MMC6496: Public Interest Communication Theory

Academic Term: Fall 2026
3 **Credit Hours**

Instructor
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Office Phone Number: Meetings will take place over Zoom preferably. Email me to set up a time. Phone: for emergency use - 617-413-6061.
Virtual Office Hours: Tuesdays 12-1 pm (EDT/EST)

Course Description and Prerequisites

Course Description: In this course, the students will learn public interest communications theories and their strategic applications to practice. In addition, the students will be introduced to professional resources in public interest communications related to theory and strategic application. By the end of this course, the students will understand the major areas of public interest communications theory and how those areas have been developed through empirical research.

Course Prerequisites – N/A

Course Expectations

This course is fully online; you must log in to Canvas with your Gatorlink username and password to access the materials and assignments. The course is organized into modules with due dates. Unless otherwise specified, each module begins on Monday at 12:00 AM ET and ends on Sunday at 11:59 PM ET.

Time Commitment & Student Workload Expectations
Expect to spend 10 to 20 hours per week per course watching or attending lectures, reading, working on assignments and projects, and engaging in discussions.

Expectations for Writing Assignments: Writing Style
To meet the academic rigor and standards of a graduate program, all students must use the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition style in their courses when appropriate for the assignment. The APA 7th Edition Manual has a plethora of guidelines that include scholarly writing, publishing principles, elements and format for your papers, writing style and grammar, bias-free language guidelines, mechanics of style, in-text citing references, etc. For additional information on notable changes, see changes between APA 6th Edition and APA 7th Edition.

Linked here is our course "Netiquette, directions and rubric for discussion posts." (posted on our course website too)

Linked here is our course "Writing guidelines." (posted on our course website too)

Class Demeanor

In our optional online live meetings that you attend please silence your cell phones, and any sounds coming from your computer. Please try and limit background noise when possible. If you cannot avoid background noise where you are (e.g., a young child you are caring for; or an annoying sibling/friend in your study space) please keep yourself muted except when you need to talk.

When possible, please try to keep your video on as it leads to a better online class environment.

The instructor reserves the right to put you on mute if too much noise is coming from your computer or if any non-class-appropriate material is shown on screen.

Please act respectful of other students' views or opinions as you would in an in-person class. This is also the case for when posting on discussion boards or any interactions with other students in the course.

If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who unmute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. Please let the instructor know if these situations apply to you.

In your group work assignments please respect the rules for class demeanor above. Additionally in your group you have to submit your work on time to other group members to give them at least 24 to respond to your work. You are required to attend all meetings that your group sets up or develop an alternative way to give them recorded or written feedback that you let them know in advance if you cannot make a meeting. Your meetings can take place over Zoom.

Attendance Policy
Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies. Click here to read the university attendance policies for information on absences, religious holidays, illness, and the twelve-day rule. Excused absences must be consistent with university policies in the Graduate Catalog and require appropriate documentation.

Late Assignment Policy
Late assignments will not be accepted unless it is a University excused absence, as stated in the attendance policies. ***Due to the university grading deadlines, no late work will be accepted for final projects or work due in the final week of class.*** Students should contact their instructors before submitting the assignment deadline if potential issues arise concerning submitting the final work.

1. Late Assignment Grade Reductions
   a. 0-24 Hours Late: 10% reduction in grade.
   b. Over 24 Hours (24 hours and 1 minute) to 7 Calendar Days Late: 20% reduction in grade.
   c. After the 7th Calendar Day: Work will not be accepted.
2. Late Discussions will not be accepted.

Student Guidelines for Course Challenges
A student with questions regarding course content such as assignments, assessments, instructional materials, lectures, meetings, course objectives, course module objectives, or other areas of the course, please adhere to the following guidelines: First, *approach the faculty member who is teaching the course* to ask for clarifications regarding the course

assignments, assessments, materials, lectures, meetings, etc. Use the instructor's contact information to request an appointment where you can address any concerns and/or questions. If, after meeting with *the faculty member teaching the course,* you are still unclear on the course assignments, assessments, materials, lectures, meetings, etc., then the next step would be to contact online advising (onlineadvising@jou.ufl.edu) for additional guidance.

Accessibility/Students with Disabilities Information
Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letters with their instructors and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation
Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways:

1. The email they receive from GatorEvals,
2. Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or
3. The central portal at https://my-ufl.bluera.com

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/."

