



SELF PROGRAM 2025/2026

The Political Persuaders

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Course information

Number of credits : 6 credits

Contact hours : 30 hours

Hours taught per week : 2,5 hours

Teaching period : Fall Semester 2025

Course description:

This course explores the role and influence of special advisers, or “spin doctors”, in politics. Through several case studies, we will see how politicians are “shaped”, trained, some might even say “groomed” to seduce potential voters. Over the past few decades, the professionalisation of politics has made the use of spin doctors necessary, even if their role is still not well-known, for obvious reasons: politicians have to appear “natural”, benevolent

and worthy of trust. The communication “machine” behind them has therefore to remain hidden, in the background. This course will shed some light on this fascinating aspect of political communication.

The course therefore examines how the image of politicians is shaped by various photo-ops and other publicity stunts, but also thanks to their speeches and overall political communication. Special attention will be paid to discourse analysis and the role of metaphors and narratives in political speeches.

Prerequisites:

Basic knowledge of political communication.

Course objectives:

The main objective of this course is to better understand how effective and professional political communication helps politicians come across as trustworthy. We will see what is going on behind the scenes and try to make sense of the current political situation in the UK, the US and in France.

Assessment: [at least 2 marks, one for the final written exam in class and one for a mid-term/oral presentation ...]

30%: Mid-term written exam

70%: group presentation and group dossier at the end of the semester

Attendance:

In order to participate, students must be present. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed; otherwise no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.

Bibliography:

Bonnet, A.-P. (2024). Johnsonism and crisis management : A critical narrative analysis of the UK Prime Minister's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 0(0), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2024.2334281>

Bonnet, A.-P. "As Easy as Bojo's 'Oven-ready' Brexit Pie? The Conservative Campaign", *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* [Online], XXV-3 | 2020, Online since 10 September 2020, connection on 10 July 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/5718>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.5718>

Dickson, Annabelle and others, 'We're all living in Dominic Cummings' world now', *Politico*, 13 December 2019 <https://www.politico.eu/article/dominic-cummings-uk-electio-2019-strategy-conservative-victory/> consulted 28 February 2020.

Hare, Geoffrey, 'Studying political slogans as communication.' *Francophonie: The French Journal of the Association for Language Learning* 3 (June 1991): 24.

Payne, Sebastian, 'UK election: how the Tories 'got it done'', *Financial Times*, 22 December 2019 <https://www.ft.com/content/ab3692b0-2317-11ea-92da-f0c92e957a96> consulted 27 February 2020.

Ridge-Newman, Anthony, 'Weak and wobbly' to 'get Brexit done': 2019 and Conservative campaigns', *Election analysis*, <http://www.electionanalysis.uk/uk-election-analysis-2019/section-4-parties-and-the-campaign/weak-and-wobbly-to-get-brexit-done-2019-and-conservative-campaigns/> consulted 28 February 2020.

Ross, Tim and Tom, McTague, *Betting the House: The Inside Story of the 2017 Election* (London, Biteback Publishing, 2017) p. 431.