

SPCOM 491: Power, Politics, & Community

Faculty of Arts, Department of Drama and Speech Communication, Winter 2014
Tuesday & Thursday: 10:30-12:20, RCH-205

Professor Robert Danisch

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Course Description:

This course examines the ways in which interpersonal relationships help build communities and how communities then acquire political power. Such a process is largely a result of specific face-to-face communication practices. And that process is also essential for the dissemination of innovation, the creation of social movements, and the development of ethically responsible public cultures. Creating and maintaining communities requires communication and rhetorical practice. This course asks how communicative acts are constitutive of community life and how communities acquire and exercise political power. The distribution of power to communities and the exercise of that power through communicative acts (often interpersonal communicative acts) are at the core of political life in a democracy. So this course will also ask questions about the defining characteristics and the functional practices of democratic life. Democracy requires active and engaged communities. Finally, this course also aims to be both theoretical and practical. In other words, we will try to explain how and why communities acquire political power, but we will also try to develop a working knowledge of how we might generate political power for the communities to which we belong. In other words, we will try to explain where power comes from and develop a sense of how to acquire power ourselves in order to generate social or political change.

Course Objectives:

- To 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.
- To 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 the major approaches to theories of democracy and the acquisition and exercise of political power through community life.
- To provide students with the practical tools for acquiring and using power to form communities and produce change.
- To help students develop a theoretical account of where power comes from, how to produce change, and why communities form or disintegrate.
- To develop students' abilities to conduct sustained research and produce a substantive research project.

Course Policies and Procedures:

- *In the Classroom* – This is an advanced undergraduate seminar. The topic of the seminar was chosen based on your professor’s research interests. As a seminar, however, the main objective is for a small group of students to engage in intense study and conversation about a unique area of interest. Seminars are characterized by high degrees of interactivity between students and between professor and student. This is not a lecture course and it is not a course for students who do not have a significant background in communication studies. We will read a lot and I expect classroom conversations to demonstrate a high degree of intellectual engagement and sophistication. Students must do the readings for the week before coming to the seminar and all students are expected to participate in lively conversations each class period. If you are interested in engaging in that kind of participation and the intense study about the topic at hand then this course is for you. If you are not interested in those things, then this course is not for you.
- *Attendance* – Your presence in class is mandatory. However, I will not be taking attendance, and there will be no way for me to be absolutely certain that you are attending regularly. But 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 Thursday.” 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.
- *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 (and I basically have for this class), 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 class list. What I'm going to do is email the class, each week, a set of pdfs of the following week's readings. 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. I will ensure that the readings are available at least one week prior to when we will discuss them in class. 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: Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*, Jeffrey Stout's *Blessed are the Organized*, Danielle Allen's *Talking to Strangers*, Mancur Olsen's *The Logic of*

Collective Action, Scott Tarrow's *Power in Movement*, Jeffrey Pfeffer's *Power: Why Some People Have It and Others Don't*, James Jasper's *The Art of Moral Protest*, Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* and *Better Together*. 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.

Assignments:

- 1) **Research Paper** – This is an advanced undergraduate seminar, so you will write one big paper that constitutes your semester project. All semester projects will result in a formal scholarly paper of at least 10 pages and at most 20 pages due by 5:00pm on April 11th (to be emailed to me as an attached word document). Please note that a proper scholarly apparatus (notes, citations, page numbers) is a requirement for your papers. Though it is unreasonable of me to expect a paper of “publishable quality” at the end of a seminar, I do expect a polished paper that reflects sustained thought and careful revision. It should also use a recognized scholarly reference system. I recommend Chicago Style with footnotes, but will accept MLA, APA, Chicago parenthetical, Harvard, or any other style widely used in the humanities or social sciences. We will discuss how to write a research paper in detail in class. This assignment will be worth 40% of your final grade and will be graded on a scale of 0-100.
- 2) **Short Paper, Two Choices: Organizational Communication Audit or Exegesis** – Each student will also be asked to write one short paper during the semester. You will have a choice between two paper topics. The first, an organizational communication audit, will ask that you evaluate and critically analyze the way in which some particular community organization has chosen to acquire, develop, and exercise power to effect change. The second option, the exegesis, asks that you perform a short explanation of a passage from a text and offer a personal interpretation of a part of a reading. The short paper should be less than six pages and will be graded on a scale of 0-100. This paper will be due on February 27th, and it will be worth 25% of your final grade.
- 3) **Seminar Leader** – At the beginning of the semester, students will be given a partner to work with on two assignments. The first assignment requires that partners select one particular seminar to lead during the semester (dates will be chosen in class). During that seminar, the two students will help facilitate the discussion. Discussion leaders should spend extra time on the readings and be prepared to discuss them in depth. The seminar leaders will bring in discussion questions and topics in the form of a handout and will take an early role in directing the course of the seminar. The students should send an email to the class list (which I will set up) the day before the scheduled seminar with a list of questions and topics to discuss *and* should bring a photocopy of the list of questions/topics for everyone to class. You should aim to get at the most important issues in the readings. Questions can be oriented around anything from really basic

