

PMGT 215 – Managing Online Communities in an Electoral or Advocacy Campaign

DRAFT

Spring Semester, 2009

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will cover all aspects of building and managing a web campaign in either the electoral or advocacy arenas and overseeing outreach in multiple online communities. Class topics will include both the technical (building a backend system, designing a budget, blogging, etc.) and practical (working with web vendors, online fundraising, get-out-the-vote activities, issues management). The course will address a series of situations or scenarios that pose short-term challenges (such as those faced by campaigns) and long-term challenges (such as those faced by advocacy groups and trade associations).

The course begins by examining the managerial aspects of putting together a web-based campaign, including the areas of responsibility that must be brought together into a cohesive, functioning team. Next, the class will take up the technical components of an integrated campaign including the necessary elements and financing need to achieve the organization's goals. The concluding section examines some practical applications of online communications such as fundraising and mobilizing constituencies.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Develop a strategic understanding of the Internet in electoral or advocacy campaigns and the role of online community outreach and mobilization.
- Learn how to lead a web team to accomplish specific organization goals – such as fundraising, volunteer recruitment, issue advocacy, rapid response, earned media, get-out-the-vote, and constituent communications – in a changing digital environment.
- Understand the web campaign's role in a larger organization, advocacy group, or political campaign.
- Learn how to budget their organization's finances and human resources in their online effort.
- Gain technical expertise in different areas of online campaigning, including blogging, web site management, social networking outreach, online marketing, fundraising, and voter mobilization.

REQUIREMENTS:

The class will be based on a series of projects and simulations that will require students to replicate a campaign for an organization of their choice. Students will be expected to complete several written exercises that culminate in a final paper (approximately 20 pages of material). In addition, students will generate other work product, such as material that would be placed online in support of their organization's goals. The assigned exercises will include responding to negative advertising online,

building an online fundraising plan, blogging and outreach to friendly and hostile bloggers, designing a web campaign plan, promoting issues and advocacy online.

The final grade will be awarded based on the following formula: 20% for the basic strategy; 40% for the major paper; 20% web applications; and 20% for class participation. Attendance and participation in the class are an absolute must.

BOOKS FOR PURCHASE: (from Amazon.com):

Robert Scoble, *Naked Conversations: How Blogs are Changing the Way Businesses Talk with Customers* (Wiley, 2006).

Garrett Graff, *The First Campaign: Globalization, the Web, and the Race for the White House* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

Paul Greenberg, *CRM at the Speed of Light: Essential Customer Strategies for the 21st Century* (McGraw-Hill Osborne Media, 2004).

David Henderson, *Making News: A Straight-Shooting Guide to Media Relations* (New York: IUniverse, 2006).

Brian Reich and Dan Solomon, *Media Rules! Mastering Today's Technology to Connect with and Keep Your Audience* (Wiley, 2007).

Ben Rigby, *Mobilizing Generation 2.0: A Practical Guide to Using Web 2.0 to Recruit, Organize, and Engage Youth* (Jossey-Bass, 2008).

Zephyr Teachout, *Mousepads, Shoe Leather, and Hope: Lessons from the Howard Dean Campaign for the Future of Internet Politics* (Paradigm Publishers, 2007).

ONLINE RESOURCES:

Lowell Feld, "Drafting an American Hero," *Politics & Technology Review* (<http://www.ipdi.org/uploadedfiles/March2008PoliticsandTechnologyReview.pdf>), March 2008.

Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet, *Constituent Relationship Management: The New Little Black Book in Politics* (<http://www.ipdi.org/uploadedfiles/IPDI-CRMreport-final.pdf>), March 2007.

Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet, *Best Practices for Political Advertising Online* (<http://www.ipdi.org/UploadedFiles/BannerAdReport4.pdf>), March 2008.

David Karpf, "Measuring Influence in the Political Blogosphere: Who's Winning, and How Can We Tell?" *Politics & Technology Review* (<http://www.ipdi.org/uploadedfiles/March2008PoliticsandTechnologyReview.pdf>), March 2008.

Christopher Locke, Rick Levine, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger, *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (<http://www.cluetrain.com/book/index.html>), 2001.

Alan Rosenblatt, *The Them Me US* (<http://www.drdigipol.com/2006/01/05/the-them-me-us/>).

Christine Williams and Girish J. Gulati, "The Political Impact of Facebook: Evidence from the 2006 Midterm Elections and 2008 Nomination Contest," *Politics & Technology Review* (<http://www.ipdi.org/uploadedfiles/March2008PoliticsandTechnologyReview.pdf>), March 2008.

