

Course Syllabus

R 6:30-9:20 p.m. (Fell 116)

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Office Hours: TR 12:30-1:30 p.m.
or by appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this course is to provide students with a solid grounding in theories, principles, and strategies of persuasion as they apply to everyday contexts in which influence attempts take place. Students should gain familiarity with findings from empirical investigations on persuasion, social influence, and compliance-gaining, and will learn about strategies and techniques of persuasion relating to a wide variety of real-life communication contexts, situations, and settings. You will also learn how to investigate the persuasion process within your area of interest (e.g., interpersonal, organizational, health, mass media, legal, political, instructional, etc.) Finally, you 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. Following are specific learning objectives for this course:

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.

PERSUASION & CIVIC/POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AT ILLINOIS STATE

The American Democracy Project (ADP) at Illinois State is a cooperative effort by students, faculty, staff, and administration and the project involves a joint partnership between Academic and Student Affairs. The overarching goal of the ADP is to promote civic engagement, in many different forms, on the part of students, now and in the

future. The project embraces all organized activity designed to promote constructive civic engagement on the part of students while they are on campus, and after they graduate. The ADP's goals connect directly with Illinois State's commitment to educate students for global citizenship as outlined in [Excellence by Design](#).



“How we organize, how we mobilize, and how we fight around a set of issues can hopefully chart a different path of our being together, and also must involve a different kind of story that we tell about who we are, so that we can imagine being together differently.”

- Eddie Glaude, Jr. (University Professor & Past Chair of the Dept. of African American Studies at Princeton University)

Illinois State was selected as one of eight institutions to participate in a national ADP initiative, the Political Engagement Project (PEP). This project, directed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, addresses the serious problem of political disengagement in young people and advocates a dramatic increase in college and university efforts to strengthen student interest in politics. The primary mission of PEP is to enhance ISU students' awareness and understanding of political engagement and impact their level of political involvement and leadership. This project rests on the assumption that institutions of higher education must educate students for political engagement in order to develop the kind of informed political participation that is essential for a meaningful democracy.

The COM 424 project aims to positively influence the following competencies related to civic and political engagement:

- Knowledge—an understanding of politics and political processes.
- Judgment/deliberation—abilities to use reasoning to justify claims, present evidence in support of a position, and weigh competing claims.
- Skills—the abilities to engage in political discourse and processes (e.g., developing communication, critical thinking, as well as information and media literacy skills).
- Motivation—being interested in public affairs, feeling committed to being actively engaged, and feeling a sense of political efficacy.

For more information about the ADP and PEP, please visit the following web site:

<https://civicengagement.illinoisstate.edu/>

REQUIRED READING

Cialdini, R. B. (2021). *Influence: The psychology of persuasion*. Harper Business.

Perloff, R. M. (2021). *The dynamics of persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the 21st century* (7th ed.). Routledge.

Additional readings will be provided by the instructor.

GRADING

Your grade for this course will depend on how many points you earn from an application essay, midterm exam, class discussion, and a final paper. **NOTE: Failure to turn in any of the course requirements may result in failure of the course.**

1. Application Essay (25 points): You will complete a brief (2-3 double-spaced pages) essay applying persuasion theory and/or research to a topic of your choice. Sample application essay topics include:

- a. Develop a strategy to increase voting among 18 to 25-year-old students for the upcoming 2026 midterm elections. You should target students at Illinois State University.
- b. Examine an existing ad campaign for a new product. This should entail the analysis of at least two ads (print, video, radio, etc.) that are being utilized to sell a new product.
- c. Devise a campaign aimed at curbing vaping among teenagers. Target a specific age group and devise tactics to reduce the level of vaping.
- d. Examine the marketing strategy used by one of Bloomington-Normal's sports teams to recruit and maintain their season ticket base. You should contact the season ticket office and meet with one of their ticket agents to gain insights.
- e. Examine the strategy the Trump administration used to defend the war with Iran. You will need to examine archival data to do a thorough job.
- f. Develop a campaign to encourage students, faculty, staff to get fully vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19.
- g. Examine the current U.S. military PSYOP (psychological warfare/operations tactics) campaign in a region of your choosing (<https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/specialty-careers/special-ops/psychological-operations>).

