



COM 324-001

Theory and Research in Persuasion

Spring 2024

Classroom: Fell Hall 275A (SMACC) most days; but Zoom on 4 days noted in the schedule

Dates & Times: Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays, 9:00 - 9:50 a.m.

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Office Hours: By appointment, in-person, Mondays 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. Any time via cell phone.

Course Description and Objectives:

The purpose of this class is to provide students with a solid grounding in theories, principles, concepts, processes, research, applications, and strategies of persuasion and social influence. According to the undergraduate catalog, this course is a: "Survey of theoretical and applied literature dealing with how attitudes, beliefs, and social behaviors are affected by communication. Production and criticism of such messages will be studied." Those interested in communication studies, politics, public health, mass media, social media, education, public relations, advertising, marketing, or psychology, will find this course to be a useful addition to their knowledge toolbox. This course is designed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Students should gain familiarity with findings from empirical investigations on persuasion, social influence, and compliance-gaining.
2. Students will learn about strategies and techniques of persuasion relating to a wide variety of real-life communication contexts, situations, and settings.
3. Students will develop a better understanding of the many ways that persuasion theories and skills can be used as a tool for civic and political engagement.
4. Students will understand and analyze the process of persuasion and attitude change, general theories and typical research, and contemporary persuasion problems.
5. Students will understand the communicative components of persuasion (source, message, channel), primary outcome variables (attitudes, values, beliefs, intentions, and behaviors), and variables associated with message receivers.
6. Students will evaluate the effectiveness of persuasion in advertising, health, and political campaigns.
7. Students will analyze persuasion complexities in mediated and interpersonal contexts.

Hybrid Course:

We use two different modalities for class meetings throughout the semester: our physical classroom (Fell 275A) on most days and Zoom via ISU Canvas on 4 specified days. Check the tentative schedule each day to verify if we are meeting in the SMACC lab or on Zoom. It is possible we may have unplanned Zoom days, so also be sure to check Canvas announcements and your ISU email. Have a stable Internet connection and device with webcam and audio (plus microphone) when we use Zoom for live online classes. During Zoom classes, have your *camera turned on* and unmute your microphone to ask/answer questions.

Consult the Modules feature in ISU Canvas for PDF readings and other tasks you must complete each week. Cognella's Active Learning platform is a separate Canvas site (yes, we use two Canvas sites: the one ISU hosts as well as one Cognella hosts), so be sure to check it each day and week for active learning tasks you are required to complete related to textbook readings.

Contact me through my ISU email (for quick questions or to schedule in-person appointments) or on my cell phone (for back-and-forth dialogue). I will not check or respond to Canvas inbox messages.

Professionalism:

Learning is maximized by reading class materials, note-taking, critical listening, cognitive engagement, and focusing one's attention by not yielding to distractions. Professionalism includes listening to others' perspectives (although not necessarily agreeing with those viewpoints), actively listening to those who are speaking, and working together in a spirit of cooperation. We are a team working collectively to improve and learn. Each student must be a productive, contributing member of our team. Be on time for class. While in class, ignore cell phones, text messages, social media, or urges to surf the Internet. Respect should be demonstrated by listening, ignoring distractions, and being fully present—both physically and mentally. Be prepared for class by completing readings and *finishing Active Learning tasks before we discuss the chapters in class.*

Attendance Policy:

Prompt, regular attendance and active engagement are required. Attend classes prepared to discuss and engage with the daily readings. Perfect attendance is expected; by enrolling in this course, you have made a commitment to be present during all class meetings and your group members should be able to count on your presence. Peer evaluations tend to be negatively affected when students rack up absences. Being absent deprives you of valuable class lectures, discussions, and announcements. Historically, there has been a strong correlation between absences and grades; the more class periods students miss, the lower grades they tend to earn.

Late Work Policy:

If you do not take an exam during our scheduled class time on an exam day, you will very likely receive a zero. All other assignments are expected at the start of class on the due date. An automatic 5% of the points possible are deducted from late work, with an additional 5% deducted for each 24 hours the assignment is late. As a general rule, incomplete grades will not be given.

Academic Misconduct Policy:

Students must be honest in all academic work, consistent with the *Code of Student Conduct*. All ideas are to be appropriately cited in both oral and written form when borrowed, directly or indirectly, from a source. Inadequate citation, unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration, and/or the presentation of someone else's work constitute plagiarism. For group projects, the same principle applies—groups may not plagiarize the work of those outside the group.