CLASS SESSIONS:

1. January 12 Introduction and initial discussion
January 19 Martin Luther King Day: **NO CLASS**
2. January 26 Overview of Web-Based Campaigning
3. February 2 The Online Team and Web Vendors — the array of expertise
4. February 9 CRM and Backend Systems for Online Communications
February 16 President's Day: **NO CLASS**
5. February 23 Multimedia and Media Outreach (Blogs, vlogs, social media sites, mainstream media, etc.)
6. March 1 Online Fundraising
7. March 8 Online Get-out-the-Vote Programs
March 15 Spring Vacation: **NO CLASS**
8. March 22 Online Advertising
9. March 29 Online Community Building
10. April 5 Social Networking Outreach
11. April 12 Harmonizing with "Off Line" Channels.
12. April 19 Presenting the Final Product.
13. April 26 Summing Up

SESSION ONE

JANUARY 12

Subject: Introduction – The historical role of communications media in politics; the evolution of media outlets available to political communicators; and the growing importance of new vehicles for reaching and mobilizing constituencies.

A review of the course outline, expectations, and assignments. Discussion of why candidates, advocacy groups, elected officials, and political managers spend time, energy, and resources to communicate with constituencies. Consideration of the changes in media over time and the historic role that communications media has played in politics.

Reading assignments for next class :

A.

B.

Written assignments for next class: None.

January 19 - NO CLASS (MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY)

SESSION TWO

JANUARY 26

Subject: Overview of Web-Based Campaigning. First, in developing our job as political communicators we need to adopt a strategic planning approach — assessing the factors that political professionals consider when developing a media strategy. Second, what are the tools at our disposal to reach the relevant constituencies?

In putting together an online outreach strategy, political professionals need to address the realities of the online media: what are the available channels and how they operate. What differences possibilities do the various components of an integrated online strategy offer? What audiences can be reached by the different vehicles? What sort of competition for attention and opposition are likely to be encountered in each format?

Reading assignments for next class

A.

Written assignments for next class: Choose an organization for which you will simulate the role of online communications director during the initial part of the course. Bring a description of the organization and an analysis of its online presence to class. Be prepared to present a description of your organization to the class.

SESSION THREE

FEBRUARY 2

Subject: The Online Team and Web Vendors — An analysis the skills that must be brought to web-based communications. What specializations and expertise exist in the online world of politics? What components should be kept “in-house” and which should be contracted out? What firms specialize in difference modalities of communication? How should the online team be integrated with the other aspects of the organization’s communications strategy? What are the budgetary implications of each component?

This class will also examine the consulting industry surrounding online communications and the various forms of data, expertise and services they provide. To what extent is the industry divided by partisanship and who are the major players and rising stars in each party? Which techniques of communication and the vendors that offer them have begun to be eclipsed by newer vehicles of media?

An analysis of the major providers of online communication services, including ISP’s, software and hardware companies.

Assignment due: There will be in-class presentations of the organizations that students have selected as possible candidates for group projects.

Reading assignments for next class

A.

B.

Assignment for Next Week

Each member of the class will complete an analysis of the online presence of their selected group to be presented to the class in the next week.

SESSION FOUR **FEBRUARY 9**

Subject: CRM and Backend Systems for Online Communications – Class will discuss principles of customer relationship management programs from the business world that apply to politics and the technical resources that are necessary in-house to mobilize and coordinate the online communications effort, including the reporting structure to top level management. How will a backend-system help organization these activities and provide a backbone of information for online community and social networking outreach?

Much of this session will be given over to student presentations of their analysis of the online presence of the organizations they would like to suggest for class projects. Analysis should include an assessment of the visibility of the organization in comparison to its friendly competitors or outright opponents and the use of various components on the online world. At the conclusion of class, the students will offer the instructor(s) their opinion of which organizations offer the best prospects for the group projects that will become the heart of the coursework.

Reading assignments for next class :

A.

Written assignments due for next class: None

FEBRUARY 16 - NO CLASS (GW BIRTHDAY)

SESSION FIVE **FEBRUARY 23**

Subject: Online Community Building – To some extent, community building is essential for almost all traditional political activities. In the digital age, many relationships and community emerge around groups of common interest online – including groups of political and issue-based affinity. How do online communities function? How can political and advocacy groups reach them?

There are distinct differences when the organization endeavors to build a long-term and building relationship. How have advocacy organizations successfully engaged the populous to support their goals and initiatives? What differences have been learned

between bottom-up approaches versus top-down control? What are the dynamic and detriments of both techniques.

In this class, students will be assigned to one of four groups, each of which will take on an interest group, association or corporation as a “client” and will also adopt an election campaign as an object of comparative study. From this point on, the two continuing projects will have fundamentally different tones: the election campaigns will be monitored, described, and analyzed, while for the issue advocacy organizations we will simulate consulting services that could assist the organization in its online presence.