- h. Propose your own project; however, I need to approve the topic before you begin!

As you can see, there are two different types of projects listed above. One type requires you to examine an existing situation given your understanding of persuasion theory and research. The objective of this type of project is to assess what strategies are being used, whether they are successful, and what changes should be made to make the campaign more successful.

The other type of application essay requires you to design a campaign that can be successfully used to change behavior. In doing so, you need to detail how you plan on using persuasion techniques to increase the likelihood of success.

The application essay is worth 25 points and is due on **September 3, 2026**. Please use course readings to support your analysis, provide sufficient internal citations and list references on a separate page using APA style.

2. Instructional Discussion (100 points): You will be responsible for leading an instructional discussion on assigned chapters/articles. The class session will include an overview of the relevant literature, a student-led discussion, and any experiential activities that may apply. Evaluation will be based on your ability to accurately present current research findings, to effectively organize the class discussion, to ask thought-provoking questions, as well as your ability to effectively engage and involve students in the learning process. Details and further instruction will be provided.

- a. Your discussion facilitation outline (***just to the instructor***) is due on the date that you facilitate the discussion. Remember that your discussion **MUST** include the assigned readings for that date.

3. Research Paper (175 points): The goal of this paper is to produce a product acceptable for convention presentation and/or publication. Most journal and convention guidelines specify that papers should be no longer than 25 pages (excluding references, tables, etc.). *Your final paper should be between 15-20 pages in length.* Papers should be written using APA (American Psychological Association) guidelines as this is the style required by most journals that publish communication research. If you do not have a copy of this manual, I recommend that you purchase it. Writing clearly and concisely is an ongoing learning process-none of us ever perfect it. However, I do want you to be concerned about your writing style and hope that as this course progresses your writing will also improve. Feel free to ask me to consult with you on your papers prior to grading. You may select one of two options for the format of your final paper.

- a. *Research Summary.* A research summary is an essay, incorporating an original way of summarizing, analyzing, and interpreting a body of research literature. Rather than being a mere descriptive survey, it goes

beyond to develop insights and provide acute evaluations which can be the basis for subsequent research. Research summaries for purposes of this class should contain a) a review of literature, b) evaluation of literature, c) issues for further inquiry, and d) practical and/or theoretical implications.

b. *Research Proposal*. A research proposal is the first step in the research process in which you (a) describe of the purpose of the study, (b) provide a rationale for the study question(s), (c) define all key concepts/terms in the research question(s), (d) review previous research directly relevant to your research question(s), and (e) describe proposed methods and procedures, including participants, data bases or measurement instruments, time frame, and a rationale for your choices.

Each student will give an informal (brief) summary of the final paper at the time of the scheduled final exam.

c. The timetable for the paper assignment is as follows:

1. a 1-2 page purpose statement (you will provide an overview of the topic—25 points). **DUE: September 24, 2026.**

2. a 6-10 page summary of your paper's purpose, relevant prior literature, research questions, or hypotheses and methods (50 points). **DUE: November 5, 2026.**

3. a 15-20 page final paper (100 points). **DUE: TBD** (finals week).

4. **Summary of Grading:**

Application Essay	25 points
Instructional Discussion	100 points
Paper	175 points

Total	300 points
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POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Professional Courtesy. As this is a graduate seminar, I feel it is unnecessary to emphasize issues such as respect for the class (attendance, turning assignments in on time, etc.) and the members of the seminar (respecting others' opinions, being respectful to those who are speaking, and working together in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition). I do, however, want to be clear about my expectations. I believe graduate school is an experience designed to bring professional individuals together to increase and expand knowledge. Thus, I will expect your behaviors and

attitudes towards this course to reflect professional courtesy. If I believe a student is not meeting my expectations (e.g., excessive absences, inadequate work, disrespect for others, etc.), I will notify you immediately and a decision will be made concerning your need to drop the course.