Students found to commit intentional acts of dishonesty (including cheating on an exam, falsifying evidence, recycling work submitted for another course, or plagiarizing an assignment) will likely receive a failing assignment and course grade as well as be referred for disciplinary

action to the Student Conduct and Community Responsibilities office. All group members will be held collectively responsible for infractions, so be sure to fully contribute and proofread everything before submitting (“that wasn’t my part of the paper” does not absolve you of responsibility since you are not assigned individual parts and the entire paper is your responsibility). Reporting academic dishonesty is my professional responsibility and I do not hesitate to enforce consequences.

In this course, the use of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT or Adobe Firefly is not permitted to support the completion of any assignment. This includes, but is not limited to, using generative AI tools to ideate, pre-plan, edit, translate, or otherwise create original material you claim to be solely your creation. Use of a generative AI tool to complete assignments in whole or in part is considered academic dishonesty in this course.

Special Needs Accommodation:

I am happy to accommodate any special needs you may have—so please let me know, although I require documentation from SAAS for ongoing accommodations. Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services (SAAS) in 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Course Assignments and Grades:

The grading scale is as follows: A= 100-90%; B= 89-80%; C= 79-70%; D= 69-60%; F= 59% and below. Percentages will be calculated based on points earned from:

	<u>Points Possible/Your Points</u>	
<u>Examinations</u>		
First Examination	100	/ _____
Second Examination	100	/ _____
Final Examination	100	/ _____
<u>Individual Activity</u>		
Active Learning Site	100	/ _____
Research Study Announcement Board	10	/ _____
<u>Group Work</u>		
SMACC Research Project	75	/ _____
SMACC Research Presentation	15	/ _____
Total	500	/ _____

Examinations:

Exams are closed book/closed notes. Question format consists of objective style (e.g., multiple choice, true/false, matching, and fill-in-the blank) as well as short answer/short essay. The final exam is comprehensive, while other exams address only readings covered in prior weeks.

Active Learning Site:

Our publishing company, Cognella, has an Active Learning website which is a separate Canvas site from our ISU Canvas course site with a plethora of helpful materials including practice quizzes, flashcards, DIY study guides, case studies, interactive videos, written assignments, discussions, and skill builders (drag and drop text, drag the words, mark the words, and fill in the blank). Order site access from Cognella here: <https://store.cognella.com/97568>.

You are required to complete the quizzes, case studies, interactive videos, and skill builders for each chapter and appendix. The flashcards and DIY study guides are optional but reviewing them is the best way to prepare for the quizzes and exams. Discussions and written assignments are also optional.

Engaged SMACC Research Group Project and Presentation:

Using Meltwater and/or Talkwalker software available in the SMACC, your assigned group will research and present an original project applying an approved persuasion theory to a contemporary civic engagement topic of concern in the post-truth era, such as the election and political issues (e.g., abortion rights, immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, threats to voting rights) or current crises (e.g., COVID-19, social media misinformation and conspiracy theories, climate change) by analyzing social media data. This would be a tremendous undertaking for an individual assignment, but as a group you will be able to pool effort collaboratively.

The project and presentation will involve creating data visualization plus a 3-5 page executive summary that meaningfully cites a minimum of 10 peer-reviewed journal articles found in Milner Library's "Communication Source" database, though you should aim for additional sources and also cite any relevant assigned readings. Citations and references must follow APA style, 7th edition. Group presentations should be extemporaneous, collaborative, and be 10-12 minutes. Grading rubrics are posted on Canvas. All project and presentation materials, including copies of the journal articles you cite, must be submitted on the ISU course Canvas site using the Assignments function.

All members will receive the same group score, unless voted less than a 100% share by other members. Any student wishing to vote another member less than a 100% share of the group score must email me the specific share percentage for each assignment (i.e., provide separate and exact percentages for the executive summary and presentation) and a reasonable rationale justifying the percentage (e.g., didn't complete work, absent from meetings, failed to participate fully in the assignment). Emails will be kept confidential and must be received no later than 24 hours following the assignment due date.

Research Study Announcement Board:

The board is at: <https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies/>. Studies post as the semester progresses, but don't wait to get started. Participate in multiple studies to earn points. Students wishing not to participate in research studies may complete a 3-page journal article review instead; a sample is provided on Canvas.

Required Textbook and Active Learning Account:

The textbook and accompanying Cognella Active Learning account are required and necessary for successful completion of the course. Both the textbook, in either print or electronic form, as well as the Active Learning account access can be acquired at <https://store.cognella.com/97568>. Do not delay ordering as we start using the textbook and Active Learning account during week two, and shipping a printed textbook takes some time.

Hunt, S. K., & Meyer, K. R. (2021). *Engaged persuasion in a post-truth world* (1st ed.). Cognella.

Required PDF readings are available through Milner Library or Canvas hyperlinks; citations are in this syllabus. It is helpful to have access to a copy of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition) and help sheets are available on Canvas.

