



SPC 309

Persuasion & Propaganda

Dr. Michael I. Niman

Buffalo State College

Fall 2010

Es lebe Deutschland!

BuffaloState

State University of New York

SPC 309 Fall 2010 Syllabus

Persuasion & Propaganda

3.0 Credit Hours

Wednesday 6:00 – 8:40 – Classroom Bldg. A-212

Professor: **Dr. Michael I. Niman**

Office Hours: Tuesday / Thursday 2:00-3:30

Wednesday 3:30-5:45PM & by appt. 230 Bishop Hall

Professor's Website: <http://mediastudy.com>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Media messages, spread by rapidly proliferating technologies, have come to dominate our cultural environment, expanding the power of mediated messages to engineer our collective and individual behavior. When communicators use this power intentionally, we call the resulting messages either persuasion or propaganda. This resulting manufacture of public consent, usually regarding government or corporate agendas, has emerged as the most powerful political force in the 21st Century. This course will utilize a cultural studies approach to examine the history and current applications of persuasion and propaganda. Looking specifically at the contexts of public relations, advertising, interpersonal and intercultural communication, we will analyze propaganda and persuasion's ethical impacts, their socio-political implications and their effect on our cultural environment in this era of globalization.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this semester, students should be able to: a) analyze and identify theoretical concepts guiding the construction of persuasive and propagandistic messages. b) Apply theoretical concepts to practical attempts at persuasion and propaganda. c) Construct and deconstruct persuasive messages. d) Evaluate socio-cultural implications of persuasive and propagandistic messages with regards to power dynamics, hegemony, cultural imperialism and the overall impact upon popular culture and politics. Most importantly, students should be able to formulate ethics-based arguments regarding the use of persuasion and propaganda.

GRADING

40% Class Participation / 12 Weekly Essay Assignments – Includes preparing short (or not too short) weekly reading-based *reflective* essays and participating in class discussions. Reflective essays will demonstrate an in-depth comprehension of and familiarity with the reading material. You must bring them to class each week. A good essay will cite the readings and discuss the issues or theories raised by the author(s). Students will write **one essay for each chapter or article** included in the weekly readings. Professor will collect and grade essays. Students who are not in class are not participating (as in not earning a good participation grade) and will not be able to turn in reflective essays. Essays should be “typed” and stapled (buy a stapler). Reflective essays **are not accepted late w/o medical or funeral documentation**. You should bring Reflective essays to class during the week after which they were assigned. On the top of each sheet of essays, write “SPC309,” your name and the number of the week that the essays *are due*. See professor’s online style guide before writing.

15% Persuasion and Propaganda: A Personal Reflection (Due Week 4 – 9/22)

– Citing definitions of Propaganda from the Jowett/O’Donnell book, describe an incident in your life where a person or organization used propaganda to persuade you to do something that later proved contrary (against) your best interest – but was in the best interest of the persuader. For example: Buying a gas guzzling SUV, Signing a predatory rent-to-own contract, Signing a long-term overpriced cell phone contract, joining the _____ etc. Describe in detail how the persuading person or agency persuaded you. What tools did they use? How did you react at the time? Why were you susceptible to this persuasive effort? etc. Cite class readings when answering these questions. Assignment must be “typed.” See professor’s online style guide before writing.

15% Invert the Bias Exercise (Due Week 9, Oct. 27)

– Make a copy of one of the articles that you are analyzing for your semester project. Select a short article (500 words or less). *(1)* In the introduction paragraph, you should clearly **identify and explain the bias of the article**. *(2)* rewrite the article to **reverse the bias** *changing as little of the original article as possible* (anti-plagiarism rules are waived for this assignment). **Note: Your re-write should be biased, displaying a bias diametrically opposed to the original bias** which you will have identified. *Number the paragraphs* in both the original article and in your rewrite. Maintain the same basic structure, changing some of the text (language usage), and choosing different *[accurate]* facts or quotes to add. You can find these accurate quotes by *doing research*. **Added or changed lines should be italicized**. You may do **research** for additional information to cite in the article. *You cannot, however, change reality*. For example, *you can’t make up quotes for or attribute ideologies to real people such as public figures, or fabricate facts or bogus studies*. You are changing the bias of the article, not the reality of the world. Be prepared to present your work in front of the class. **Hint:** Be sure to select an article where the

author *clearly displays a bias*. If the author's bias is vague or nonexistent, your inversion will be equally vague and difficult to ascertain. If the article has no clear bias, this assignment cannot be completed. **Hint:** Pick an article about a subject that you are very familiar with. **Hint:** You can change the bias by changing the card stacking – cut some quotes and add others. **Please Note:** *If you do not understand the concept of bias, you should drop this upper division class before the end of the add-drop period and register to take it when you have the prerequisite literacy skills.* See professor's online style guide before writing.

