INTRODUCTION

Organizational storytelling both effectively communicates an organization’s mission and builds empathy for its cause. A story is more than an exposition, climax, and resolution. Effective storytelling weaves a narrative that tells a systemic story about the social justice movement. The course will offer an overview on how to strategically use values-based communications, helping students understand how to move persuadable audiences to garner support for social justice issues.

This course teaches students how to communicate with the public and work with the media. The concepts and skills prepare students to generate public support for their organization’s mission, strategic initiatives, and fund-raising activities. Students learn to position organizations in the public eye and translate complex concepts into clear and concise messages for public consumption. They develop skills in written and oral communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. Students learn about a range of communications vehicles and discuss ways to use those vehicles to get their messages out.

The course was inspired by How to Be An Effective Activist, a 90-minute training on non-violent action.

Learning Objectives:
By the end of this course students should be able to:

1. Discuss the role of storytelling and narrative in strategic communications and its importance.
2. Describe the fundamentals of framing and messaging through a values-based communications lens.
3. Explain the concept and practice of public narrative and how to move from values to actions.
4. Understand how creative direct action drives and deepens narrative and storytelling in social justice movements.
5. Craft and incorporate digital storytelling.
6. Identify ways in which public opinion research informs and shapes strategic communications.
7. Create a comprehensive strategic communications plan.

Outline of Class: Classes will initially involve roughly 50 minutes of lecture, 30 minutes of discussion, 15 minutes of questions, and 5 minutes of concluding remarks will pull together some of the key points, highlight ongoing areas of empirical and theoretical debate, and frame the readings for the subsequent class. Lectures will NOT summarize what is in the readings. Class participation will constitute a significant percentage of the final grade. My lectures are very interactive and typically include classroom exercises to help us move from communications theory to practice. Over the course of the semester we may alter the proportion of lecture and discussion time. During the course, we will use current events as case studies for strategic communications. I encourage students to tell me which topics they wish to examine and I will weave them into the classes and forums.
**Syllabus**: The syllabus is designed for those interested in both theoretical and practical applications of strategic communications. The communications methodologies and worksheets outlined in the course may be particularly useful for students interested in crafting campaigns that reach and shift the opinions of persuadable audiences, key stakeholders, donors, the media, and/or decisionmakers.

**GRADES**

There is no curve in this course. Everyone may receive an A or everyone may receive an F. This course will abide by the Wagner School’s general policy guidelines on incomplete grades, academic honesty, and plagiarism. It is the student’s responsibility to become familiar with these policies. All students are expected to pursue and meet the highest standards of academic excellence and integrity.

Incomplete Grades: [http://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies/incompletes](http://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies/incompletes)

Academic Honesty: [http://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies](http://wagner.nyu.edu/students/policies)

**Course Requirements:**

1. **Class Participation** (30%) The course depends on active and ongoing participation by all class participants. This will occur in three ways:

   a. Participation begins with effective reading. Class participants are expected to read and discuss the readings on a weekly basis. That means coming prepared to engage the class, with questions and/or comments with respect to the reading. Students are expected to have completed all the required readings before class to the point where they can be called on to critique or discuss any reading.

   b. In class itself, the key to quality class discussions is listening. Asking good questions is the second key element. “What did you mean by that?” “How do you/we know?” “What’s the evidence for that claim?” Be reflective, thoughtful, and fully engage with the ideas of others in the class. Students should share thoughts and reactions in ways that promote critical engagement with their classmates. While engaging, remember the classroom agreements. Discussion topics will often be very personal, sensitive, and even controversial. Being respectful of everyone’s opinion is essential to creating a safe and engaged learning environment.

   c. There will also be regular classroom exercises and case discussions. For students who are less comfortable engaging during class, I encourage students to take full advantage of the forums on NYU Classes. Forums are a great way to add to the participation grade and remain engaged in the conversation throughout the week. Participation in class exercises, discussions, and forums all go into the participation grade.

   Quality and quantity of participation can be, but are not necessarily, closely correlated.

