George Mason University
Graduate Course Approval/Inventory Form

Please complete this form and attach a copy of the syllabus for new courses. Forward it as an email attachment to the Secretary of the Graduate Council. A printed copy of the form with signatures should be brought to the Graduate Council Meeting. Complete the Coordinator Form on page 2, if changes in this course will affect other units.

Please indicate: ___X___ NEW  ____ MODIFY  ____ DELETE

Local Unit: Communication Department  Graduate Council Approval Date:

Course Abbreviation: COMM  Course Number: 621

Full Course Title: Media Advocacy for Nonprofit Organizations

Abbreviated Course Title (24 characters max.): Media for Nonprofit Orgs

Credit hours: 3  Program of Record: M.A. in Communication

Repeatable for Credit?  ___ D=Yes, not within same term  Up to hours
___ T=Yes, within the same term  Up to hours
_ X_ N=Cannot be repeated for credit

Activity Code (please indicate):  ___Lecture (LEC)  ___Lab (LAB)  ___Recitation (RCT)
___ Studio (STU)  ___Internship (INT)  ___Independent Study (IND)  __X__ Seminar (SEM)

Catalog Credit Format  3 : 3 : 0  Course Level: GF(500-600) __X__ GA(700+)

Maximum Enrollment: 20  For NEW courses, first term to be offered: Summer 2004

Prerequisites or corequisites:

Catalog Description (35 words or less)  Please use catalog format and attach a copy of the syllabus for new courses.
Drawing from scholarship in media studies, critical theory, and the public health campaign literature, this course provides a graduate-level introduction to media advocacy strategies for non-profit organizations with limited financial resources. (32 words)

For MODIFIED or DELETED courses as appropriate:
Last term offered:  Previous Course Abbreviation:  Previous number:

Description of modification:

APPROVAL SIGNATURES:
Submitted by: Katherine E. Rowan, Graduate Coordinator email: krowan@gmu.edu
Department Chair: Don M. Boileau email: dboileau@gmu.edu

Department/Program:  Communication  Date: 10/6/03

College Committee:  Date: 

Graduate Council Representative:  Date: 

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
Course Coordination Form  

Note: No other units are affected by this communication department course.  
Katherine E. Rowan, Ph.D., Graduate Coordinator  
Signature _______________________________  Date ________________  

Approval from other units:  

Please list those units outside of your own who may be affected by this new, modified, or deleted course. Each of these units must approve this change prior to its being submitted to the Graduate Council for approval.  

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Graduate Council approval: _______________________________  Date: ____________  
Graduate Council representative: ___________________________  Date: ____________  
Provost Office representative: _____________________________  Date: ____________
Media Advocacy for Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profits and issue-advocacy organizations often find that achieving their policy agenda depends upon shaping the public debate about their issue. Yet many advocates feel ill-equipped to develop a media strategy that can both attract coverage to their issue and shape it in ways that advance their policy goals. Drawing on insights from media studies, critical theory, and the public health campaign literature, this course provides a graduate-level introduction to media advocacy strategies appropriate for non-profit organizations with limited financial resources.

Course Objectives

(1) To understand the theoretical and methodological dimensions of Media Advocacy, apart from other strategies for shaping public opinion.

* Media advocacy approaches differ profoundly from “social marketing” approaches to shaping public opinion and transforming risk-producing social environments. Students will be challenged to understand the ethical, political, and theoretical distinctions between media advocacy and social marketing, as well as the strengths and blind spots of both approaches.

(2) To investigate how current structures and practices in media and political institutions create opportunities and challenges for non-profit organizations attempting to influence public opinion and public policies.

* The course will draw on readings from critical media theory, political communication, and public sphere theory.

(3) To explore how individuals interpret political and ideological arguments and discourses, in order to better prepare students for crafting effective advocacy campaigns.

* Drawing on audience reception (focus group) research within the tradition of cultural studies, students will investigate the complex strategies that individuals employ when making sense of social and health issues.

(4) To equip students with the skills to plan, create, and conduct media advocacy campaigns that advance public policies in ways that can transform the social environment that produces social and health risks.

* To this end, students will draw on readings and case studies to help them plan and, potentially, conduct a semester-long media advocacy campaign around a health or social issue of their choosing.

Course Activities
In our investigations of media and mass communication theory, we will primarily be engaged in two kinds of activities: (1) seminar discussions, and (2) advocacy workshops.

