

SPCOM 420: Persuasion

Faculty of Arts, Department of Communication Arts, Fall 2019
Wednesday: 2:30-5:20, ML-117

Professor Robert Danisch

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Course Description:

Bertrand Russell once remarked that: “What is distinctively human at the most fundamental level is the capacity to persuade and be persuaded.” This is a lofty claim. I’d add to it by suggesting that the capacity to persuade is a key to effective leadership and the foremost demonstration of effective communication skills. Persuasion lies at the heart of our personal and professional lives, whether the goal is to convince one person in a face-to-face encounter, influence a small group in a meeting, sway an entire organization, or win over the public. This course investigates persuasion—how we can convince others to voluntarily change their attitudes or behavior in order to accomplish our cherished goals—by extracting from our knowledge of human behavior proven principles of effective influence.

This course uses a variety of pedagogical methods to develop students’ practical skills in persuasion, including lecture/discussions, case studies, role-play simulations, and classroom exercises. Along the way we will examine the communicative, psychological, and sociological aspects of persuasion and persuasive messages. We will explore the ways in which the sending and receiving of persuasive messages involve cognition, emotions, and social norms in everyday contexts. We will examine theories of how and why persuasion works in public discourse, and have opportunities to practice applying the skills of critical thinking to the principles of persuasion in assignments, class discussions, and everyday life in and outside of the classroom. Essentially we will learn how and why people are convinced to do things by words and symbols.

Course Objectives:

- Promote students’ ability to think critically, clearly and analytically. This means understanding the ideas and concepts raised throughout the course, their origins, strengths, weaknesses, and their relationship to larger themes in this class, in your education, and in your view of the world.
- Improve students’ abilities to persuade others and to improve students’ abilities to analyze and resist the ways in which others try to persuade them.
- Improve students’ abilities to read and listen critically, to respond reflectively and reasonably to others, and to distinguish successful and unsuccessful arguments.
- To gain a conceptual and practical understanding of the background, elements, processes, and contexts of persuasion from psychological and sociological perspectives.

- To increase your understanding of how perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, and social norms are active in shaping the sending and reception of persuasive messages.
- To better understand the relationship of rhetoric/persuasion, critical questioning, and democracy.

Course Policies and Procedures:

- *In the Classroom* – This class will be a mixture of lecture, discussion, and practical exercises. During some class periods, I will deliver a lecture on the topics outlined on the course schedule. However, that does not mean I expect you to be passive consumers. At times I will be asking you questions and I will expect you to ask me questions. In addition, I will ask you to provide examples of concepts we talk about in class, and so participation in lectures will be encouraged in a variety of ways. I expect this to be a lively class. Also, please turn off all ringing electronic devices when entering the classroom. The sound of a cell phone (or any other device) is extremely distracting to your professor, and I assume to your fellow classmates, and it is rude and offensive. Finally, no texting in class. Period. End of story. Leave the cell phone in your bag. No texting. Please don't text in class. That's no texting in class. In case it wasn't clear, do not send text messages while in class.
- *Attendance* – Your presence in class is mandatory. You should be aware that the best way to do well in this course is to show up to every class, prepared and attentive. Inevitably, at the end of the semester, students who missed classes do poorly, while students who show up consistently do well. I do not post lecture notes on the Internet, nor do I respond to emails that say “what did we talk about in class on Friday.” We cover lots of material in class and for that reason it is critical that you attend in order to do well. Attendance also means refraining from playing with your cell phone, reading the newspaper, surfing the internet, using other electronic devices or doing other coursework while in the classroom. If I notice you engaged in some activity that does not pertain to what is happening in the class, I will ask you to leave. This course is designed for courteous, motivated students who attend each class, do all the reading, and ask questions when they don't understand something. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting materials we covered from a classmate. Students who fail to meet these basic and reasonable expectations can assume that their performance on assignments will suffer. Students who miss an excessive number of classes can expect to lose points from their final mark.
- *Academic Integrity* – I expect that the work you complete for this course will be your own, which is to say that cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any written assignment that borrows from other sources without giving proper credit or that is plagiarized in whole or in part from another source (including other student's work) is grounds for an “F” on the assignment, or depending on the severity of the crime, is grounds for an “F” in the course.

University Policies on Academic Integrity:

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and

responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline. <http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71>

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4. <http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/student-grievances-faculty-guidelines/policy-70>

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals. <http://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72>

Academic Integrity website (Arts):

http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (University):

<http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

The AccessAbility Services (AS) Office, located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS Office at the beginning of each academic term.

