

COMM 475: Persuasion
Fall 2008
University of Maryland, College Park
Department of Communication

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Office Hours:	Thu 3-5 p.m., and by appt.

1) Class meets ...

When? Tue Thu 12:30 – 1:45 p.m.
Where? Hornbake Library 0105

2) 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.

3) 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 two group projects on message-based campaigns.

4) 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 at <https://elms.umd.edu>. Instructions on how to access our 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.

5) Grading

a) Marking System

The following symbols are used on the student's permanent record for all courses in which he or she is enrolled after the initial registration and schedule adjustment period: A+ (100%); A (93-99%), A- (90-92%); B+ (89%); B (83-88%); B- (80-82%); C+ (79%); C (73-78%); C- (70-72%); D+ (69%); D (63-68%); D- (60-62%); F (below 60%); XF; I; P; S; and W. These marks remain part of the student's permanent record and may be changed only by the instructor upon certification, approved by the department chair and the dean that an actual mistake was made in determining or recording the grade.

b) Assignment of Grades

Assignment	Maximum Points
Your best exam	60
Your second best exam	60
Individual paper	60
Group project I	40
Group project II	60
Class activities	20
OVERALL	300

Total possible points for the semester = 300 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 and multiplying by 100 to obtain a percentage of points earned. The final course grade will then be assigned according to the grading scale above (see *Marking System*). 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.

6) Course Requirements

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, identification, 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, 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) Individual Paper

Students are required to write an individual paper (see *Assignment of Grades*). The individual paper should be a short (700 to 1000 words long) introduction of a theory, concept, phenomenon, or approach that is related to persuasion and social influence. The layout of the paper should draw upon the "Contributor Guidelines" of the "Encyclopedia of Social Psychology." An adapted guideline will be distributed in advance.

c) Group Projects: Analyzing and Designing a Campaign

Students will work in groups of 4 on two group projects during the semester. Whereas the aim of the first project is to *analyze* an advertisement or a campaign, the task of the second project is to *design* an advertisement or a campaign. Details on the group tasks and the related assignments (group presentations, handouts, papers) will be provided in the third week of class when groups will be formed.

d) Participation / Class Activities

Students are expected to 1) read the assigned 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 two assignments related to in-class activities, which will be worth 10 points each.

Attendance will not be graded. If you miss a class or a discussion, it is advisable to get notes for that day from a classmate prior to asking your instructor for assistance.

7) Policy

a) Academic Integrity

The mission of a university can only be accomplished in a place where academic integrity is valued. The code of Student Conduct states that academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe.

If anyone is determined to have cheated, plagiarized, or misrepresented work in this class, I will recommend to the Department Head or hearing committees that the person be suspended or expelled from the university.

Papers submitted for credit in other classes may *not* be submitted for credit in this course. You are expected to have full knowledge of the University's Student Conduct Code. A copy of the code may be obtained at the Office of the Dean of Students and Student Services.

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>.

b) Attendance and Due Dates

The University recognizes 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 the instructor 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.

c) Special Needs

Anyone that needs special considerations (i.e., student athletes, practices, games, travel etc.) must have their schedule approved 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.

You should also contact the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6529 as soon as possible. We will require an official letter outlining authorized accommodations which also needs to be submitted by the third class session. Retroactive accommodations will not be made.

8) 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?
Sep 2	<i>The art of persuasion: An information-processing perspective</i> Introduction to class	Syllabus	
Sep 4 & 9	<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	
Sep 11, 16 & 18	<i>The Thorough and the Speedy families</i> Dual process models and the unimodel & <i>Introduction of group assignments</i>	PCG; KT	Preferences for project groups
Sep 23 & 25	<i>Who wants to be contradictory?</i> Consistency models (balance and dissonance theory)	C 3; G&S 3	
Sep 30	<i>Reserved for group projects / questions regarding the exam</i>		
Oct 2	<i>An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth</i> Sequential requests	C 1, 2	Individual paper
Oct 7	First exam		First exam
Oct 9 & 14	<i>You promised!</i> Commitment	C 3	
Oct 16 & 21	<i>The power of the many and the attraction of the few</i> Conformity	C 4; G&S 6	
Oct 23 & 28	<i>The friendly thief</i> Liking and similarity	C 5; G&S 5, 8	Assignment group project I
Oct 30	GROUP PROJECT I Campaign analysis		Group presentation I
Nov 4	<i>Follow an expert</i> Authority	C 6; G&S 5	
Nov 6 & 11	<i>The Blue Mauritius</i> Scarcity	C 7	
Nov 13	Second exam		Second exam
Nov 18 & 20	<i>I don't want to scare you but ...</i> Fear appeals	G&S 13	
Nov 25	<i>Which answer you get depends on the question you ask</i> Social cognition and communication	Sch	
Nov 27	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING		
Dec 2	<i>What we don't know about persuasion</i> New directions in research on persuasion and social influence	C 8; O'K	Assignment group project II
Dec 4 & 9	GROUP PROJECT II Campaign fair		Group presentation II
Dec 11	Catch up day!		
Dec 19 1:30-3:30pm	Third exam (final exam)		Third exam

C=Cialdini; G&S=Gass and Seiter

Additional **required** readings: KT=Kruglanski & Thompson; O'K=O'Keefe; PCG=Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman; Sch=Schwarz;