

POLM 5018: Strategic Communications

Instructor: Prof. Jeni Armstrong

NOTE: POLM 5018 is normally taught in two sections (A, B). While the course content (readings, lectures, assignments) is the same across both sections, specific due dates vary and are not included in this online version of the course outline. Registered students will have access to the more detailed course outlines — which will also include week-by-week assigned readings and A/V — via Brightspace.

I. Course Description

In this course, we will take an introductory look at strategic communications and how it is used in a Canadian political context. Starting with the basics, the course will introduce different topics that successful communicators must consider when building a communications plan — from identifying objectives and learning more about audiences to understanding how political arguments are framed. The major course assignment will involve drafting a communications plan and supporting products, and the course will wrap up with a review of crisis communications (aka: what happens when things don't go as planned).

The course will be taught in a hybrid format that will rely heavily on self-directed learning, combined with weekly classes (in-person or via Zoom, depending on the section). In addition to the work required to complete the assignments, you can expect to read (on average) 50 pages a week for this course and spend up to half an hour each week watching pre-recorded content (this will vary week to week). In three of the six weeks, we will be joined by communications practitioners and seasoned political strategists, giving you direct access to experts with realworld experience in the issues surrounding strategic communications.

II. Preclusions

None.

III. Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, successful students will have demonstrated an understanding of issues related to strategic communications and its practice in Canada, and demonstrated their ability to:

- Critically evaluate communication strategies used in and around government. This includes the ability to identify effective/successful communication efforts, and the ability to reflect on how lessons learned from these efforts can be used in future communications work.

- Write a professional communications plan that includes supporting products. This includes the ability to identify a communications opportunity, draft a comprehensive plan, and deliver products that are aligned with strategic objectives.
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the concept of “framing.” This includes the ability to define and explain the concept as discussed in class and in assigned tests, as well the ability to identify and expand on relevant examples, and apply the concept in a written assignment.
- Conduct independent research that expands on the ideas and themes explored in the course. This includes the ability to identify, assess, and defend new sources of information, and the ability to engage with a variety of sources, including the guest speakers invited to our class meetings.
- Act in a supportive and professional manner. This includes the ability to provide constructive and meaningful feedback on others’ contributions and observations, and a demonstrated commitment to submitting all work before the assigned deadlines.

IV. Texts

- Glenn, T. (2014). Professional Communications in the Public Sector: A Practical Guide. (*est. cost: \$66.95 in paperback*)
- McCarten, J. (2021). The Canadian Press Stylebook: A Guide for Writers and Editors (19th ed.). The Canadian Press. (*est. cost: \$39.50 in paperback*)
- McCarten, J. (2022). The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling (23rd ed.). The Canadian Press. (*est. cost: \$27.50 in paperback*)
- Additional readings as assigned. (*no cost; PDFs provided on course page*)

V. Course Calendar

A range of topics will be covered in this six-week course:

| Week | Topic |
|--------|---|
| Week 1 | Introduction to Strategic Communications |
| Week 2 | Framing: What You’re Trying To Say |
| Week 3 | Planning: How Plans and Product Work Together |
| Week 4 | Objectives: What You’re Trying to Do |
| Week 5 | Audiences: Who You’re Talking To (And What They Care About) |
| Week 6 | Crisis Communications: When Things (Don’t) Go As Planned |

VI. Evaluation

A range of assignments will be used to assess student performance and progress in the course. These include:

| Assignment | Percentage | Due Date |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| Framing Assignment | 30% | Due before Week 3 class. |
| Announcement Proposal | 20% Each short quiz is worth 5%; there are five quizzes in total: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Language and Writing• Spelling and Capitalization• Punctuation• Plain Language• Frequently Confused Words | Due before Week 4 class. |
| Communications Plan and Products | 50% (25% for plan; 25% for products) Products selected must total 25%, based on percentages below (eg: speech <u>or</u> news release + media advisory) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speech (600-800 words) - 25%• Q&A (political; min eight questions and answers) - 25%• Op-ed (max 600 words) - 25%• News Release - 15%• Backgrounder - 15%• Media Advisory - 10%• Key Messages - 10%• Video Script (max 30-45 secs) - 10% | Due before Week 6 class. |

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

VII. Statement on Plagiarism

Carleton's Senate defines plagiarism as "presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one's own." This can include:

- Reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- Submitting assignments prepared, in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (eg: ChatGPT) — **the use of generative AI for any/all of your assignments in POLM 5018 is not authorized/allowed;**
- Using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- Using another person's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- Failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another person's works and/or failing to use quotation marks.

Additionally, in this course you may not hand in a completed assignment that you have previously submitted, or intend to submit, to another course (including this course, if you have taken it previously).

You should know that plagiarism is a serious offense which cannot be resolved directly with me. If I suspect that you have submitted plagiarized work, a rigorous investigation will be launched by the Faculty Dean. The penalties for plagiarism are not trivial, and can include a final grade of "F" for the course. You can read more about the process and potential sanctions [here](#).

VIII. Statement on Student Mental Health

As a university student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall wellbeing. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus):

<https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

Carleton Resources:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389, <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

IX. Academic Accommodations

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations in this class. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with learning disabilities, psychiatric/mental health disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders, chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your letter of accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After the request for accommodation has been made, please also schedule a time to meet with me, so that we can make sure that the accommodations you need are in place.

Pregnancy or Religious Observation: As soon as you are aware that accommodation for these reasons may be needed, please contact me directly via email. We will work together to find a way for you to satisfy your course requirements in a way that does not disadvantage you academically.

Survivors of Sexual Violence: As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Student Activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.