30% Semester Project: Propaganda Scrapbook (Due 12/8). Students will clip at least four mainstream American magazine or newspaper news articles throughout the semester and **analyze** them for persuasive or propagandistic messages. These *must be news articles and not editorials or opinion columns* (stop by during office hours and ask me if you are unsure – using an editorial in place of an article means that segment of the project earns an *F*). Articles must be **clipped throughout the semester, not scavenged in a mad last minute rush**. Stop by and discuss your articles with me, as you select them, during my office hours. Do not use Sports articles (because it's really just a game, after all).

For each article, Describe the bias in your opening paragraph or paragraphs, then, using multiple theories and strategies outlined in your textbooks (particularly Jowett/O'Donnell), use **bullet points to describe in detail the persuasive/propagandistic techniques used** in each article and **cite them** (list page and book where technique is described). (1) *Who is the desired audience* and what do you think their *reaction* will be. (2) *Describe the process of propaganda or persuasion the author uses to construct each message.* What tools is s/he using? (3) *What is the author's ideology?* **Hint:** This project will not work if the articles you chose do not contain a **clear bias**. Make life easy for yourself and hunt for the easiest articles to work with. Finding these articles will determine your success with this project. Though this project is due in its entirety on 12/8, students should be completing this work throughout the semester and should be prepared to present their work by 12/1. See professor's online style guide before writing. Submit a paper copy in class and submit an electronic copy to turnitin.com.

Please Note:

All policies articulated in this syllabus supersede Communication Department suggested policies.

Grading of student papers will reflect Standard American English usage. Buffalo State students and faculty generally use Chicago, APA or MLA bibliographic styles. All are acceptable. Students should use one style consistently throughout their paper. I prefer The

Chicago Manual of Style for this class. A Chicago style guide is available online (Adobe) at <http://mediastudy.com/AAAstyleguide.pdf>.

Plagiarism will result in automatic course failure and departmental or college disciplinary action. Ask around – I firmly enforce this policy w/o exceptions. Plagiarism means passing off someone else’s ideas, work or writing (intellectual property) as if it is your own. **Quotes must be inside of quotation marks** and clearly cited. Any other use of a sequence of words, no matter how few, not written by you constitutes plagiarism. Likewise, any series of **ideas** presented by someone else, or any **analytical structure** written by someone else, must be properly cited **even if you present their work in your own words**. Professor reserves the right to upload all papers, minus student names, into an anti-plagiarism database. I suspend these rules for the “Invert the Bias” exercise.

Students entering this course **must** possess literacy skills (reading comprehension and writing) appropriate for a college junior. Since understanding propaganda and persuasion requires understanding the societal context in which it appears, you should have a base awareness of political issues in the world today. This is also a prerequisite, as is a basic understanding of bias and biased media.

Cellies must be in silent mode. “Ringing” cellular devices = lowered semester grade and/or public torment and humiliation.

Surreptitiously turning in an absent student’s assignment constitutes fraud on the part of both students involved and will result in automatic class failure for both students. A student with an **excused medical or catastrophe absence** may send their paper to class or to my office, with a clear note attached explaining their excused absence.

The use of **electronic recording devices** is prohibited in this class except with specific permission of the professor, or except, after notification of the professor, as provided for under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Course content is protected intellectual property.

3.0 credit courses require at least **9.0 hours of work per week**.

Please remember that grading is never quite fair, so don’t expect your grade to always adequately reflect what you have learned. The best strategy to address the injustices inherent in grading is to carefully read the reading material, submit exemplary assignments, show up on time, participate in class and avoid any possible ambiguity regarding the quality of your work.

By registering for and remaining in this class, students are agreeing to abide by these guidelines.

BSC Disabilities Policy: *"Any student who requires accommodations to complete the requirements and expectations of this course because of a disability is invited to make his or her needs known to the professor and to Marianne Savino, the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities, 120 South Wing, 878-4500"* (BSC Office of Disabilities Services Syllabus Statement).

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda – 2nd Edition by Noam Chomsky. Seven Stories Press (2002). ISBN 1-58322-536-6. (\$8.95)

Propaganda by Edward Bernays with an intro by Mark Crispin Miller. IG Press (2005). (Originally Published 1928) ISBN 0-9703125-9-8 (\$13.95)

War, Media and Propaganda: A Global Perspective Edited by Yahya Kamalipour and Nancy Snow. Rowman& Littlefield (2004). ISBN 0-7425-3563-0 (\$27.95)

Propaganda and Persuasion 4th Edition by Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell. Sage (2006) ISBN 1-4129-0898-1

Required texts are available at the **Main Street Talking Leaves Bookstore**, 3158 Main St. (between Hertel and Winspear - 837-8554). From BSC, left on Elmwood, right on Amherst or Hertel, left on Main St. Elmwood bus to Hertel bus, get off at Main Street. Consider your trip to Talking Leaves as fieldwork. Spend some time here looking over the other books in the store. Think about how these books subvert the dominant propaganda paradigm?

