

# **PADM-GP 4450 Strategic Communications for Advocacy**

# **Fall 2023**

## Instructor Information

* Jamila Brown
* Email: [jb6467@nyu.edu](mailto:jb6467@nyu.edu)
* Phone: 718.283.4164
* Office Hours: By appointment
* Schedule an Appointment Time: <https://calendly.com/jamilaaisha>

## Course Information

* Class Meeting Times: Wednesdays, 4:55-6:35pm
* Class Location: 60 Fifth Ave, Room C12

## 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**](https://wagner.nyu.edu/news/story/how-be-effective-activist-90-minute-training-nonviolent-action-draws-400), a 90-minute training on non-violent action.

## Course and 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. Craft and incorporate digital storytelling.
5. Identify ways in which public opinion research informs and shapes strategic communications.
6. Learn how to create narrative-led campaigns using story-based strategy.
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, Assignments and Evaluation

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](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies). 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.

Students **MUST WRITE** their assignments and are **NOT** permitted to use ChatGPT or any AI platforms to assist them.

Students are always encouraged to ask questions about assignments and highly encouraged to schedule office hours, however, I will **NOT** read assignments before the submission date. As mentioned below in more detail under class participation, students must ask good questions to become an effective communicator. Learning to ask questions and learning to trust one’s writing is an essential part of this course.

### Course Requirements

#### Class Participation (20%)

The course depends on active and ongoing participation by all class participants. This will occur in three ways:

* 1. 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.
  2. 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.
  3. 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 Brightspace. 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.

#### Writing Assignments (40%)

Effective, strategic communicators are effective writers and strategists. There are **four** short individual writing assignments for the course:

##### Tell Your Story (10%)

In **500 words** based on the concepts of storytelling and narrative we covered in the first class lecture and readings, tell me why you are here. **Essays should be as close to 500 words as possible and may not exceed more than 525 words.**

The objective of the assignment is to write a personal narrative centered in (your) advocacy (issue) that is equally compelling and concise. Some guiding questions to help shape your personal narrative are: What motivated you to apply for your NYU program? What events in your life lead you to this point? What are you interested in doing with this degree? How do you want to shape your future? How will your public service impact the world? Who are you as a public servant? What do you care deeply about and why does it matter to you?

The reading “*Beyond Resistance*” offers an example of what a personal narrative is from an advocacy lens and the reading “*Storytelling for Advocacy*” offers a framework and specific guidance for what makes a compelling story and how to compose it.

The class presentation will be available on Brightspace for your review. Use week 1’s readings and what you learned during the class lecture to craft a compelling personal narrative.

**Assignment is due by 5:00pm on Wednesday, September 13.**

##### 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. Instructions to complete the assignment are as follows:

1. Create **one** [SMART](https://www.smartsheet.com/blog/essential-guide-writing-smart-goals) goal. Your communications goal must be a SMART goal. It must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound.
2. Write **five** different audiences. Identify **five** audiences who can help you achieve your SMART goal. These audiences must be specific. Remember, there is no such thing as the “general public.” Your audiences must comprise of people who have decision making power and/or have the power to influence the decisionmakers.
3. Write **five** VPSA messages. VPSA stands for Value, Problem, Solution, and Action. It is a framework that is used to create effective messaging for advocacy. The reading “*Vision, Values, Voice: A Communications Toolkit*” gives a step by step guide on how to write VPSA messages. These messages must be personalized for each of your **five** audiences. Think about what message will be the most compelling to your audience. Start by identifying what your audience values, i.e., what do they care about. The value is the initial point of connection that draws your audience into the subject matter. Next, identify the problem your advocacy aims to solve. Then offer a solution that relates directly to your SMART goal and solves the problem. Finally give them a concrete action to take that will help achieve your SMART goal. A VPSA message must include a value, problem, solution, and an action. Typically, VPSA messages are four **complete** sentences long. The only notable exceptions are for social media; however, the social media message must still include a value, problem, solution, and action. In addition to being written in complete sentences, your VPSA messages must also be grammatically correct.
4. List **five** messengers to communicate with your **five** audiences. Select **five** messengers to deliver each of your **five** VPSA messages to your **five** different audiences. The messenger must be the best person to communicate with your audience. The messenger should also be someone your audience has trust and familiarity. An ideal messenger is someone whose opinion your audience highly respects. The reading *The Tipping Point* offers specific insight on how important the messenger is in communications – often the messenger carries more importance than the message. Additionally, “*Don’t Think an Elephant*” and “*Visions, Values, Voice: A Communications Toolkit*” offer guidance about selecting the appropriate messenger.
5. List **five** channels of engagement. Channels of engagement are the mediums and platforms your messengers will use to deliver your **five** VPSA messages to your **five** audiences. Examples of channels of engagement include newspapers (be specific and list the name of the publication), town hall meetings, emails, text messages, door to door visits, board meetings, press conferences, social media (be specific Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X – Twitter), blogs, and many more. You must select a channel of engagement that **five** audiences engage with on a regular basis. Ask yourself, where is your audience most likely to encounter this information. For example, if your campaign targets audiences who 18-25 year old’s living in NYC you may want to list TikTok as a channel of engagement. These channels of engagements will vary depending on your audiences. The reading “*Vision, Values, Voice: A Communications Toolkit”* outlines the various mediums in which you can use VPSA messages.

