GSWS 320-4: ST: Opinion, Propaganda And Political Communication: Making the Generational Shift in Democratic Renewal

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Office hours: Mondays 12:30-13:25; 17:30-18:30 or by appointment made over email, for Friday afternoon 14:30-16:30.  
Lecture: Mondays 13:30 – 17:20; AQ 5037

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 spindoctors, political journalists, strategists and speechwriters, and raise questions of moral ethics. 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 federal, provincial and municipal levels. 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?

Objectives:
- 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 editorial
- To write an advanced academic argument
- To create space for summative self-reflection on the craft of political communication for communication majors.

Course Texts and Courseware:
Required:
- Selected additional articles for the seminar topics will be available on the course WebCT/Canvas
- Assigned articles are found online or on reserve.

Recommended:

Course Evaluation and Assignments: (to be confirmed in first class)
Seminar Participation 10%  
Presentation(s) 10% AS ASSIGNED  
Midterm Speech (in class) (7minutes) 20% DUE OCTOBER 21, 28  
Op Ed piece (750 words) 20% DUE NOVEMBER 18  
Final paper (9-12 pages) 40% DUE DECEMBER 9 4:00 PM - CMNS

Prerequisite: 15 units

THE DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN’S STUDIES ENCOURAGES CLARITY OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION AND GOOD WRITING. STUDENTS WILL BE EVALUATED ON THESE SKILLS IN ALL COURSES GIVEN BY THE DEPARTMENT.

IN ADDITION, THE DEPARTMENT WILL FOLLOW POLICY T10.02 WITH RESPECT TO “INTELLECTUAL HONESTY,” AND “ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE” (WWW.SFU.CA/POLICIES/TEACHING)