Required Article Readings (citations listed in the order we read them):

- Hunt, S. K., & Meyer, K. R. (2019). Engaging persuasion: What should undergraduate students enrolled in a persuasion class learn? *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, 2, 12-16. <https://doi.org/10.31446/jcp.2019.04>
- Spartz, J. T., Su, L. Y-F., Griffin, R., Brossard, D., & Dunwoody, S. (2017). YouTube, social norms and perceived salience of climate change in the American mind. *Environmental Communication*, 11(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2015.1047887>
- Bail, C. A., Argyle, L. P., Brown, T. W., Bumpus, J. P., Chen, H., Fallin Hunzaker, M. B., Lee, J., Mann, M., Merhout, F., & Volfovsky, A. (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(37), 9216-9221. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115>
- Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: Compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55(1), 591-621. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.142015>
- Banas, J. A., & Miller, G. (2013). Inducing resistance to conspiracy theory propaganda: Testing inoculation and metainoculation strategies. *Human Communication Research*, 39(2), 184-207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12000>
- Tsipursky, G., Votta, F., & Mulick, J. A. (2018). A psychological approach to promoting truth in politics: The pro-truth pledge. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 6(2), 271-290. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.856>
- Guess, A., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2019). Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5(1), eaau4586. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586>
- Reinhart, A. M., & Anker, A. E. (2012). An exploration of transportation and psychological reactance in organ donation PSAs. *Communication Research Reports*, 29(4), 274-284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2012.704601>
- Sontag, J. M. (2018). Visual framing effects on emotion and mental health message effectiveness. *Journal of Communication in Healthcare*, 11(1), 30-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17538068.2018.1435017>
- Hausman, D. M., & Welch, B. (2010). Debate: To nudge or not to nudge. *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 18(1), 123-136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2009.00351.x>

- Sundstrom, B., Ferrara, M., DeMaria, A. L., Gabel, C., Booth, K., & Cabot, J. (2018). It's your place: Development and evaluation of an evidence-based bystander intervention campaign. *Health Communication, 33*(9), 1141-1150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2017.1333561>
- Wong, S. H., & Chow, A. Y. M. (2017). An exploratory study on university students' perceptions of posthumous organ donation base on the theory of reasoned action. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 75*(3), 284-299. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222816633241>
- Quick, B. L., LaVoie, N. R., Reynolds-Tylus, T., Martinez-Gonzalez, A., & Skurka, C. (2017). Examining mechanisms underlying fear-control in the extended parallel process model. *Health Communication, 33*(4), 379-391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2016.1266738>
- Effron, D. A. (2018). It could have been true: How counterfactual thoughts reduce condemnation of falsehoods and increase political polarization. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 44*(5), 729-745. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217746152>
- Warner, B. R., Jennings, F. J., Bramlett, J. C., Coker, C. R., Reed, J. L., & Bolton, J. P. (2018). A multimedia analysis of persuasion in the 2016 presidential election: Comparing the unique and complementary effects of political comedy and political advertising. *Mass Communication and Society, 21*(6), 720-741. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2018.1472283>
- Wojcieszak, M., & Kim, N. (2016). How to improve attitudes toward disliked groups: The effects of narrative versus numerical evidence on political persuasion. *Communication Research, 43*(6), 785-809. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215618480>
- Diehl, T., Weeks, B. E., & Gil de Zuniga, H. (2016). Political persuasion on social media: Tracing direct and indirect effects of news use and social interaction. *New Media & Society, 18*(9), 1875-1895. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815616224>

Tentative Schedule

Week 1	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Jan. 15	*No Class (MLK Jr. Day)	
W, Jan. 17	*Philosophy of the course, assignments, and syllabus policies *How to acquire textbook and access to Active Learning	*Read Syllabus *Explore Canvas and locate PDF articles
F, Jan. 19	*Overview of persuasion theory and research *Opening Activities (<i>Grey's Anatomy</i> & other clips)	*Acquire textbook and Active Learning account access
Week 2	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Jan. 22	**"Engaging persuasion: What should undergraduate students enrolled in a persuasion class learn?" *Assign SMACC research project groups and brainstorm topics	*Read Hunt & Meyer (2019)
W, Jan. 24	**"Scope of Persuasive Communication." *Cialdini quiz (group activity)	*Read Chapter 1
F, Jan. 26	**"YouTube, social norms and perceived salience of climate change in the American mind." *How to read journal articles	*Read Spartz et al. (2017)
Week 3	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Jan. 29	**"Academic Research and Theory."	*Read Appendix B
W, Jan. 31	**"Ethical Implications of Persuasion." *Bad News Game (group activity)	*Read Chapter 2
F, Feb. 2	**"Persuasion for the Common Good."	*Read Chapter 3
Week 4	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Feb. 5	**"Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization."	*Read Bail et al. (2018)
W, Feb. 7	**"Persuasive Campaigns and Social Movements."	*Read Chapter 4
F, Feb. 9	**"Debate: To nudge or not to nudge." *Identify SMACC research topic	*Read Hausman & Welch (2010)
Week 5	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Feb. 12	**"Theories Predicting Behavior."	*Read Chapter 5
W, Feb. 14	**"It's your place: Development and evaluation of an evidence-based bystander intervention campaign." *Identify theoretical framework for SMACC research project	*Read Sundstrom et al. (2018)
F, Feb. 16	**"An exploratory study on university students' perceptions of posthumous organ donation base on the theory of reasoned action."	*Read Wong & Chow (2017)
Week 6	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Feb. 19	**"Constructing Persuasive Messages."	*Read Chapter 6
W, Feb. 21	**"Examining mechanisms underlying fear-control in the extended parallel process model." *SMACC research project	*Read Quick et al. (2017)

