List of course readings may change throughout the semester as the course evolves. Updated versions of the syllabus will be made available through the e-learning site of the course.

Classes: two times 100 minutes a week; time slots and venue as announced at www.ceu.hu/polsci.

Office hours: available time-slots can be booked through a link on my webpage at http://www.personal.ceu.hu/departs/personal/Gabor_Toka/

Course objectives
This MA-level course explores how political communication and mass media (are believed to) shape the political process and political outcomes: do they contribute – positively or negatively – to the quality of democracy, or they make no difference at all? While Political Communication I (offered in Fall 2011) engaged this question from the perspectives of journalism and news media, here the emphasis falls on the mediated interaction between citizens and politicians and varied third actors in between them. This course puts a particular emphasis on learning about how rigorous scholarly arguments are made about these issues via methodologically sophisticated empirical analysis. We examine how politicians, citizens, and other actors respond to mediated messages; how news, advertising, and entertainment impact citizens’ beliefs, information level and political behavior; the empirical dimensions of variations across contemporary media systems; what given political communication environments require from political actors who want to get their messages through; and how niche media, modern mobilization techniques and entertainment media shape campaign strategy and news coverage. In the course of this we shall critically examine key concepts, approaches and methodologies in the field, including experimental, qualitative and quantitative research designs and concepts like the democratic performance of the media, media logic, mediatization, the public sphere, media system characteristics, media effects, agenda setting, priming, framing, momentums, stages in the development of modern political campaigns, bandwagon, and third-person effects. Hence the course provides students with a postgraduate-level understanding of:

- selected concepts and research methods in political communication, political marketing and election campaign studies;
- current techniques used by political and social actors in traditional media as well as online political communication; and
- critical perspectives and issues in political communication, political marketing and
Learning outcomes
- A basic understanding and critical review of the social science literature in the field of political communication.
- Conceptual frames and research skills for the analysis of political communication in contemporary political systems.
- Skills to identify and analyze media framing and agenda setting as well as campaign and information effects on public opinion.

Course requirements and grading
Students are required to participate actively in seminar discussion (10%), write position papers (45%) and take home essay exams (45%). For some of the weeks the take home essay task will be replaced with team projects that we will define collectively as the course progresses.

Course format and class participation
Each class begins with a usually short introductory lecture, to be followed up by a seminar discussion about the readings of the week. Course participants are expected to contribute actively to the seminar discussion. Active participation involves comments and questions based on the required literature, the lecture, and the seminar presentation(s). Questions and comments on the class website are also welcome.

Position papers, take home exams and presentation
During weeks 2 to 11, every student will submit a short written assignment related to the readings of each week, at least 24 hours before the respective class. These ten assignments will account for 90 percent of your grade. By default, six submissions must be position papers of up to 300 words, and four must be take home essay exams, each up to 600 words. Three position papers may be substituted with an in-class presentation of a review essay of max. 1,500 words on three or more recommended readings of a given week. The schedule of these optional presentations will be arranged during the first week of the semester. Review essays have to answer question (A) below. All assignments must follow the departmental style manual, strictly respect the above word budget and be submitted through the e-learning site of the course. One half of your submitted position papers must address question (B), and the other half question (C); and all take home essays must address question (A). The questions are as follows:

A. Summarize what the central theoretical claim of each reading of this week is, and how each reading tries to provide evidence for that claim. Write down what you think (1) the weakest and (2) the strongest point in the arguments of the readings this week are, i.e. what part of the argument (of any of the readings this week) receives the least and what receives the most convincing support from the evidence presented. Explain why you think so.

B. Which mandatory reading of the week makes the most relevant proposition for practicing politicians and communication specialists? Explain why you think that the key proposition of one article has more applied relevance than that of the other(s). If there is just one mandatory reading for the week, then answer this question instead: What and
how much applied relevance do the propositions of this reading have for practicing politicians and communication specialists?

C. Which mandatory reading of the week makes the most relevant theoretical proposition about political communication? Explain why you think that the key proposition of one article has a broader theoretical relevance in political communication research – i.e., helps to explain a wider range of interesting phenomena – than that of the other. If there is just one mandatory reading for the week, then answer this question instead: What and how much theoretical relevance do the propositions of this reading have for the study of political communication?