This assignment requires thoughtfulness and attention to detail. Be mindful of your goal and who are the right people to deliver and receive these messages by the right medium. This assignment is also a great opportunity to get feedback on your current or potential projects. Feel free to use real life examples of initiatives you are working on and/or interested in.

**Assignment is due by 5:00pm on Wednesday, September 20.**

##### Story of Self, Us, and Now (10%)

This is a **500-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. **Essays should be as close to 500 words as possible and may not exceed more than 525 words.**

Students will use their original subject matter from their personal narrative/story of us and augment the essay to include the story of us and the story of now. The story of self is your personal narrative and describes your call to leadership. The story of us is about your community and gives insight as to who you represent and who is affected by this issue. Finally, the story of now is a call to action that details why the issue is urgent and why we must act now.

Students should reflect on who they are, what community or communities they come from, and the current socio-political moment to craft a compelling narrative. The assignment is directly pulled from the reading *Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power***.** Ganz’s framework teaches us how to move audiences from values and emotions into action. The goal of the assignment is for students to demonstrate their growth as storytellers.

**Assignment is due by 5:00pm on Wednesday, September 27.**

##### Create Your Advocacy Video Ad (10%)

Students will create a short video advertisement for the advocacy campaign selected for their G.A.M.E. Plan assignment. The video must **NOT** exceed 90 seconds (1 minute and 30 seconds). Keep in mind that most [effective advertisements](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj_FD25oREY&ab_channel=GaryChambersJr.) are between 30 to 60 seconds.

Students must imagine their campaign ad will run on television and social media (YouTube, X, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook). The video’s messaging must embody the campaign’s SMART Goal and include **one** VPSA message.

In this exercise the student is the messenger, and the professor is the target audience. The student must consider what will move the professor – the audience – on this issue. What will be the most compelling message that will encourage the professor to take action on the issue.

Students are encouraged to be creative and use all the resources available to them. This may include using video templates from social media, using special backgrounds provided on Zoom, or shooting the video on location (i.e., go outside!). Students are encouraged to record videos using their mobile phones, although other devices and platforms such as drones, Zooms, gimbals, etc. are allowed.

This assignment draws from all course readings and lectures thus far. Pay particular attention to the media and digital media lecture various platforms are utilized for advocacy campaigns.

**Assignment is due by 5:00pm on Wednesday, October 4.**

#### Final Group Project and Group Presentation (40%)

This is the culmination of all the course learnings in **two parts: one written and one verbal** – both are group assignments.

Students are required to select their groups by September 20 and email the names of the group members to the professor. Each group must select their topic by September 27 and email the topic to the professor. **Assignments are due by 5:00pm on Wednesday, October 18.**

##### Final Project (20%)

Part one of the final project is to complete a comprehensive strategic communications plan that includes a corresponding op-ed, letter to the editor, article, or press release that is 300-500 words.

Students must complete the Rasmuson Foundation’s strategic communications template in its entirety. The guide clearly lays out its instructions step by step and students must fill out each category as a group.

Additionally, each group must write op-ed, letter to the editor, article, or press release that is 300-500 words. This written accompaniment is part of your communications plan. It demonstrates the group’s ability to effectively communicate the issue in a way that is engaging and informative.

“Vision, Values, and Voice: A Communications Toolkit” gives specific examples for how to write an op-ed, letter to the editor, article, or press release in VPSA. Students must draw from all of the course readings that range from messaging to communications channels to evaluation and research to complete this assignment.

This is a template that students can use beyond this course that will allow them to develop their own communications campaigns.

##### Final Presentation (20%)

Part two of the final project is a 5-minute presentation that each group must record and email to the professor on the final day of class, Wednesday, October 18. The final presentations must enact and reflect the strategic communications plan the groups created. The presentation is an extension or an example of the group’s campaign strategy.

Students are encouraged to be creative and glean from examples used throughout the course. Presentations in the past have included: press conferences, panel discussions, podcast interviews, talk shows, and protests.

This assignment is heavily inspired by creative direct action and the examples given in the Class 6 lecture. The presentation will be available on Brightspace for reference.