Reading assignments for next class (3/3):

A.

B.

Written assignments due for next class: Present a basic goal that you believe your client should achieve in its online communications. In addition, present an analysis of the chosen campaign's basic online communications and outreach strategy. This should include: goal(s), situation analysis, strategy statement, assumptions, theme, key messages, and target groups.

SESSION SIX

MARCH 1

Subject: Social Networking Outreach – Some of the most popular (and growing) sites on the web are social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. Many blogs are community-driven as well, adding a deep history of political interaction and ideological-driven conversation. How can political and advocacy reach, cultivate, and mobilize these online social networking sites?

Assignments due this class: A detailed statement of the basic goal to be pursued by your "client" and an analysis of the communications strategy of the campaign organization assigned to your group.

Assignments due next week: A presentation of the social networking outreach techniques that should be adopted by your "client" through online communications and a comparative statement of the successes that your campaign organization has had during the prior year. The latter analysis should make comparisons to the direct opponent and to other, similarly situated campaign organizations.

SESSION SEVEN

MARCH 8

Subject: Multi-Media and Media Outreach. This class will examine the role online multi-media is playing in political campaigns. How are organizations using videos, blogs, podcasts, and online games to inform their bases of support and bypass the mainstream media? Which multi-media tactics can an organization apply to meet its changing goals? Does user-generated media pose a threat or an opportunity for political and advocacy organizations? How do you use the Internet to conduct media outreach? How influential is the political blogosphere and how can your organization participate? What about social media sites?

Assignments due this class: Class presentations of fundraising scenarios.

Reading assignments due for next class:

A.

Written assignments due for next class: A analysis of the multimedia and media outreach tactics your client should adopt, with particular emphasis on how those tactics will help your organization meet its goals.

MARCH 15 - NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

SESSION EIGHT

MARCH 22

Subject: Online Fundraising. The class will take up the various ways in which political organizations (campaigns and advocacy) have achieved success in online fundraising. What techniques have succeeded and which have failed? What kinds of organizations achieve the greatest success in this area? To what extent are organizations able to create a successful “bottom up” approach to raising money? Do large donors (\$1000+) still expect the direct personal connections that cannot be created online? What role is micro-bundling playing?

Reading assignments due for next class :

A.

Written assignment due for next class: Present a “online fundriasing” strategy for your “client” organization.

SESSION NINE

MARCH 29

Subject. Online Get-out-the Vote Programs. An analysis presented by guest lecturers of the get-out-the vote efforts of the two Presidential campaigns in the 2008 elections. How did each go about getting their supporters identified and brought to the polls? What factors made for a successful effort? Are there comparisons available to down ballot campaigns that give purchase on the ways in which candidates can use online communications to win elections?

Reading assignments due for next class:

A.

Written assignment due for next class: Address the following issues. What target groups are deemed to be critical to influence and activate? Are there key segments of the general or activist population that need to be engaged? What online techniques should your “client” develop to mobilize the critical -- and possibly diverse -- constituencies? How does your online activity fit in with the overall communications strategy of the organization? What are the ethical implications of constituency mobilization for your “client.”

SESSION TEN

APRIL 5

Subject: Paid Online Advertising. Gradually, paid advertising online is gaining acceptance in the political world. This class will examine the various vehicles for reaching defined audiences through paid placements. What are the metrics of success? Can one calculate the “ROI,” meaning both “return on investment” and “risk of inactivity?” The latter concept being the consequences of not being active in an online arena in which one’s competition or opponents are engaged. What techniques are proving to be effective in “delivering eyeballs?”

Reading assignments for next class: T.B.A.

Written assignments for next class: Each group will present an analysis of the paid advertising component that their “client” should be advancing as part of their online communications. This analysis should include a detailed budget and a statement of expected delivery

SESSION ELEVEN

APRIL 12

Subject: **Harmonizing with “Off Line” Channels.** No organization or campaign should develop its online communications in a cyclone. Online and “off line” should go hand-in-hand. This class will examine the context within which online communities occur by observing scenarios in both online and offline communications.

Reading assignments due for next class: None.

Written assignments due for next class: Major presentation of “client’s” online communications strategy.

SESSION TWELVE **APRIL 19**

Subject: **Presenting the Final Product.** Each team will present its online work product for its “client” organization. If we have been able to achieve client buy-in, representatives of the client organization will attend this section to ask questions and comment on the proposed strategy.

Reading assignments due for next class: None.

Written assignments due for next class: None.

SESSION THIRTEEN **APRIL 26**

Subject: **Summing Up.** A review and critique of the work product. The teams will have an opportunity to question and discuss the efforts of the other teams. Criticism and suggestions for revising the course for future years will also be solicited.