Course-related books on library reserve:
WEEK 1: The study of political communication: the key issues in a changing environment

The topics of this week’s lecture will look at the mediatization of everyday life and politics; the relationship between media and democracy; media access, media performance, media structure and choice; the relationship between societal, political and media context characteristics and political communication.

Mandatory readings:

Recommended readings

**WEEK 2: Media systems, political communication and democracy**

*The topics of the lecture will briefly discuss the structural characteristics and regulation of the mediated information environment; public service broadcasting principles and practices in a cross-national perspective; the impact of media structures, markets, genres and formats on political communication*

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings**


WEEK 3: Political communication, public opinion and democracy: Learning, persuasion and the conditional nature of media influence

The topics of this week’s lecture will briefly discuss the level and origin of citizens’ political knowledge and the role of the media in information provision; the interactive relationship between citizens’ predispositions, politicians’ strategies and the characteristics of the media and information environment; difficulties in conceptualizing and capturing media effects

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings**


**WEEK 4: The blurred boundaries of political communication and entertainment**

The topics of this week’s lecture will cover the role of political interest and program choice; entertainment media (talk shows, stand-up comedy, etc.) as sources of political information; soft news and tabloid media; strategic political communication; fan audiences

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings**


**WEEK 5: Selective exposure and its implications**

The topics of this week’s lecture will explore selective media exposure and the difficulties in capturing media effects; the role of partisanship in program choice; selectivity mechanisms and processes of opinion reinforcement, mobilization and polarization

**Mandatory readings:**


**Recommended readings**


**WEEK 6: The role of interpersonal discussion in political communication**

The topics of this week’s lecture will explore how peer-to-peer discussion among citizens impacts news reception, political engagement, opinion polarization, and the distribution of political influence in society. We will discuss the empirical reality of applying theories of opinion leadership, two-step communication flows, and deliberative democracy to everyday political talk, including digital communication via chat forums and the blogosphere.
Mandatory readings:

Recommended readings
Woessner, Matthew, and April Kelly-Woessner. 2009. "I Think My Professor is a Democrat: Considering Whether Students Recognize and React to Faculty Politics." PS: Political Science and Politics 42 (2): 343-351.
WEEK 7: Media and public opinion: Agenda-setting and priming

The topics of this week’s lecture will discuss interactions between party, public and media agendas; the effects of issue salience, entertainment value, editorial selection process, and politicians on the media agenda

Mandatory readings:

Recommended readings

WEEK 8: Framing: all-powerful tool or just a new catch-word?

The topics of this week’s lecture will cover the concept of media framing, the impact of competing and dominant frames, framing by news sources vs. political actors.

Mandatory readings:

Recommended readings
WEEK 9: Changing patterns of political communication in election campaigns

The topics of this week’s lecture will give a short historical overview of pre-modern, modern and post-modern/post-fordist campaigning; discusses permanent campaigning, direct communication; professionalisation of political campaigns and the rise of strategic consultants and spin doctors.

Mandatory readings:

Recommended readings

WEEK 10: The controversial role of advertising and negative campaigning

The topics of this week’s lecture will focus on political advertising format and context; marketization of politics; engineered sound bites and information provision; substantive political issues and personalization; negativity, information gains and mobilization.

Mandatory readings:

**Recommended readings**


**WEEK 11: The role of new media and the internet in political communication**

_The topics of this week’s lecture will cover the diverse political uses of internet and mobile communications in everyday life and politics; online solutions by mainstream political organizations: party websites, newsletters, online donations and mobilization; blogs and political journalism._

**Mandatory readings:**


Recommended readings


WEEK 12: When the voters communicate to the politicians: public opinion polls and deliberative assemblies

The topics of this week’s lecture will cover public opinion polling history; different uses of polls; the relationship between public opinion and policy processes; manipulation of polls, push polls and restrictions on publication of public opinion polls.
Mandatory readings:

Recommended readings