Course-Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define and explain what is meant by the "public interest" in public interest communications. (CO:1)
2. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of major theoretical paradigms and approaches in public interest communications theory. (CO:2)
3. Explain why PIC has to be science-oriented and evidence-based. (CO:3)
4. Identify and apply six spheres of influence in a PIC campaign example. (CO: 4)
5. Critique approaches to strategy in PIC campaigns. (CO:5)
6. Explain the Western approach to PIC campaigns, and its downsides when applied globally. (CO:6)
7. Identify trusted messengers. (CO:7)
8. Develop CTAs ("calls to action"). (CO:8)
9. Develop and apply theoretically driven actionable recommendations for a strategic public interest communications plan for a client/organization/social movement. (CO: 9)
10. Deliver a PIC strategy presentation (CO: 10)
11. Provide and receive constructive feedback. (CO: 11)

Textbooks and Materials

Required Course Textbook(s)
Jane Johnston and Magda Pieczka. (2019). Public Interest Communication. Critical Debates and Global Contexts. Routledge.

- ISBN 9781315185521

This book should be available as a free e-book via the UF library (sign in through your Gatorlink, UF id, using the VPN). If you prefer, you could also buy the paperback which is about $5.00 more than the e-book not counting shipping.

Required Software: There is no required software to purchase for this course.

Recommended Textbook(s)
This textbook is recommended in all CJC Online classes to support student expectations for writing style.

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association: The official guide to APA style* (7th ed.).

- ISBN-13: 978-1433832161
- ISBN-10: 143383216X

An example of a (mock) student paper in APA format is included in your actual course.

Instructional materials for this course consist of only those materials specifically reviewed, selected, and assigned by the instructor(s). The instructor(s) is only responsible for these instructional materials.

University and Course Grading Policies

University Honor Code
UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Conduct Code specifies the number of behaviors that violate this code and the possible sanctions. Click here to read the Conduct Code. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is unacceptable, especially in academic communities. All academic work must be an original work of your own thought, research, or self-expression. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to, prohibited collaboration, consultation, and submission of academic work that has been purchased or obtained (see the UF Policy: Student Conduct Violation). In addition, self-plagiarism is also unacceptable. Self-plagiarism is defined as recycling or reusing one's own specific words from previously submitted assignments or published texts. Remember that plagiarism is unacceptable in any of your work, including all discussion board posts, journal entries, wikis, and other written and oral presentation assignments. It's important to always cite your sources in your assignments.

Grading Criterion
Your grade will be calculated based on the following:

Assignments/Assessments	Weight (%)
Course Orientation: These assignments are required; however, they do not count towards the final grade. • Student Introduction • Course Evaluation	0%
4 Journal Entries	15%

11 Discussions – Individual	15%
4 Small Group Assignments	20%
Theory Paper & Mini Essay	20%

Final Project
• **Components**
  ○ Thesis & Outline
  ○ Paper
  ○ Presentation
	30%

TOTAL	**100%**

Grade	Percentage
A	**92.5-100%**
A-	**89.5-92.4%**
B+	**86.5-89.4%**
B	**82.5-86.4%**
B-	**79.5-82.4%**
C+	**76.5-79.4%**
C	**72.5-76.4%**
C-	**69.5-72.4%**
D+	**66.5-69.4%**
D	**62.5-66.4%**
D-	**59.5-62.4%**
E	**0 – 59.4%**

The only passing grades for graduate students are A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, and C. Letter grades of C-, D+, D, D- or E are not considered passing at the graduate level. However, the grade points associated with these letter grades are included in grade point average calculations. See the Graduate Catalog and UF graduate school grading policy for more information.

Student Privacy

Federal laws protect your privacy regarding grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see the Notification to Students of FERPA Rights.

Technology Requirements

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students at the university are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against university policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Software

- Microsoft Office 365.
- UF Apps – access UF software applications from any device from any location at any time.
- Adobe Reader
- Zoom

Technical Support

If you have technical difficulties with your course, don't hesitate to contact the UF Computing Help Desk by filling out an online request form or calling 352-392-4357 (HELP).

If your technical difficulties cause you to miss a due date, you must report the problem to the Help Desk and then email your instructor. Include the ticket number you are given from the Help Desk in an email to the instructor to explain the late assignment/quiz/test.

IT Support
For all Technical assistance questions, please get in touch with the UF Computing Help Desk.
Phone: 352-392-HELP (4357)
Email: helpdesk@ufl.edu

Communication Policies

Student Expectations
Students are expected to check for course announcements weekly to see if there are any updates to the schedule or what we are doing for the week. Students are expected to complete all course assignments on time and must let the instructor know by email if there is a reason that they are late with an assignment (ahead of time if possible).

Announcements
You are responsible for reading all announcements posted in the course each time you log in.

Email
You are responsible for reading all your course emails and responding promptly (within 24 hours).

Instructor Communications

Email Policy
Except for weekends, holidays, and University breaks, the instructor will typically respond to emails within 48 hours. For course-related questions, please post on the Canvas FAQ discussion board. If you have questions of a personal nature, please email me directly.

Assignment Feedback Policy
I will provide feedback/grades on submitted assignments within two weeks of the due date. Some assignments may require a longer review period, which I will communicate to you if necessary.