*Open Your Mind To New Ways of Approaching Old Ideas
Take Command of Your Own Mental Environment & De-Colonize Your Soul
Seize Control of Your Own Thoughts and Emotions*

Fall 2010 Course Outline

WEEK 1 (9/1)

Defining Propaganda and Persuasion.

Assignment: Read Jowett/O'Donnell p. 1-28 (stop after 3rd paragraph). Read Bernays p. 9-33. Write week two reflective essays.

WEEK 2 (9/8)

"Organizing Chaos." Invisible government. The origins of propaganda and persuasion. Propaganda and religion.

Assignment: Read Jowett/O'Donnell p.44-73 Read Bernays 36-45. Write week three reflective essays

WEEK 3 (9/15)

Putting history into perspective. {View Goodman Video}

Assignment: Read entire Chomsky booklet except p. 22-29 (write only two short essays – one covering Chomsky's Martian shtick and the other covering the rest of the booklet. Write week four reflective essays.

WEEK 4 (9/22) Personal Reflections Due

Discuss Reflections.

Spectator Democracy, engineering opinion and representing reality. What would the Martians think? Chomsky on Bernays.

Assignment: Read Jowett/O'Donnell p93-124, 139-145. Write week five reflective essays.

WEEK 5 (9/29)

The Age of Propaganda. The industrial revolution, the communication revolution and the emergence of the propaganda state. {View Hijacking Catastrophe}

Read Bernays p. 71-107. Read Chomsky p. 22-29. Assignment: Read Jowett/O'Donnell p145-152. Write week six reflective essays.

WEEK 6 (10/6)

The Public Relations Industry. Advertising as propaganda. {View Toxic Sludge}

Assignment: Read Jowett/O'Donnell p201-221, 226-245. Write week seven reflective essays.

WEEK 7 (10/13)

Psychological Warfare. World War I and the advent of Psych-ops and info-warfare. Atrocity propaganda then and now. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis and the Seven Propaganda Devices. World War II: The architecture of fascism.

Read Kamalipour/Snow "Forward" p.xi-xii. , "Information Dominance..." p.7-14, "From Bombs..." p. 17-24, "Selling the Iraq War..." p. 25-32, "Anatomy of..." p. 125-130. Write week eight reflective essays. Invert the Bias Exercise Due Next Week.

WEEK 8 (10/20)

Contemporary Propaganda and Persuasion. {View Outfoxed}
Invisible media management strategies. "Public Diplomacy." The embedded reporter. "Information Dominance."

Read: Read Kamalipour/Snow "War as..." p.79-90, "The War on..." p.131-137, "Spinning War..." p. 47-58. Write week nine reflective essays.

WEEK 9 (10/27) Invert the Bias Exercise Due

Visual Propaganda. The unembedded Reporter. Controlling history and public memory.

Read Kamalipour/Snow "Spectacle and Media..." p. 69-77, "Murdoch's War" p. 93-99, "War on..." 147-168, "The Self-Absorbed..." p.199-206. Write week ten reflective essays.

WEEK 10 (11/3)

Contemporary war propaganda: An international perspective.

Read Bernays 109-128, Read Kamalipour/Snow "From Propaganda to Public Diplomacy" p. 219-224, "Can we..." 227-234. Write week eleven reflective essays.

WEEK 11 (11/10)

Discuss "Invert the Bias" exercise.

The voice of the politician: Political rhetoric. The theory of Public Diplomacy.

Read Jowett/O'Donnell p269-287. Write week twelve reflective essays.

WEEK 12 (11/17)

Back to theory: How to analyze persuasion and propaganda. The mechanics of persuasion and propaganda.

Read Jowett/O'Donnell p. 357-367, Read Kamalipour/Snow "Epilog" p. 237-242.

Students should be prepared to present portions of their semester project. Write week thirteen reflective essays.

WEEK 13 (11/24) No Class. Wampanoag Genocide Memorial Day Weekend.

WEEK 14 (12/1)

Analysis and evaluation of persuasion and propaganda continued. Applying propaganda theory to news media. Media deconstruction. Presentations of student work.

WEEK 15 (12/8) FINAL PAPER DUE

Propaganda deconstruction. Presentations of student work. Final paper due 12/8. Submit a paper copy in class and submit an electronic copy to turnitin.com via Angel.

**If you don't learn intellectual integrity and ethics at school,
it's not likely you'll find them on the job.**

-- Buffalo State College Communication Department