Required Texts and Readings:

I like books - I like buying them, I like reading them, I like keeping them on my bookshelf, I like talking to people about them. Reading makes you smarter. You should read a lot. I wish I could assign a book a week, but that doesn't seem to be the culture anymore for undergraduate students. During the first class I will ask all of you to write down your email addresses, and afterwards I will construct a dropbox folder for the class. Everyone will be invited to join the dropbox folder and you will be able to find all of the readings inside the folder. You should print the readings out or bring some electronic device to class that allows you to read them off a screen. I expect students to access all readings

regardless of their location. BUT. And this is a big BUT. If you are a fantastic student, super bright and eager you should really consider buying the following books: Robert Danisch's *What Effect Have I Had?*, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, *Words that Work* by Frank Luntz, *Influence* by Robert Cialdini, *The Story Factor* by Annette Simmons, *The Culture Code* by Clotaire Rapaille, *Descartes' Error* by Antonio Demasio, Jason Stanley's *How Propaganda Works*, and *The Psychology of Persuasion* by Kevin Hogan. All of these books are on Amazon.com as paperbacks or used. You should buy them and read them, cover to cover. We will read sections from each but you should really read them all at some point if you are seriously interested in mastering the content of this class. If you buy the books, then just bring the books to class – you'll look smarter at least. In any case, I believe that reading a lot is good and so we will try to read a lot this semester. Each week I will give you assigned readings and then I will mention extra reading that you can do to go above and beyond the normal expectations of the course.

Assignments:

- 1) **Research and Synthesize** – Your first short paper will require you to do some independent research into academic work on persuasion and synthesize that work into a coherent, objective, and rational account of persuasive practices. You'll be asked to choose from a variety of potential concepts, questions, or researchers and simply synthesize the latest research in 4-6 pages. This paper will be due on October 2nd. It will be worth 25% of your final grade.
- 2) **Contextualize and Analyze** – Your second short paper will require you to choose a particular primary example of persuasion in action. You will then take this primary source and apply the concepts from class in an effort to analyze its structure, form, effect, intended audience, and language. Your example can be an image, speech, picture, movie, commercial, anything that attempts to convince a particular audience of something. This paper will be 4-6 pages long and due on October 30th. It will be worth 25% of your final grade.
- 3) **Convince Me!** – In your third short paper, you will attempt to persuade me of some particular proposition. I don't care how you do it, what the proposition happens to be. Only a thoroughly convincing case that has made me believe in the proposition being advanced will receive an A. Unlike Short Paper #1 or #2, this is not a standard academic paper. Sometimes, we ought to violate standards in order to produce effects. I only care that you hand me 3-7 pages of paper. I don't care what's on it. And I will evaluate the thing that is handed in based on the effect it produced on the audience (me). This will be due on November 20th and it will be worth 25% of your final grade.
- 4) **Self-Reflective Communication Audit** – A communication audit critically assesses the specific communication practices of a particular person, team, or organization. The purpose of this kind of audit is to show specifically where and how a person or group can improve communication competencies. You will write an end-of-term audit of your own communication skills in the light of the practices of persuasion that we discussed during the semester. In other words, you will reflect on how persuasive you are and what practices you might employ to become more persuasive.

This assignment will be worth 25% of your final grade and it will be due on December 6th.

Grading Policies:

- *How are Grades Calculated?* - For each of the four assignments you will receive a score out of 100 points. Given that each assignment is worth 25% of your final grade, I will take the average of your four scores and that will be your grade for the semester. I do not like giving students numerical marks and I think it is an inferior system of grading. In my mind, I often think in terms of a letter grade. So that you know, your number out of 100 points translates into the following letter grades:

90-100 = A+	73-76 = B	60-62 = C-	0-50 = F
85-89 = A	70-72 = B-	57-59 = D+	
80-84 = A-	67-69 = C+	53-56 = D	
77-79 = B+	63-66 = C	50-52 = D-	

- *What do the Grades Mean?* – Loosely translated the letter grades mean the following: an A+ is truly outstanding and spectacular work that goes well above and beyond the normal expectations of an assignment and demonstrates a complete mastery of the subject matter. An A or an A- is excellent and exceptional work. A grade in the B range is good to very good work that demonstrates a solid grasp of the material. A grade in the C range is average work that demonstrates a satisfactory but incomplete grasp of the course material. A grade in the D range is unsatisfactory work of poor quality. And an F is failing work that does not meet the minimum requirements for the course. Because grades in the A range are exceptional and grades in the C range are average, A grades are rare and difficult to obtain. I'm telling you this so that you know that if you earn a 75 on an assignment it means that I think the assignment is good not excellent. If you earn a 95, it means it's one of the best pieces of work I've have ever seen for this kind of class.
- *Extensions* – There are no extensions for any assignment. Assignments are announced well in advance of due dates. If you know in advance that you cannot make a due date for an assignment, please discuss it with me beforehand. Requests for extensions after a due date has passed will only be granted in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances and must include (a) one typed, double-spaced page explaining the reason for missing the deadline, and (b) relevant documentation such as an official doctor's note. The written request for an extension must be in my hands within one week after the scheduled due date. I am under no obligation to accept late assignments; assignments that are accepted may suffer a significant penalty (5 points for each day late).
- *Negotiations and Missed Assignments* - I do not haggle with students over grades, nor do I listen to declarations about why a student deserves an extra point here or there. You and I will not be negotiating your grade for the class – you will be earning a grade based on criteria that are explicitly stated in class. In addition, after the final grades are posted for the semester I will not re-mark or re-consider any grade from earlier in the semester. If you do not understand why you got a particular grade or why you lost points on a given assignment, you should

come to my office hours or make an appointment to see me and I will explain your grade. If you do not participate in, or hand in, the final exam or either of the collaborative papers you will receive an F for the course.