Class Attendance and Participation. To be socially responsible, I urge you not to attend class if you feel your safety and the safety of your classmates and faculty may be compromised by your attendance. When you need to miss class, you must be swift and proactive in working with your instructors to take advantage of learning opportunities, develop mastery of course materials, meet the learning objectives as outlined in the course, and prepare for more advanced learning.

Having said that, you are responsible for reading the assigned material prior to class. You are expected to discuss the readings and your ideas informally each session. Because this course is a seminar, not a lecture class, your own involvement is imperative. In order for our discussions to be productive you will need to (1) show knowledge of readings and have given thought to what you have read, (2) articulate your ideas clearly and argue effectively for your positions, (3) contribute to a lively interchange of ideas, and (4) respond thoughtfully to the comments of others.

Deadlines. All assignments must be completed on schedule and must be handed in when due. No makeups or extensions will be permitted unless the student contacts the instructor **prior** to the due date and has a verifiable excuse. One letter grade will be deducted for each day that any assignment is late.

Student Access and Accommodation Services. 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 at 308 Fell Hall, Office Phone (309) 438-5853, Video Phone (309) 438-7682, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Academic Misconduct. You are expected to be honest in all academic work, consistent with the academic integrity policy as outlined in the [Code of Student Conduct](#). All work is to be appropriately cited when it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from another source. Unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration on any work, or the presentation of someone else's work, is plagiarism. In certain circumstances, I may be required to refer violations to the [Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution](#).

Artificial Intelligence. In this course, students can use generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT or Adobe Firefly) to complete specific assignments, given instructor guidance and permission, so long as the use of generative AI tools is properly disclosed through in-text citations, quotations, and references. Please refer to the APA style manual for specific guidelines for attribution. Note that any use of generative AI must be both responsible and ethical. This means that students using generative AI are required to comply with all privacy laws and research requirements to protect data and must have appropriate permissions to enter data into a generative AI tool. Students should clarify

any questions on whether data or information may be entered into a generative AI tool with the instructor.

Student Counseling Services. Life at college can get complicated. If you're feeling stressed, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, depressed or are struggling with personal issues, do not hesitate to call or visit [Student Counseling Services \(SCS\)](#). These services are free and completely confidential. SCS is located at 320 Student Services Building, 309-438-3655.

Extra Credit. There will be a few extra credit opportunities for research participation. The extra credit points will be added to your final grade and may not necessarily appear in the gradebook immediately upon your completion of the opportunity. There are no guarantees for extra credit, and it is each student's responsibility to be aware of and take advantage of such opportunities. You may receive extra credit for participating in up to four of the studies posted to the School of Communication's Research Announcement Board. The Research Announcement Board is updated as research studies are opened/closed, and it is your responsibility to access the Board and be aware of available opportunities. The Research Announcement Board can be accessed via: <https://sites.google.com/site/ilstusocstudies>

Each study you participate in is worth five points of extra credit. I will receive evidence of participation and the time of participation from the researcher(s) who administer the research studies at the conclusion of the semester; however, it is your responsibility to make sure that the researchers have the necessary evidence of your participation at the time of the study. Before participating in a study, please be sure to have your name, ULID (i.e., the part of your email before @ilstu.edu), instructor name, and course and section number ready, as you will need to provide these to receive credit. Research Credit can only be applied to one course for each study, unless specified otherwise on the Research Announcement Board. A maximum of 20 points can be earned from extra credit opportunities via the Research Announcement Board.

Non-Research Extra Credit. There may be some studies for which you are not eligible (e.g., recruiting based on gender or family structure) or in which you do not wish to take part. Reasonable alternatives are available for those not able or wanting to take part in specific studies, to ensure equitable non-research-based opportunities. Throughout the semester, I will announce non-research opportunities for extra credit, which may include attending a colloquium, reading a recent article or research paper, or attending an on-campus event and writing a summary of the connection of the event to course content. I will make these opportunities and specific details available as they arise.