Course Policies

Video Recording
Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may

be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal, educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Privacy

If your course includes live synchronous meetings, the class sessions will all be recorded for students in the class to refer to and for enrolled students who cannot attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilized a profile image agree to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who unmute during class and participate agree to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. Please see UF's Information Technology policies for additional information.

Challenging Topics

In this course, we may cover subjects that may be sensitive and/or challenging. As in all our courses, we do this not to indoctrinate but to instruct, to prepare you to be the most effective and successful media professional or scholar you can be. We encourage you to understand all concepts presented in class, but we know that what you personally believe is your choice. If you want to discuss anything regarding this, don't hesitate to contact me directly.

Academic and Student Resources

Academic Resources

- E-learning Technical Support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 (HELP) or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- Career Connection Center: Career assistance and counseling. Reitz Union, Phone: 352-392-1601.
- Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance concerning using the libraries or finding resources. UF Library Services for Distance Students

Ask a Librarian – chat with librarians online.
CJC Librarian - April Hines, Phone: 352-273-2728, Email: aprhine@uflib.ufl.edu.

- Writing Studio: Provides one-on-one consultations and workshops tailored to specific classes (graduate and undergraduate). 302 Tigert Hall, Phone: 352-846-1138.

Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, call 352-294-2273, or visit the website to refer or report a concern, and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

- *Counseling and Wellness Center:* Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis and non-crisis services.

- Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

- University Police Department: Visit the UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

- GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal well-being, including wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

Student Fees and Service Entitlement

Student Fees

There are fees mandated by the state and one local fee that ALL students must pay per credit hour. Visit the University Bursar for up-to-date fee rates.

- Capital Improvement Trust Fund Fee
- Technology Fee
- Student Financial Aid Fee [not applicable for certificate programs]

Student services and entitlements

The student services that the distance student is entitled to are comparable to those of the resident student and should include the following:

- Eligibility for financial aid and financial aid advising [not applicable for certificate programs]
- Student complaints and concerns
- Student counseling and advising
- Student organizations
- Technology assistance

Week Number	**Topic and Assignments**
Week 1	What is the "Public Interest" in PIC? Discussion Topic Discussion 1 - What is Public Interest? Assignment Journal Entry 1 - "The Public Interest" and the Nature of Public Interest Communications
Week 2	What is Public Interest Communications Theory? Discussion Topic Discussion 2 - Define Public Interest Communication (PIC) Assignment Journal Entry 2 - Exploring the Journal Of Public Interest Communications
Week 3	Public Communication Theory Foundations - Persuasion and Engagement Assignment Journal Entry 3 - Attitudinal Advocacy, Alternative Persuasion, Activism on Social Media, and Critiquing the Information Deficit Model
Week 4	Ethics and Non-Profits in PIC Discussion Topic Discussion 3 - Exploring Ethics in International Business Affairs with Carnegie Council Assignment Journal Entry 4 - Advocacy Challenges, Ethical Guidelines, and Culture-Centered Approach in Non-Profits and Community Engagement
Week 5	Social Movements and PIC Discussion Topic Discussion 4 - Social Movements and the Intersection of Public Interest Communication Digital and Radical Activism in PIC Discussion Topic Discussion 5 – Dialogue, Engagement, and Social Change in Digital Media
Week 6	Social Science Meets PIC Discussion Topic Discussion 6 - Unearthing Useful Social Science Theories for Public Interest Communication Assignment Research Paper: Exploring Public Interest Communication Theories for Strategic Application
Week 7	PIC Strategy: Where Theory Meets Practice Assignment Final Project: Thesis and Outline Discussion Topic Discussion 7 - Academic Insights
Weeks 8 & 9	Example Week: Public Interest Communications Campaigns in History - The US and Beyond Discussion Topic Discussion 8: Part I - Public Interest Communications Campaigns in History - The US and Beyond Assignment Part II: Mini Essay - Exploring Social Reform Movements: A Global Perspective Discussion Topic Discussion 8: Part III Conclusion - Public Interest Communications Campaigns in History - The US and Beyond
Week 10	Know Thy Audience: Enter Their World Discussion Topic Discussion 9 - Know Thy Audience: Enter Their World
Week 11	Evoke Emotions with Intention & Comm Tactics 101 Peer Review 1: Small Group – Strategic Communication: Emotions and Tactics
Week 12	All About the CTAs Peer Review 2: Small Group - Crafting Effective Calls to Action (CTAs) for a PIC Campaign Revised CTA (Based on Peer Review Feedback)
Week 13	Stories Matter Discussion Topic Discussion 10 - The Power of Storytelling

Week 14-16	Public Interest Communication Campaigns in Action - Final Presentations Prep and Practice Final Presentation Practice and Prep (Small Group) Public Interest Communication Campaigns in Action - Final Presentations Assignment Final Paper Assignment Final Project Week 15: Thanksgiving Break

The instructor reserves the right to adjust this syllabus, as necessary.