Course Schedule:

Week #1 – September 4th – Introduction to Course – What is Persuasion? Why Persuasion?

***You should have read the preface to my book *What Effect Have I Had?* before coming to class, or at least listened to Episode 001 of my podcast "Now We're Talking" which can be found here: <https://soundcloud.com/rdanisch/episode-001>

Week #2 – September 11th – Ancient Rhetoric, Aristotle, and Character

Readings:

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 1 – Chapters 1, 2, and 3; Book 2 – Chapters 1, 2, 12, 20, and 22.

Week #3 – September 18th – Words, Magical Words, and Identification

Readings:

Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1989): 77-125 and 179-191.

Frank Luntz, *Words that Work: It's not What You Say, It's What People Hear* (Hyperion, 2006): 1-33, 71-80.

Week #4 – September 25th – Influence, Compliance, and the Relationship between Reason and Emotion

Readings:

Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (HaperCollins, 2007).

Antonio Demasio, *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (Penguin Books, 1994): 165-201.

Week #5 – October 2nd – Narrative and Story-Telling

Readings:

Annette Simmons, *The Story Factor* (Basic Books, 2006): 27-48, 105-131, and 157-180.

Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration* (University of South Carolina Press, 1989): 57-78.

Short Paper #1 – Research and Synthesize – Due.

Week #6 – October 9th – How and Why Propaganda Persuades

Reading:

Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton University Press, 2015): 39-222.

No Class on October 16th - Reading Week**Week #7 – October 23rd** – Argumentation, Reasoning, and Rational Persuasion

Readings:

Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research* (University of Chicago Press, 2008): pp. 108-170.

Week #8 – October 30th - The Psychology of Persuasion and Non-verbal Priming

Readings:

Kevin Hogan, *The Psychology of Persuasion* (Pelican Publishing Company, 1996): 41-114.

Robert Gass & John Seiter, *Persuasion, Social Influence and Compliance Gaining* (Pearson, 2007): 299-343.

Short Paper #2 – Contextualize and Analyze – Due.

Week #9 – November 6th – Background Assumptions and the Sociology of Persuasion

Readings:

Lawrence Lessig, “The Regulation of Social Meaning,” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 62, no. 3, 951-962, 1008-1014 (943-1045).

Clotaire Rapaille, *The Culture Code: An Ingenious Way to Understand Why People Around the World Live and Buy as They Do* (Broadway, 2006): 1-54 and 73-92.

Week #10 – November 13th – Psychographics, Cambridge Analytica, Russian Trolls and the 2016 Election

Readings:

"Cambridge Analytica: How Did it Turn Clicks into Votes?"

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/06/cambridge-analytica-how-turn-clicks-into-votes-christopher-wylie>

"What is Psychographics?"

<https://www.cbinsights.com/research/what-is-psychographics/>

Watch:

Social Media's Dark Side:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=560&v=HBRLMoL_vTQ

How Russian Bots Invade Our Election

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZmrIkRDMsU>

How Russian Trolls Collected Personal Information

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heXp2tyDI6k>

Week #11 – November 20th – Putting it All Together, a Practical Primer of Persuasion Skills:

Reciprocity, Liking, Emotional Intelligence, Authority, Similarity,
Contrast, Specificity, Scarcity, Commitment, Repetition, Adherence,
Salience, Storytelling, Metaphor, Simplicity + Clarity, Warmth +
Directness

Readings:

Robert Danisch, *What Effect Have I Had?* (KDP, 2018): 203-248.

Short Paper #3 – Convince Me! – Due.

Week #12 – November 27th – Persuasion in Public Culture

Readings:

Ezra Klein, “The Unpersuaded: What’s the Use of Presidential Rhetoric?” from *The New Yorker* (March 19, 2012): 32-38.

Scott Adams, "How to Be a Wizard: Lessons from a Master Persuader" find it here:

<https://blog.antsand.com/custom/persuasion>

Owen Harries, “A Primer for Polemicists,” from *Tactical Notes, No. 10* – find it here:

<http://www.libertarian.co.uk/lapubs/tactn/tactn010.htm>

***Communication Audit due on December 6th by 5pm.