Citations for Required/Suggested Readings (listed in the order we read them):

- Hunt, S. K., & Meyer, K. R. (2022). *Engaged persuasion in a post-truth world*. Cognella.
- Perloff, R. M. (2021). *The dynamics of persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the 21st century* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Snyder, T. (2021, January 9). The American abyss: A historian of fascism and political atrocity on Trump, the mob and what comes next. *The New York Times Magazine*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/magazine/trump-coup.html>
- Cialdini, R. B. (2021). *Influence: The psychology of persuasion*. Harper Business.
- Gregor, M., & Mlejnková, P. (2021). Explaining the challenge: From persuasion to relativism. In M. Gregor, & P. Mlejnková (Eds.), *Challenging online propaganda and disinformation in the 21st century* (pp. 3-41). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Wineburg, S. (2021, May 14). To navigate the dangers of the web, you need critical thinking—but also critical ignoring. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/to-navigate-the-dangers-of-the-web-you-need-critical-thinking-but-also-critical-ignoring-158617>
- Devlin, M., & Devlin, N. B. (2021, January 21). Voters are starting to act like hard-core sports fans—with dangerous repercussions for democracy. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/voters-are-starting-to-act-like-hard-core-sports-fans-with-dangerous-repercussions-for-democracy-153175>
- Giridharadas, A. (2021, January 15). We are falling on our face because we are jumping high: A dash of perspective in a dark hour. *The Ink*. <https://the.ink/p/hope>
- Brigety, R. E. (2021). The fractured power: How to overcome tribalism. *Foreign Affairs*, 100(2), 40-46.
- Semetko, H. A., & Tworzecki, H. (2018). Campaign strategies, media, and voters: The fourth era of political communication. In J. Fisher, E. Fieldhouse, M. N. Franklin, R. Gibson, M. Cantijoch, & C. Wlezien (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of elections, voting behavior, and public opinion* (pp. 441-457). Routledge.
- Atouba, Y., & Wilson, D. (2020). Does the form of protest matter? Examining attitudes toward different forms of athletes' protests against police brutality and injustice. *Communication Research Reports*, 37, 243-253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2020.1835633>

- Pearson, M. (2021, January 17). There's no such thing as 'alternative facts'. 5 ways to spot misinformation and stop sharing it online. *The Conversation*.
<https://theconversation.com/theres-no-such-thing-as-alternative-facts-5-ways-to-spot-misinformation-and-stop-sharing-it-online-152894>
- Compton, J., van der Linden, S., Cook, J., & Basol, M. (2021). Inoculation theory in the post-truth era: Extant findings and new frontiers for contested science, misinformation, and conspiracy theories. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, e12602, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12602>
- Nichols, T. (2017). How America lost faith in expertise: And why that's a giant problem. *Foreign Affairs*, 96, 60-73.
- Gass, R. H., & Seiter, J. S. (2018). *Persuasion: Social influence and compliance gaining* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Hamid, N. (2021, May 8). How to talk to insurrectionists and conspiracy theorists. *CNN*.
<https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/08/opinions/how-to-talk-to-insurrectionists-and-conspiracy-theorists-nafees-hamid-op-ed/index.html>
- Ellwood, B. (2021, April 20). A phenomenon called psychological reactance might help explain the mindset of anti-maskers. *PsyPost*.
<https://www.psypost.org/2021/04/a-phenomenon-called-psychological-reactance-might-explain-the-mindset-of-anti-maskers>
- Sydnor, E. (2018, June 27). Does incivility hurt democracy? Here's what political science can tell us. *The Washington Post*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/06/27/does-incivility-hurt-democracy-heres-what-political-science-can-tell-us/>
- Stalder, D. R. (2020, June 16). What can we really tell from white silence? Biases against peaceful protesters and silent non-protesters. *Psychology Today*.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/bias-fundamentals/202006/what-can-we-really-tell-white-silence>
- Starbird, K., Arif, A., & Wilson, T. (2019). Disinformation as collaborative work: Surfacing the participatory nature of strategic information operations. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 3, 1-26.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3359229>
- Ellwood, B. (2021, May 12). Multi-country study finds cultural values of collectivism and masculinity are tied to belief in conspiracy theories. *PsyPost*.
<https://www.psypost.org/2021/05/multi-country-study-finds-cultural-values-of-collectivism-and-masculinity-are-tied-to-belief-in-conspiracy-theories-60745>

