GSWS 320-4: Special Topics: Opinion, Propaganda and Political Communication

Professor: Dr. Catherine Murray  
Email: murraye@sfu.ca

Office: K-9670; 778-782-5322
Office hours: TBA
Lecture: Mondays 13:30 – 17:20; SECB 1013

Course Description:
This seminar course examines the core paradox of political discourse in a democratic society today. Despite rising levels of education and citizen interest in 24-hour news and contemporary forms of satire, voting turnout in most advanced democracies is declining, and the majority (two in three) of young voters (under the age of 25) do not choose to vote. We look at how politics is defined and meaning is mediated within the communicative public sphere, during and between elections. Is politics good entertainment? To what extent are formal political systems increasingly bypassed by social media or by other modes of public assembly? We look at the insider and outsider worlds of the spin doctors, political journalists, strategists and speechwriters, and raise questions of moral ethics. Why are there persistent age and gender gaps in political mobilization? How are insistent indigenous or racialized minorities seizing political recognition? What are “good” politics and “bad” politics? Conversely, what is “good” political communication, which empowers citizens, allows collective decisions, enables sustainable democracies, and mediates extremism? And how are judgements about “bad” political communication made, which demobilizes citizens, deceives political actors, or drives wedges amongst peoples to preserve power?

This seminar places a strong emphasis on engaging with political discourse by discussion, analyzing rhetoric, and writing opinion pieces.

The seminar is open to students taking the Dialogue Minor. For the Fall 2013 Semester, students will grapple with the problem of making the generational and gender shifts beginning in Canadian democracy, at the municipal levels using the fall city elections as our live laboratory. What are the principal discourses on trust, fear, social justice, entrepreneurship, and hope in our democratic societies today, and which ones show the most promise for a fundamental political renewal or realignment?

Learning Outcomes:
- To enable students to identify the principal institutions, interests and actors in political communication.
- To explore rhetoric, political marketing, and the political (dark/light) arts of persuasion.
- To produce two short, expressive pieces of political writing: a speech, and an editorial.
- To write an advanced academic argument.
- To create space for summative self–reflection on the craft of political communication.

Prerequisite: 15 units.
Course Texts and Courseware:

**Required Text:**

- Selected additional articles for the seminar topics will be available on the course Canvas.

**Recommended Readings:**


Course Evaluation and Assignments:

*(to be confirmed in first class)*

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<td>Seminar Participation</td>
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<td>Presentation(s) as Assigned</td>
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<td>Mid-Term Speech (in class - 7 minutes)</td>
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<td>Op. Ed Piece (750 words)</td>
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<td>Final Paper (9-12 pages)</td>
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