(1) Seminar Discussions: The first half of each weekly session will be devoted to discussing readings drawn from a variety of fields within communication studies, including: media advocacy, news media studies, reception theory, and critical theory.

(2) Advocacy Workshops: The second half of each weekly session will be devoted to workshops where student help one another complete their advocacy projects by semester’s end.

Course Readings – Required and Recommended

(1) Texts

W. Lance Bennett. (2000). *News: The politics of illusion*

(2) Selections and Articles

*Media Advocacy Strategies – The Berkeley Media Studies Group*

*Understanding the Media – Using Critical Theory Strategically*
Daniel Hallin. (1994). *We keep America on top of the world.*

*Understanding the Audience*
Understanding the Political Field: Case Studies in NIMBY and Situating Human Services
Stuart Hall, “The rediscovery of ideology: Return of the ‘repressed’ in media studies.”
Mary Douglas, Pollution

Assignments and Evaluation Breakdown

Seminar Participation 20%
Weekly Preparation Assignments 20%
Mid-semester Plan 15%
Field-test (focus group) 10%
Media Advocacy Campaign Proposal 35%

Class Schedule

Unit 1 Course Introduction
Workshop: Review Syllabus and Assignments

Unit 2 Media Advocacy: An Introduction


Workshop: Bring tentative topic for advocacy project (specify appropriate non-profit).

Unit 3 Citizens v. Consumers / Media Advocacy v. Social Marketing


Workshop: Begin developing strategy (see questions in Wallack et al., page 13).

Unit 4    Media Advocacy: Campaign Case Studies


Workshop: Begin monitoring the media (see Wallack et al., p. 30).

Unit 5    Understanding the Media: The Political Economy of the Media


Noam Chomsky & Edward Herman (2000). *Manufacturing Consent.* (selections)

Workshop: On making your campaign “newsworthy” (see Wallack et al., p. 30)

Unit 6    Understanding the Media: News Production and Routines


Daniel Hallin. (1994). *We keep America on top of the world.* (selections)


Workshop: Framing your issue with images and language (see Wallack, p. 67).

Unit 7    Understanding the Media: Covering Movements for Policy Change


Workshop: Plan a news event and create a media kit (see Wallack et al., p. 83)
Unit 8  Understanding the Audience: Reception Theory


Major Assignment Due: Mid-Semester Campaign Plan.

Unit 9  Understanding the Audience: Processing the News


Workshop: Bring field-test (focus group) protocol and question guide.

Unit 10  Understanding the Audience: The Abortion Debate


Workshop: Discuss plan for recruiting a field-test focus group.

Unit 11  Understanding the Political Field: Social Theory and Advocacy


Workshop: Report back on field tests with focus group.

Unit 12  Understanding the Political Field: The NIMBY Syndrome


Workshop: Discuss the “political field” around your issue.

**Unit 13 Understanding the Political Field: NIMBY and Human Services**


Workshop: Last-minute questions.

**Unit 14 Final Problem Solving Session**

No readings assigned. We will use the time to finalize our project proposals.

**Unit 15 Project Proposal Presentations**

Individuals and groups present field-tested proposals.

**Description of Assignments**

Taken together, these assignments advance students toward the completion of their final project: a comprehensive, field-tested proposal for conducting a media advocacy campaign on behalf of a specific non-profit association. Campaign proposals can be crafted on behalf of an actual non-profit (e.g., if you already work for one, or would like to work for one…) or you can create a “hypothetical” organization around an issue for which you feel some passion.

(1) *Weekly Assignments – 20 points*

Each week, students will be expected to complete a specific assignment in preparation for class. In the main, the assignments will ask you to apply the tools and theories we discuss in class to your own campaign proposal. Periodically, the assignments will guide your preparation for our discussions of the readings.

(2) *Mid-Semester Plan – 15 points*

Midway through the semester, students will prepare a 10-12 page (double-spaced) mid-semester “draft” of their campaign proposal. This mid-semester plan brings together each student’s first six workshop assignments, laying out their goal for policy change, their evaluation of news coverage on the issue, their larger advocacy strategy, their more specific media strategy, and an initial plan for a media event/press conference/piggyback strategy (with sample press kit).