- Kristofferson, K., McFerran, B., Morales, A. C., & Dahl, D. W. (2017). The dark side of scarcity promotions: How exposure to limited-quantity promotions can induce aggression. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43, 683-706. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucw056>
- Hornik, J., Ofir, C., & Rachamim, M. (2017). Advertising appeals, moderators, and impact on persuasion: A quantitative assessment creates a hierarchy of appeals. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 57, 305-318. <https://doi.org/10.2501/jar-2017-017>

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE
SEMINAR IN PERSUASION**

Week 1	Topic	Assignments Due
8/20	Course Orientation/Introductions/Cialdini's Model of Persuasion	*Read Syllabus & Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 1 & Perloff (2021) Chapter 1 *Quiz 1 Due
Week 2	Topic	Assignments Due
8/27	Ethics & Persuasion in a Post-Truth Era & Understanding Weapons of Influence and Propaganda	*Read Perloff (2021) Chapters 2 & 3; Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 2; *Read Cialdini (2021) Chapter 1
Week 3	Topic	Assignments Due
9/3	Weapons of Influence: Reciprocity & Exploring Connections between Civic Engagement and Persuasion	*Read Cialdini (2021) Chapter 2 *Read Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 3; *Application Essay Due
Week 4	Topic	Assignments Due
9/10	Politics, Campaigns, and Social Movements & Exploring Strong Attitudes	*Read Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 4; *Read Perloff (2021) Chapters 4 & 5
Week 5	Topic	Assignments Due
9/17	Attitudes: Functions & Measurement & Processing Persuasive Communication	*Read Perloff (2021) Chapters 6 & 7 *Read Perloff (2021) Chapter 8 & Compton et al. (2021)
Week 6	Topic	Assignments Due
9/24	Source Factors in Persuasion & Message Factors in Persuasion	*Read Perloff (2021) Chapters 9 & 10; Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 7; & Nichols (2017) *Read Perloff (2021)

		Chapter 11 *1-2 Page Purpose Statement Due
Week 7	Topic	Assignments Due
10/1	Weapons of Influence: Liking & Review for Midterm Exam and Overview Instructional Discussion Assignment	*Read Cialdini (2021) Chapter 3 *Read Hunt & Meyer (2022) Appendix A
Week 8	Topic	Assignments Due
10/8	Weapons of Influence: Social Proof & Theories of Behavioral Reactions	*Read Cialdini (2021) Chapter 4 *Read Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 11
Week 9	Topic	Assignments Due
10/15	Emotional Message Appeals (ID) & Language and Nonverbal Persuasion (ID)	*Read Perloff (2021) Chapter 12 *Read Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 12
Week 10	Topic	Assignments Due
10/22	Cognitive Dissonance Theory (ID) & Principles of Influence: Authority (ID)	*Read Perloff (2021) Chapter 13 *Read Cialdini (2021) Chapter 5
Week 11	Topic	Assignments Due
10/29	Weapons of Influence: Scarcity (ID) & Interpersonal Persuasion (ID)	*Read Cialdini (2021) Chapter 6 *Read Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 8 & Perloff (2021) Chapter 14
Week 12	Topic	Assignments Due
11/5	Visual and Esoteric Forms of Persuasion (ID) & Persuasive Misinformation and Motivated Reasoning (ID)	*Read Gass & Seiter (2018) Chapters 14 & 15 *Read Hunt & Meyer (2022) Chapter 10; *6-10 Page Summary Due
Week 13	Topic	Assignments Due

11/12	Weapons of Influence: Commitment and Consistency (ID) & Advertising, Marketing, & Persuasion (ID)	*Read Cialdini (2021) Chapters 7 *Read Perloff (2021) Chapter 15
Week 14	NO CLASS—NCA	
Week 15	NO CLASS—FALL BREAK	
Week 16	Topic	Assignments Due
12/3	Persuasion and Health Communication (ID) & Principles of Influence: Unity (ID)	*Read Perloff (2021) Chapter 16 *Read Cialdini (2021) Chapter 8
Finals	Topic	Assignments Due
TBD	Research Presentations	*Final Paper Due