2. **Writing Assignments** (30%): Effective, strategic communicators are effective writers and strategists. There are three individual writing assignments for the course:

   a. **Tell Your Story** (10%) in no less than 800 words based on the concepts of storytelling and narrative we covered in the first class. Be sure to refer to the PowerPoint presentation and Narrative Analysis Worksheet in order to craft a compelling biography. **Assignment is due by 5:00pm on Tuesday, September 12.**

   b. **What’s Your G.A.M.E. Plan?** (10%) Strategic communications are just that – strategic! Students must select a topic, issue, or cause that piques their interests and create an outreach
plan and strategy using The Lightbox Collaborative worksheet, The G.A.M.E. Plan. Identify a communications goal. Craft messaging for targeted audience(s) and select the messengers and methods or platforms needed to engage them. (This is a great opportunity to get feedback on any current or potential projects.) **Assignment is due by 5:00pm on Tuesday, September 19.**

c. **Story of Self, Us, and Now (10%)** is an 800-word exercise in which student will revisit the Tell Your Story assignment and re-write it using Marshall Ganz’s Public Narrative model of the Story of Self, Story of Us, and Story of Now. Students must reflect on who they are, what community or communities they come from, and the current socio-political moment to craft a compelling narrative. **Assignment is due by 5:00pm on Tuesday, September 26.**

3. **Final Group Project and Group Presentation (40%)** is the culmination of all of the course learnings.

   a. **Final Project (20%)** is a comprehensive strategic communications plan to be completed in groups. Students may use the Rasmuson Foundation’s strategic communications template as a guide.

   b. **Final Presentation (20%)** is a 10-minute presentation that each group will perform in front of the class. The final presentations must enact and reflect the strategic communications plan the groups created. Students are encouraged to be creative and glean from examples used throughout the course.

**Late Policy:** Papers handed in late will be penalized one-third of a grade per day.

**Grading Breakdown:** Class participation (30), Writing Assignments (30%), Final Project and Presentation (40%).

**Required Books:**
George Lakoff, *(ALL NEW)* *Don’t Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*
Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*

**Recommended Books:**
Simon Sinek, *Start with Why*
Andrew Boyd, *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution*
### OVERVIEW OF SEMESTER

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WEEKLY COURSE READINGS

WEEK 1: STORYTELLING AND NARRATIVE

No Required Reading

Recommended:

a. Joseph E. Davis, Narrative and Social Movements: The Power of Stories. [NYU Classes]
c. Center for Story-Based Strategy, Narrative Power Analysis Worksheet. [NYU Classes]

WEEK 2: VALUES, MESSAGING, AND FRAMING

Required:
George Lakoff, *ALL NEW* Don’t Think an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate.


Recommended:

   https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action
b. Marshall Ganz and Liz McKenna. The Practice of Social Movement Leadership. [NYU Classes]

WEEK 3: SHIFTING NARRATIVE

Required:
Malcolm Gladwell, *Tipping Point.*

2. Race Forward, Moving the Race Conversation Forward Part 2. [NYU Classes]
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lwymxTwmkQ

Recommended:

a. Race Forward, Moving the Race Conversation Forward Part 1 [NYU Classes]
b. Public Narrative Worksheet [NYU Classes]

WEEK 4: MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Required:

1. The Opportunity Agenda, Vision, Values, Voice: Communications Toolkit, Pages 31-37. [NYU Classes]
2. Race Forward, Moving the Race Conversation Forward Part 1 [NYU Classes]  
3. Deen Freelon, Charlton D. Mcilwain, and Meredith D. Clark, *Beyond the Hashtags,* Center for Media and Social Impact. American University. [NYU Classes]
Recommended:

b. The Rockefeller Foundation, Digital Storytelling for Social Impact [NYU Classes]

WEEK 5: INCORPORATING PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

Required:

2. The Opportunity Agenda, Vision, Values, Voice: Communications Toolkit, Pages 10-12. [NYU Classes]

Recommended:


WEEK 6: CREATIVE DIRECT ACTION

Required:

1. Ruckus, Direct Action [NYU Classes]

Recommended:

a. Andrew Boyd, *Beautiful Trouble*
b. Ruckus, Action Visuals [NYU Classes]
c. Making Waves, The Culture Group [NYU Classes]

WEEK 7: FINAL GROUP PRESENTATIONS AND PROJECTS

Required:

a. The Rasmuson Foundation. Strategic Communications Template. [NYU Classes]