content questions (like “what does the passage on p. 25 mean?”) all the way up to “big picture” issues that connect the week’s readings with other discussions we’ve had in the course. In addition, the seminar leaders will be charged with the responsibility of producing an extended bibliography for the week. This work should be done after the seminar because the bibliography should include any references to texts made during class (but not referred to on the syllabus). It should also include an overview of at least one potential “archive” of material that deals with the theme for that particular week and an overview of one particular academic journal (or journal issue) that dealt with issues pertinent to what we discussed in class. In addition, the extended bibliography will cite additional sources that deal with the key themes from the week. Each student’s performance on this assignment will be graded on a scale of 0-100 and worth 10% of your final grade.

- 4) **Deliberation** – Your second task with your partner is to participate in a deliberation about one of the key issues that we will be dealing with throughout the semester. Your “deliberation” is a sustained back and forth conversation between you and your partner that unfolds over several weeks and in which the two of you think through some controversial issue and some examples of what we have talked about in class. At the end of your deliberation, you and your partner will edit what you discussed and hand it in as a kind of paper. This assignment will be due on March 27th and will be graded on a scale of 0-100. You will receive explicit instructions for the deliberation in class. This assignment will be worth 25% of your final grade.

Grades:

- *How are Grades Calculated?* - For each of the four assignments you will receive a score out of 100 points. I will then average the marks based on the percentage weights listed above. 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?*² – 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 – January 7th & 9th -

“Introduction to the Course: Why Study Power, Politics, and Community? What does this Have to Do with Communication?”

Reading:

Atul Gawande, “Slow Ideas: Some Innovations Spread Fast. How do You Speed the Ones that Don't,” *The New Yorker* (July 29, 2013).

Week #2 –January 14th & 16th –

“American Pragmatism and the Argument for Community Life as the Essence of Democracy”

Reading:

John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Swallow Press, 1954).

Jane Addams, “The Subjective Necessity of Social Settlements,” from *The Jane Addams Reader* (Basic Books, 2001).

Week #3 – January 21st & January 23rd –

“Saul Alinsky and the Origin of Social Movements and Community Organizing”

Readings:

Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (Vintage Books, 1971).

Week #4 – January 28th & January 30th –

“Does Alinsky’s Method Still Work?”

Readings:

Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

Week #5 – February 4th & February 6th –

“Small Groups and Collective Action”

Readings:

Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Harvard University Press, 1971).

Week #6 – February 11th & February 13th –

“Power in Social Movements”

Readings:

Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

*****No Class on February 18th & February 20th – Winter Break*****

Week #7 – February 25th & February 27th –

“Individual and Personal Power within Organizations”

Readings:

Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Power: Why Some People Have it and Others Don’t* (Harper Business, 2010).

*****Short Paper Due on February 27th.**

Week #8 – March 4th & March 6th –

“Persuasion in Social Movements”

Readings:

Charles Stewart, Robert Denton, Craig Allen Smith, *Persuasion and Social Movements* (Waveland Press, 2012).

Week #9 – March 11th & March 13th –

“Culture and Morality in Social Movements”

Readings:

James Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Week #10 – March 18th & March 20th –

“Friendship, Politics, and Talking to Strangers”

Readings:

Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown V Board of Education* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Week #11 – March 25th & March 27th –

“Is Community Life Alive or Dead?”

Readings:

Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2001).

Robert Putnam, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2004).

*****Deliberation Due on March 27th.**

Week #12 – April 1st & April 3rd -

“Deep Democracy, Slow Democracy”

Judith Greem, *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999)

Susan Clark, *Slow Democracy: Rediscovering Community, Bringing Decision-making Back Home* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2012).

*****Final Research Paper Due on April 11th**

*****A Final Note*****

Here are a bunch of books that I wish we had time to read but that got trimmed from the syllabus because we didn't have time:

Mark Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

Jacqueline Mondros and Scott Wilson, *Organizing for Power and Empowerment* (Columbia University Press, 1994).

James Burns, *Leadership* (Harper Modern Classics, 2010).

Edward Chambers, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2003).

Si Kahn, *Organizing: A Guide for Grassroots Leaders* (NASW Press, 1992).

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Penguin Classics, 2003).

Everything Marshall Ganz has written, see here: <http://marshallganz.com/>

John Durham Peters, *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Eugene Garver, *For the Sake of Argument: Practical Reasoning, Character, and the Ethics of Belief* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Paul Schollmeier, *Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendship* (SUNY Press, 1994).

Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Basic Books, 2012).

William Keith, *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* (Lexington Books, 2007).