

**COM 318: Principles of Persuasion  
Summer 2010  
Purdue University, West Lafayette  
Department of Communication  
Monday-Friday, 8:40 – 10:50 a.m.  
Beering Hall, B247**

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Office Hours:	Thursday 11 a.m.-1 p.m., and by appt.

### **Course Description**

Consulting a doctor, a realtor, and a car mechanic have one thing in common: Most people have to rely on the knowledge and trustworthiness of others. When does another person's suggestion affect our attitudes towards a certain course of action? Are experts generally more convincing than lay people? How do people evaluate the expertise of a consultant?

In this class, we survey theories on social influence and persuasion from different perspectives. Broadly speaking, the area of persuasion addresses the question how messages change a receiver's beliefs, evaluations, and actions as a result of information processing (Bohner, 2001). We will discuss how features of the sender (e.g., expertise, trustworthiness), the message (e.g., argument strength, the length of a message), and the receiver (e.g., ego involvement, need for cognition) affect persuasive message effects. One central take-home message of our class will be that *none* of these variables *alone* can predict the success of a persuasion. Experts are not always more convincing than lay people, strong arguments do not always exert stronger attitude changes than weak arguments, and it is not generally harder or easier to convince receivers with a high than with a low ego involvement.

We will discuss models that make predictions on how these variables interact with each other. Readings, lectures, and in-class activities combine classic approaches and theories with recent findings in persuasion research. A final session is devoted to the discussion of new directions in research on persuasion and social influence.

### **Course Objectives**

The primary objective of this course is to provide students with an understanding of the theory and research related to persuasion and social influence. Students will be expected to learn the class material via participation in class discussions, actively listening to lecture, writing an individual paper on a basic concept from the persuasion literature, and participating in a group project on message-based campaigns.

## Readings

### *a) Textbooks*

- Cialdini, R. B. (2003). *Influence. The Psychology of Persuasion*. New York: William Morrow.
- Gass, R. H., & Seiter, J. S. (2007). *Persuasion, social influence, and compliance gaining*. Boston, MA: Pearson Press.

### *b) Additional readings*

The following readings are available on our class Blackboard. Instructions on how to access Blackboard will be distributed in class. A few additional readings referring to your group task will be assigned when the group projects are introduced.

- Kruglanski, A. W., & Thompson, E. P. (1999). Persuasion by a single route: A view from the unimodel. *Psychological Inquiry*, 10, 83-109.
- O'Keefe, D. (2003). Message properties, mediating states, and manipulation checks: Claims, evidence, and data analysis in experimental persuasive message effects research. *Communication Theory*, 13, 251-274.
- Petty, R. E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Goldman, R. (1981). Personal involvement as a determinant of argument-based persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41, 847-855.
- Schwarz, N. (1999). Self-reports: How the questions shape the answers. *American Psychologist*, 54, 93-105.

## Grading

Assignment	Maximum Points
Your best exam	60
Your second best exam	60
Group project	60
Class activities	20
(Extra credits for attendance and participation in class)	max. 4
OVERALL (extra credits excluded)	200

Total possible points for the semester = 200 points.

The student's final course grade will be computed by dividing the total number of points earned by the total number of possible points (200) and multiplying by 100 to obtain a percentage of points earned. The final course grade will then be assigned according to the following grading scale: A+ (98-100%); A (93-97%); A- (90-92%); B+ (88-89%); B (83-87%); B- (80-82%); C+ (78-79%); C (73-77%); C- (70-72%); D+ (68-69%); D (63-67%); D- (60-62%); F (below 60%).

## Course Requirements and Policies

### *a) Tests*

There will be two exams during the semester and one final exam. Exams will cover the reading assignments, handouts, lectures, class discussions, demonstrations, and audio-visual materials used in class. Generally, exams will include multiple choice, fill in the gaps, short answer as well as some essay questions. Although there will be *three* exams, only your *best two exams* will count toward your final grade. *Do not intentionally miss one of the first two exams!* You may end up with an exam score that is unsatisfactory and cannot be dropped. However, if you are pleased with your performance on the first two exams, you may opt not to take the final exam. Make-up exams are *only* available in case of excused absences, which have to be provided in advance (in case of religious holidays or athletic events) or within three days after returning to class (in case of documented illness). If you miss one of the first two exams without a legitimate excuse or you choose not to take the final exam because you are pleased with the results of your first two exams, you will end up with two exam grades, both of which will count toward your final grade. If you take all *three* exams, only the *best two* exams will count toward your final grade.

### *b) Group Project: Designing a Campaign*

Students will work in groups of 3 or 4 on a group project. The aim of the project is to *design* an advertisement or a campaign. Details on the group task and the related assignments (group presentation, paper) will be provided in the second week of class when groups will be formed.