(3) *Field-Test Assignment (Focus Group) – 10 points*

Prior to drafting the final proposal, students will be asked to field-test their strategy (including the policy goal and the language and imagery they intend to employ to achieve it) with a focus group of 6-10 individuals
(outside of class). The focus group participants do not have to be members of a “target audience” you have in mind. In fact, most often, the targets of advocacy campaigns are people in positions of power, whom you hope to influence through media coverage. For this reason, the purpose of a focus group in advocacy work is to get a “lay opinion” on the language and imagery you plan to include in your final campaign proposal. In other words, strategies that students find compelling might be less so for others. For this reason, students should purposefully recruit a group of individuals they suspect will give them constructive feedback on their plans. In this way, the focus group will help students refine their imagery, their language, and their media strategy—particularly if they face a choice between alternative ways of framing their issue.

(4) Final Media Advocacy Campaign Proposal – 35 points

In this final 20-30 page advocacy campaign proposal, students will lay out their larger advocacy strategy, their more specific media strategy, and the materials (press kits, news stories, editorial op-eds, news events, etc.) they intend to include in their campaign. With regard to their media strategy, students will explain: (1) how their media strategy fits in with the larger advocacy strategy (including an articulation of the specific policy goal they hope to advance by attracting and shaping media coverage); (2) how the news has covered the issue in the past; (3) their analysis of the political field (that is, the various interests that have engaged the issue, and how they have attempted to shape public opinion and policy around the issue); (4) their strategy for attracting media coverage of their campaign; (5) their strategy for “framing” or shaping that coverage (including an explanation of why certain forms of language and imagery were chosen for the campaign). Proposals should end with a discussion of how their media campaign might advance their non-profit’s policy goals among the key decision-makers on their issue.

(5) Seminar Participation – 20 points

The key to the success of the course will be our weekly seminars. During these seminars, we will spend about half of our time discussing our progress on the advocacy projects, and brainstorming ideas on how to overcome these challenges. Therefore, students will be evaluated partly on their ability and willingness to give helpful, constructive feedback to others and, just as importantly, to accept feedback on their own projects.

The other half of our seminar will be devoted to discussing readings drawn from media studies, public health, reception theory, and critical theory. Students will be partly evaluated on their ability to contribute constructively to these discussions. Good seminar participation requires actively contributing to discussions, showing evidence of having completed the readings, and treating the ideas of colleagues with sensitivity and respect.

General Notes

(1) Style

For the mid-semester draft and the final project, you are required to use the referencing procedure spelled out in the American Psychological Association style guide. If you make use of on-line resources in your work, you must properly reference them. Guidelines for citing on-line resources can be found on several WWW sites, including http://www.mun.ca/library/ref/virtuallib.html#grants.

(2) Late Assignments

Late assignments will be subject to a daily penalty. I will deduct 10 percent from your assignment for every day late (weekends equal one day). This late penalty can be waived in the case of family emergencies and should health concerns arise.
(3) Grade Disputes

If you have a question or a concern with a grade given in the course, you should follow the following procedure to ask for a re-evaluation of the grade: (1) Wait at least 24 hours to think about the grade, (2) Write a short, one-page letter that describes your reasons for asking for a re-evaluation. In short, present a measured and articulate argument for why you deserve a better grade on your work. Then, (3) drop this letter off in my mailbox in the Communication Department. I will then re-read your work and re-consider the mark. The final decision (whether it results in an improved grade, or, potentially, a less favorable mark) will be made before the end of the semester. Further appeals of grades should follow the procedure outlined in the George Mason University calendar. Finally, should you have a concern about the grade you received on a specific assignment, you should contact me within three class periods of receiving your grade for that assignment. I will not review grades re-submitted after this time period has elapsed.

(4) Emailed assignments are not accepted.

Under no circumstances will I accept assignments over email. Place late assignments in my mailbox in Thompson 212.

(5) Honor Code

George Mason University students are expected to adhere to the Honor Code; please familiarize yourself with the Honor Code if you have not already done so. All papers, projects, and exams are to be original and prepared for this class. Papers and projects for this class may be related to a task in another class, but you must get specific permission from both instructors. While hired typists and proofreaders are permitted, your exams, papers, and projects must be your own work.

(6) Disability Support Services

To provide an equitable learning environment for each student, the instructor will readily adjust to those students who have special needs. If you have special needs in the classroom, please bring a letter from Disability Support Services confirming and describing your need within two weeks of the start of the semester. You may have Disability Support Services write the instructor directly and, in either instance, the instructor will hold the information in confidence.

(7) Changes to the syllabus

As the instructor, I reserve the right to make changes to the above syllabus, in the interest of furthering student learning and/or ensuring a safe and respectful learning environment for all students. Students will be given ample notice regarding any major changes to the course plan.