F, Feb. 23	*Review for first exam	** <i>Active Learning for chapters 1-6 and appendix B graded</i>
Week 7	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Feb. 26	*** <i>FIRST EXAMINATION</i>	
W, Feb. 28	*Debrief exam *SMACC research project	
F, Mar. 1	*Meltwater and Talkwalker software tutorials *SMACC research project	
Week 8	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Mar. 4	**“Source Characteristics and Persuasion.”	*Read Chapter 7
W, Mar. 6	**“Compliance-Gaining Techniques and Sequential Persuasion.”	*Read Chapter 8
F, Mar. 8	**“Social influence: Compliance and conformity.” *SMACC research project	*Read Cialdini & Goldstein (2004)
Week 9	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Mar. 11	*No Classes (Spring Break)	
W, Mar. 13	*No Classes (Spring Break)	
F, Mar. 15	*No Classes (Spring Break)	
Week 10	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Mar. 18	**“Message Processing Theories and Research.”	*Read Chapter 9
W, Mar. 20	**“Inducing resistance to conspiracy theory propaganda: Testing inoculation and metainoculation strategies.”	*Read Banas & Miller (2013)
F, Mar. 22	**“A psychological approach to promoting truth in politics: The pro-truth pledge.” *SMACC research project	*Read Tsipursky et al. (2018)
Week 11	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Mar. 25	**“Receiving Persuasive Messages.”	*Read Chapter 10
W, Mar. 27	**“Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook.” *SMACC research project rubrics and example executive summaries ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Guess et al. (2019)
F, Mar. 29	**“Theories of Behavioral Reactions.” ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Chapter 11
Week 12	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 1	**“An exploration of transportation and psychological reactance in organ donation PSAs.” *SMACC research project	*Read Reinhart & Anker (2012)
W, Apr. 3	**“Language and Nonverbal Persuasion.”	*Read Chapter 12
F, Apr. 5	**“Visual framing effects on emotion and mental health message effectiveness.” *APA Style ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Sontag (2018)

Week 13	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 8	*Review for second exam *SMACC research project	** <i>Active Learning for chapters 7-12 graded</i>
W, Apr. 10	*** <i>SECOND EXAMINATION</i>	
F, Apr. 12	**“It could have been true: How counterfactual thoughts reduce condemnation of falsehoods and increase political polarization.” ** <i>Class meets on Zoom</i>	*Read Effron (2018)
Week 14	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 15	**“A multimedia analysis of persuasion in the 2016 presidential election: Comparing the unique and complementary effects of political comedy and political advertising.”	*Read Warner et al. (2018)
W, Apr. 17	**“How to improve attitudes toward disliked groups: The effects of narrative versus numerical evidence on political persuasion.”	*Read Wojcieszak & Kim (2016)
F, Apr. 19	**“Political persuasion on social media: Tracing direct and indirect effects of news use and social interaction.”	*Read Diehl et al. (2016)
Week 15	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 22	**“Persuasive Public Speaking.” *SMACC research project	*Read Appendix A
W, Apr. 24	*Finalize SMACC research project	
F, Apr. 26	* <i>Engaged SMACC research project presentations</i> * <i>Peer evaluations due</i>	** <i>Engaged SMACC Research Project due</i> ** <i>Research Board Participation due</i>
Week 16	Topic	Assignments Due
M, Apr. 29	*Review for Final Exam (overview, procedures, and articles)	* <i>Course Evaluations some day this week</i>
W, May 1	*Review for Final Exam (chapters 1-6)	
F, May 3	*Review for Final Exam (chapters 7-12)	
Finals Week	Topic	Assignments Due
?, May ?	*** <i>FINAL EXAMINATION</i> (date and time TBA by Registrar)	