### *c) Participation / Class Activities*

Students are expected to: 1) read the assigned chapters and articles before class; 2) come to class prepared to discuss the reading assignments; and 3) actively participate in the class (e.g., respond to questions and comments posed by others, ask questions about the readings). Participating in class does not just mean talking. Good class participation involves volunteering answers to questions that are insightful, actively listening to others' contributions to discussion, and moving the discussion along toward a shared understanding. There will be three assignments related to in-class activities, which will be worth 30 points.

### *d) Attendance and Due Dates*

There are four legitimate excuses for missing class: illness; religious observance; participation in University activities at the request of University authorities; or compelling circumstances beyond the student's control. These are the *only* circumstances under which you will be allowed to reschedule an assignment due date or an exam. If your absence is due to any of the four types of excused absences listed above you must provide a letter signed by a person in a position to make authoritative determination regarding the validity of the cause of absence (e.g., a doctor in case of illness, university officials regarding campus activities).

Permission to turn in a late assignment will be granted *only* if requested at least 24 hours before the assignment is due. In the case of an emergency, it is your responsibility to contact me as soon as physically possible or you will earn no points for this assignment. Documentation has to be provided no later than three days after returning to class.

Policy on grade appeals: Any appeals must be submitted in writing, within 7 days after the assignment/exam has been returned. My decision regarding your appeal is non-negotiable.

*e) Extra Credit Points (maximum: 4 pts.)*

Students will earn four extra credit points if they actively participate in class discussions and activities throughout the semester and do not miss more than two classes. Students who miss three classes without a legitimate excuse can earn two extra credit points. No extra credit points for class participation will be awarded to students who are absent from four or more classes or to students who do not actively contribute to class discussions. As a general rule, assignments and tests can only be made up if a student has a legitimate excuse for the day on which the assignment was due (see *Attendance and Due Dates*).

*f) Academic Integrity*

The highest standards of academic integrity are expected of all students. The failure of any student to meet these standards may result in suspension or expulsion from the university and/or other sanctions including an “F” in the course (based on instructor and university discretion in consideration of the violation). Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or facilitating such activities. Papers submitted for credit in other classes may *not* be submitted for credit in this course. The university academic integrity policies are included in the *Student Code of Honor* section of the *University Regulations* handbook. In all cases, academic integrity violations will be reported to university officials.

*g) Special Needs*

Anyone that needs special considerations (i.e., student athletes for practices, games, travel, etc.) must have their schedule approved by the professor by the third class session. In addition, any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities.

## Tentative Schedule

You are fully responsible for all information in the syllabus, including changes that will be introduced in class throughout the semester. In addition, all relevant pieces of information (including this syllabus, announcements, task assignments, and due dates), will be posted on Blackboard. It is your responsibility to check Blackboard regularly to stay informed.

*This schedule is tentative, and is prone to change if the instructor deems it necessary.*

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	WHAT IS DUE?
May 17	<i>The art of persuasion: An information-processing perspective</i> Introduction to class	Syllabus	
May 18, 19	<i>Do you like or do you dislike it? That is the question.</i> Attitudes: Concept, measures, and their correlation with behavior & <i>Introduction of Blackboard</i>	G&S 3	
May 20	<i>The Thorough and the Speedy families</i> Dual process models and the unimodel & <i>Introduction of group assignments</i>	PCG; KT	
May 21	<i>Who wants to be contradictory?</i> Consistency models (balance and dissonance theory)	C 3; G&S 3	
May 24	<i>Reserved for group projects / questions regarding the exam</i>		
May 25	<i>An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth</i> Sequential requests	C 1, 2	Preferences for project groups
May 26	First exam		First exam
May 27, 28	<i>You promised!</i> Commitment	C 3	
May 31	<i>The power of the many and the attraction of the few</i> Conformity	C 4; G&S 6	
June 1	<i>The friendly thief</i> Liking and similarity	C 5; G&S 5, 8	
June 2	PROJECT I: Class activity Campaign analysis		
June 3	<i>Follow an expert</i> Authority	C 6; G&S 5	
June 4	<i>The Blue Mauritius</i> Scarcity	C 7	
June 7	Second exam		Second exam
June 8	<i>I don't want to scare you but ...</i> Fear appeals	G&S 13	
June 9, 10	PROJECT II: Group project Campaign fair		Group presentation
TBA	Third exam (final exam)		Third exam

Abbreviations: C=Cialdini; G&S=Gass and Seiter; KT=Kruglanski & Thompson; O'K=O'Keefe; PCG=Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman;