’s final grade.

**Exercise 3:** All students will participate in a class Mock Presidential Debate. Students will play roles from candidate, to campaign manager, to press secretary, to policy director. This exercise will be worth 30 percent of the student’s final grade. Each campaign team member will debate their counterparts from the other campaign teams and their performance will be critiqued and judged by the professor. These individual performances will be worth 25 percent of the student’s final grade. Then each team will be assessed as many as 5 additional points for their overall debate performance as a team, including the debate books handed in and for their performance in the debate “spin” rooms.

**Midterm Exam:** A midterm exam worth 25 percent of the final grade will be given in the middle of the semester. The midterm exam will test students on the three required books assigned to the class. **There will be no final exam.**

**Class Participation and Attendance:** Student participation and attendance in class is considered vital to the overall learning experience. As such, attendance is required and participation will be monitored. Individual student participation over the course of the semester is worth 5 total points toward the student’s overall grade.
Required Readings:


The Political Brain, Drew Westen, Public Affairs, 2007

Words That Work, Dr. Frank Luntz, Hyperion, 2007

Class Schedule:

Thursday, September 3 – First day of class – Overview of class materials and responsibilities; First Lecture – The Art of Communications

Tuesday, September 8 – Lecture – The Art of Political Communications

***First Interviews and Speeches Scheduled***

First Interviews and Speeches Scheduled to be taped September 8th-11th; Students will be asked to write a three minute speech announcing their own run for political office. Speeches will be videotaped for critique by the professor. Written critiques will be given to students on an individual basis and the speeches will be given a non-binding grade to serve as a benchmark for each student. At the end of the semester, the same speech will be given by the student for an actual grade that will be determined by the speechmaking ability of the student and by how far the individual student has come in their speechmaking performance. In addition, very early in the semester, each student will be videotaped giving an interview as a candidate or as an elected official. These interviews also will be given a non-binding grade to serve as a benchmark for each student. Then at the end of the semester, the student will again be videotaped giving an interview for an actual grade that will be determined by the interview ability of the student or by how far the individual student has come in their interview performance. Following the first speeches and interviews, the professor will schedule one-on-one meetings with each student in order to critique each speech and interview individually.

Thursday, September 10 – Lecture – The Art of Political Communications

Tuesday, September 15 – Debate Logistics Detailed and Lecture on Media Training

Thursday, September 17 - Lecture on Media Training – Debate Teams Named

***Students divided into Debate Teams***

On Thursday, September 17, students will be randomly divided into “campaign teams.” Each campaign team will select a presidential candidate, a campaign manager, a policy director and a communications director and will begin running and preparing for the end of the semester debates, where each campaign team member will debate their
counterparts on the other campaign teams. All of this will culminate with an end of the semester Mock Presidential Debate involving the selected team “candidates” and their entire teams. In addition to each student’s debate performance, each student will be graded on overall preparation, pre-debate spin, materials prepared, conduct of actual debate, and post-debate spin.

**Tuesday, September 22** – Lecture: Media Training

**Thursday, September 24** – Lecture: Media Training

**Tuesday, September 29** – Lecture: Media Training

**Thursday, October 1** – Lecture: Media Training

**Tuesday, October 6** – Lecture: Media Training

**Thursday, October 8** – Student “In Class Workshops” on Interviewing & Speech Making

**Tuesday, October 13** – Speech Making Lecture

**Thursday, October 15** – Speech Making Lecture

**Tuesday, October 20** – Speech Making Lecture

**Thursday, October 22** – MIDTERM EXAM

**Tuesday, October 27** – Debate Prep Lecture

***Second Student Speeches and Interviews***

Second Student Speeches and Interviews will be videotaped October 27th-30th.

**Thursday, October 29** – Debate Prep

**Tuesday, November 3** - Debate Prep

**Thursday, November 5** – Debate Prep

**Tuesday, November 10** – Debate Prep

**Thursday, November 12** – Debate Prep

**Tuesday, November 17** – Pressures on Women Candidates in Public Speaking and How Men Should React

**Thursday, November 19** – Pressures on Woman Candidates in Public Speaking and How Men Should React
Tuesday, November 24 – Pressures on Women Candidates in Public Speaking and How Men Should React

Thursday, November 26 – NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING RECESS

Tuesday, December 1 – Critique of Student Debates and Second Speeches and Interviews

Thursday, December 3 – CANDIDATE DEBATE CRITIQUE AND REVIEW – FINAL LECTURE ON LEADERSHIP IN POLITICS

Key Dates for the Semester

September 8-11 – (Tuesday-Friday) – First student speeches and interviews taped

September 17 – (Tuesday) – Students divided into debate teams

October 20 – (Tuesday) – First campaign ad due at beginning of class

October 22 – (Thursday) – MIDTERM EXAM

October 27-30 – (Tuesday-Friday) – Second student speeches and interviews taped

November 16 – (Monday) – 2 Campaign Manager debates

November 17 – (Tuesday) – 2 Policy Director debates

November 19 – (Thursday) – 2 Press Secretary debates

November 19 – (Thursday) – Second campaign ad due at beginning of class

November 30 or December 1 – (Monday/Tuesday) – 2 Presidential Candidate debates