

**COMM 390/590: PERSUASION THEORY AND APPLICATION**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - STEVENS POINT, SPRING 2020  
(TTh 11:00 – 12:15PM; CAC 237)

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### **Course Description and Purpose**

In our everyday lives we are constantly bombarded with persuasive messages. Some of those messages have little or no influence on our attitudes or behaviors whereas in certain cases persuasion exerts a great deal of influence on us. This seminar centers on the notion that we are largely unaware of when, how and why persuasive (or “strategic”) communication have an impact on our attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. Facing a mysterious, influential force on which we have limited understanding can be quite disturbing.

The objective of this course is threefold. First, you will become familiar with the major theories of persuasion. This simple exercise alone will help you demystify persuasion. Second, you will be introduced to the applied contexts of persuasion theory. You will develop a basic understanding on how strategic communication professionals apply the insights of persuasion theory to have voters elect a candidate for a public office, get people lead a healthier lifestyle, or have customers purchase a commercial product (,which they typically don't need at all). As a result, you may become an educated (i.e. critical and aware) consumer of persuasive information who can effectively avoid the pitfalls of unethical influence. Third, we are not only targets of various persuasive messages but also source of strategic communication influencing others. Thus, this course aims to help you develop persuasion skills that will be much needed in your future career. For example, you'll have to persuade employers to hire you and once employed, your success will be heavily contingent upon your persuasive skills, especially, if you choose to work in one of the various communication domains.

Finally, you might have noticed by now, that there is something inherently powerful about persuasion. Indeed, if you are able to change others' attitudes or behaviors, it means that you exercise some sort of power. Exercising any kind of power inevitably raises ethical issues. This course seeks to provide you with attentiveness to the ethical dimensions of persuasion that everyone need to possess.

### **Professional Standards**

This seminar seeks to help you develop competencies that correspond with the following program learning outcomes identified by the Division of Communication:

- *Students should be able to communicate effectively using appropriate technologies for diverse audiences*
- *Students should be able to use communication theories to understand and solve communication problems*
- *Students should be able to apply principles of ethical decision making in communication contexts*

By the end of the semester - in line with the above stated program competencies - you will be able to:

- Explain what theory is and why it is useful in professional settings as well as in academic research
- Describe a set of major contemporary persuasion theories
- Describe the respective strengths and limitations of contemporary persuasion theories

- Compare and contrast persuasion theories by pointing out their similarities and differences
- Select appropriate theories to analyze persuasive contexts and to define and achieve persuasive goals
- Recognize the ethical component of persuasive contexts

### Required and Recommended Texts

There is one required textbook to this course:

- Frymier A. B. & Nadler M. K. (2010) *Persuasion: Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice*. Dubuque: Kendall Hunt

The book is available through text rental. Occasionally, additional required readings (short articles) and study materials shall be made available on the course website (Canvas).

### Activities and Grading

Your final grade will be contingent upon the following activities and assignments taking place over the course of the semester:

<b>I. Quizzes and homework:</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>II. Exams:</b>	<b>45%</b>
1. Exam #1:	15%
2. Exam #2:	15%
3. Final Exam (Take-home):	15%
<b>III. Theory paper:</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>IV. Term project report:</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>V. Term project presentation</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>VI. Participation in discussions:</b>	<b>10%</b>

*Grading scale for final grade:*

95 – 100% = A	84 – 86% = B	74 – 76% = C	60 – 66% = D
90 – 94% = A-	80 – 83% = B-	70 – 73% = C-	< 60% = F
87 – 89% = B+	77 – 79% = C+	67 – 69% = D+	

### Attendance

You must be present in class in order to understand the assignments and carry them out effectively. Also, if you are not here, you cannot participate in class discussions. Therefore, more than 2 unexcused absences will result in a reduction of one letter grade. Thus, for instance, if you were receiving a B- and you have 3 unexcused absences, your grade will be C-. Excused absences (for illness, death in the family, or other unforeseen circumstances that prevent you from attending class) can be arranged only if proper documentation -- from a physician or a university official -- is presented.

## Missed/Late Assignments

You are expected to give your research presentation on the class day when you are scheduled. If you miss your presentation, it will be impossible to make it up.

Written assignments must be handed in via Canvas or at the end of the class as specified by the assignment. Late assignments receive a failing grade.

If you miss a quiz, an exam or an assignment, unless you are granted an excused absence, you will not be permitted to make it up.

## Academic Honesty

When completing your assignments, you are expected to do original work. That is, you must avoid any form of plagiarism. I consider plagiarism - as defined by *Dictionary.com* – the “use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work.” A student caught on plagiarizing shall receive a failing grade for his/her assignment. Further academic misconduct shall be sanctioned in accordance with the *UWSP Chapter 14 – Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures*.

## Conduct in Class

To provide a fruitful experience and an effective learning environment for all of us, I expect each of you to conduct yourself with respect for your fellow students, in line with the *UWSP Communal Bill of Rights*. Also,

- Students are to be seated in class by 11:00AM, by which I will be ready to teach. I consider lateness disruptive and an emergent pattern of lateness will be treated as equivalent to absences.
- Any use including the visual display of **cell phones** is not tolerated in this class. By the beginning of class, all cell phones must be **turned off and put away** until the end of class. I consider any use of cell phones, including text messaging, as disrespectful and disruptive. Also, since those who engage in such conduct are mentally absent, **cell phone use will result in marking the offender as absent from class.**
- Use of **laptop** computers and **tablets** is **not allowed** in class. Exception is made in case of students who are unable to take paper notes due to some documented physical condition.
- UWSP is committed to providing reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities and temporary impairments. If you have a disability or acquire a condition during the semester where you need assistance, please contact the Disability and Assistive Technology Center on the 6th floor of Albertson Hall (library) as soon as possible. DATC can be reached at 715-346-3365 or DATC@uwsp.edu.

## Course Schedule

(Note: This schedule is subject to change. Should changes occur, they will be announced in class)

Date	Topics and Activities	Activities & Assignments Due
21-Jan	Class introduction	
23-Jan	The concept of persuasion; Attitudes	Ch1; Ch2
28-Jan	The attitude-behavior link;	Ch3
30-Jan	Theories	Ch4
4-Feb	Social judgment theory	Ch5

Thus, email me NOT questions about schedule and deadlines.

6-Feb	Consistency and cognitive dissonance theory	Ch6
11-Feb	Self-perception theory	Ch7
13-Feb	Theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behavior	Ch8
18-Feb	Elaboration likelihood model	Ch9
20-Feb	Review of theories	Theory paper due
25-Feb	The persuasion process: source factors	Ch10
27-Feb	Applications 1	
3-Mar	Catch-up day + Review for exam 1	
5-Mar	Exam 1	
10-Mar	Term project workshop	
12-Mar	Term project workshop	
17-Mar	Spring break	
19-Mar	Spring break	
24-Mar	Message factors: content & style	Ch11
26-Mar	Applications 2	
31-Mar	Message factors: tactics & strategies	Ch12
2-Apr	Applications 3	
7-Apr	Receiver and channel factors	Ch13
9-Apr	Applications 4	
14-Apr	Ethics in persuasion; Review for exam 2	Ch14
16-Apr	Exam 2; Case study 1	
21-Apr	Case study 2	
23-Apr	Case study 3	
28-Apr	Case study video 1 for take-home final	
30-Apr	Case study video 2 for take-home final	
5-May	Term project presentations 1	
7-May	Term project presentations 2	
11-May	Term project report due	

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"I FIGURE IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP MY KIDS FROM WANTING THEM."

Oh yeah. If you learn how persuasion works, you can finally become strategic in your efforts!