Meeting with the professor regarding the final project is highly encouraged. Please come prepared with questions and to discuss the group’s communications strategy.

### Late Policy

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

### Grading Breakdown

Class participation (20%), Writing Assignments (40%), Final Project and Presentation (40%).

## Class Readings

### 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

* Dr. Frank Lutz, *Words That Work*
* The Center for Story-Based Strategy, *Reimagining Change* [NYU Brightspace]

## Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner’s Academic Code](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/code). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/academic-oath). Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

## Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities.  Please visit the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website](https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/students-with-disabilities.html) **and click the “Get Started” button. You can also call or email CSD** (212-998-4980 or [mosescsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu)) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

## NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

[NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

## NYU’s Wellness Exchange

[NYU’s Wellness Exchange](http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/wellness-exchange.html) has extensive student health and mental health resources. A private hotline (212-443-9999) is available 24/7 that connects students with a professional who can help them address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns.

## Overview of the Semester

**WEEK 1 September 6 STORYTELLING AND NARRATIVE**

**WEEK 2 September 13 VALUES, FRAMING, AND MESSAGING**

**WEEK 3 September 20 SHIFTING NARRATIVE**

**WEEK 4 September 27 MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS**

**WEEK 5 October 4 INCORPORATING PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH**

**WEEK 6 October 11 STORY-BASED STRATEGY**

**WEEK 7 October 18 FINAL GROUP PRESENTATIONS AND PROJECTS DUE**

## Weekly Course Readings

### WEEK 1: STORYTELLING AND NARRATIVE

#### Required:

* Jamila Brown. [Beyond Resistance](https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/beyond-resistance/our-new-global-feminism-fellow-considers-whats-next), Bitch Magazine. January 16, 2018
* Jasmine Somaiah. [Storytelling for Advocacy](https://callhub.io/storytelling-for-advocacy/), CallHub. September 24, 2018.

#### Recommended:

* Grace Fleming. [How to Write a Personal Narrative](https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-write-a-personal-narrative-1856809), ThoughtCo. August 2, 2019.

### WEEK 2: VALUES, MESSAGING, AND FRAMING

#### Required:

* George Lakoff. *(ALL NEW) Don’t Think an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate.*
* The Opportunity Agenda, Vision, Values, Voice: A Communications Toolkit, 2015. [NYU Brightspace]

#### Recommended:

* Simon Sinek. “[How Great Leaders Inspire Action](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action),” TEDTalks, September 2009.[NYU Brightspace]
* Marshall Ganz and Liz McKenna. [The Practice of Social Movement Leadership](https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/2017/06/23/the-practice-of-social-movement-leadership/). [NYU Brightspace]

### WEEK 3: SHIFTING NARRATIVE

#### Required:

* Malcolm Gladwell. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference* –Chapters 1-5.
* Marshall Ganz. *Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power*. [NYU Brightspace]

#### Recommended:

* Anat Shenkur-Osorio: [Brave New Words](https://wordstowinby-pod.com/) podcast.
* [BROKE](https://www.brokeproject.org/) Report.

### WEEK 4: MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

#### Required:

* [Are We Automating Racism](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ok5sKLXqynQ&t=101s&ab_channel=Vox)? Vox, 2021.
* Hestres, Luis. *Tools Beyond Our Control: Social Media and the Work of Advocacy Organizations*. Sage Publications, 2017. [NYU Brightspace]

#### Recommended:

* Marshall Freelon, Charlton D. Mcilwain, and Meredith D. Clark. *Beyond the Hashtags,* Center for Media, and Social Impact. American University. [NYU Brightspace]
* The Rockefeller Foundation, *Digital Storytelling for Social Impact* [NYU Brightspace]

### WEEK 5: INCORPORATING PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

#### Required:

* Robert Pérez and Amy Simon. *Heartwired: Human Behavior, Strategic Opinion Research, and the Audacious Pursuit of Social Change*. [NYU Brightspace]

#### Recommended:

* The Opportunity Agenda, *Vision, Values, Voice: Communications Toolkit*, Pages 10-12. [NYU Brightspace]
* Dr. Frank Lutz. *Words That Work.*

### WEEK 6: STORY-BASED STRATEGY

#### Required:

* *Story-Based Strategy 101* [NYU Brightspace]
* Jamila Brown. [*Stories of Survival in the Diaspora*](https://www.storybasedstrategy.org/blog-full/2021/7/13/stories-of-survival-in-the-diaspora). Center for Story-Based Strategy. July 13, 2021.

#### Recommended:

* The Center for Story-Based Strategy, *Re:Imagining Change* [NYU Brightspace]

### WEEK 7: FINAL GROUP PRESENTATIONS AND PROJECTS

#### Required:

* The Rasmuson Foundation. *Strategic Communications Template*. [NYU Brightspace]