COMM 446.900 and 446.970. COMMUNICATION, ORGANIZATIONS, AND SOCIETY, Spring, 2016, DR. CONRAD

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This course is designed to investigate the communicative processes through which formal organizations influence popular attitudes and public policies. It is grounded in the assumption that U.S. residents hold ambivalent and incongruent views of organizations and the executives who run them. On the one hand Americans long have had a deep cultural suspicion about the social and cultural impact of organizations, especially large, powerful ones. On the other hand we celebrate the ways in which organizations have contributed to our economic independence and standard of living. Similarly, we celebrate democracy and condemn totalitarianism of all kinds, but we happily accept autocratic rule within our organizations, even those supported by government and tax monies. These ambivalences create a conceptual space within which organizations can simultaneously be condemned and legitimized. Our goal this course will be to understand the role that rhetoric plays in both of these processes. Note: because the course focuses on current controversies, the syllabus may suddenly change if unexpected public policy controversies suddenly erupt (e.g., the 2007-8 Immigration Debate, which continues today) or major industries or organizations face unexpected image/reputation crises (e.g., the Deepwater Horizon incident). I will, however, keep the same exam dates and paper due dates so that you can plan your semesters.

Note: If a due date or examination falls on a religious holiday that you normally celebrate, please see me for an alternative schedule

OBJECTIVES:

1) Students will be able to critically analyze and evaluate (a) current research on public policy issues related to organizations and the economy, (b) arguments made by corporate and political rhetors on those issues, and (c) common policy options.

2) Students will understand the processes through which cultural assumptions are created, sustained, and transformed and the role that organizational/economic rhetoric plays in those processes.

3) Students will be able to develop rhetorical strategies through which organizational rhetors can construct viable identities and reputations, manage reputational crises, and rebuild favorable identities after crises have subsided.
EXAMINATIONS: There will be two. The first will be on February 25; the second is scheduled for Tuesday, May 10 from 1-3 p.m., but we will need to arrange an earlier date for graduating seniors. Each exam will be "cumulative" in the sense that the key concepts of the course tend to build on one another. The in-class portion of the exam will be composed of true-false, justify and essay questions; the take-home section will be an essay. Each exam is worth a maximum of 100 points. Hopefully, your answers to the essay questions on the first exam will lead to your paper/project, in keeping with the rationale behind “W” courses.

PAPER/PROJECT:

Option #1 (designed for students registered in section 900 [hereafter referred to as "non-honors" students])

During the course of the semester we will briefly consider a number of “case studies” of organization-society relationships. For your paper I want you to choose a case study that is relevant to the course and of particular interest to you, then become an expert on that case, and then analyze the communicative strategies used by the various parties who are/were involved. You are welcome to choose one of the case studies we cover in class, but my evaluation of your paper will be based on the parts of your analysis that go beyond what we discussed as a class.

Option #2 (designed for students registered in section 970 [hereafter referred to as "honors" students] who are graduating in May, 2016).

Form a group composed of section 970 students. Conduct research on a topic of mutual interest on either organizational influence on public policymaking or organizational identity/image/reputation management. Design a unit on the topic and present it to class. Topics must be cleared with Dr. Conrad.

Option #3 (designed for honors students but available to any student who is not graduating in May, 2016).

Choose a topic of the type described in option #1. Write a paper to be submitted to either the 2017 Southern Communication Association Honors Conference or the Central States Communication Association Honors Conference. (More details about the conferences will be provided later in the semester). You may have a maximum of one co-author on this paper. Note: submitting a paper involves a commitment to appear and present it should it be accepted. The deadline for submission for the Southern States conference is December 15, 2016 and the conference will be held in Greenville, SC on the weekend of April 5-9, 2017; the deadline for the Central States conference is January 15, 2017 and will be held in Minneapolis, MN on the weekend of April 12-14, 2017.

For even younger students, two other opportunities are available: submit your paper to the TAMU undergraduate research journal, Explorations, and/or use it as the starting point for an honors thesis.

For all options: 100 points possible. Due on Tuesday, April 26, although early submissions will be happily accepted.

READINGS
There will be many. The primary textbook will be Charles Conrad, Organizational Rhetoric: Strategies of Resistance and Domination (London: Polity Press, 2011). I will distribute additional readings to you via email, so you will need to either check your email daily or arrange to have email messages automatically transferred to media that you consult more regularly. After the first day of class each session will involve a structured discussion of one or more of the week's reading assignments. STUDENTS SHOULD BRING ANY QUESTIONS THEY HAVE OVER THE READINGS TO THESE CLASSES BECAUSE WE WILL NOT HAVE FORMAL REVIEW SESSIONS FOR THE EXAMINATIONS.

Since I will send non-textbook readings by email you should create a folder in your email system for those messages. If your official TAMU email address is not the one that you read most often, you should make arrangements to have messages sent to it automatically transferred to your preferred system. I do not use the eLearning system because of its tendency to crash at inopportune times.

**FORMAT OF THE COURSE**

I teach this course in a seminar format, just as I teach stand-alone honors or graduate courses. To make this format work it is very important that you keep up on the readings. Discussion questions are included in this syllabus and/or will be distributed as the course progresses. Some readings are required of all students, some are required of honors students but optional for non-honors students, and some are required of non-honors students but optional for honors students.

**UNIT ONE: TOPOI AND ORGANIZATIONAL DISCOURSE** Topic 1 (1/19-2/4).

*Focal Text: "Walmart vs. ‘Mom & Pop’"

**Discussion Questions:** What obligations/responsibilities do organizations have to the societies within which they operate? What obligations/responsibilities do societies have to the organizations which operate within them?

**Readings:**

*Conrad, Organizational Rhetoric, chp. 1, through the “American System” (all)

**Enrichment** (required for honors students): Perrow, chp 5 (“Corruption”). To be discussed on January 28.

**Discussion question over the dead Greeks section of Conrad, chp. 1:**

(1) As I indicated at the beginning of this syllabus, on the one hand, Americans are strong advocates of democratic forms of government. On the other hand, we are happy to allow formal organizations to operate as totalitarian regimes. In fact, many (perhaps most) of us find the concept of organizational democracy to be alien and maybe even offensive, and we resist government efforts to influence the operations of organizations (that is, of democratic institutions to “interfere” with totalitarian ones). We also tolerate corporate funding
of/influence over political processes (that is, totalitarian institutions “interfering” with democratic ones). Explain why.

(2) Classical Greece was characterized by two very different views of rhetoric, a Platonic view that viewed it as a tool for a Philosopher King to use to bring stability to the Republic (and stability was achieved through the suppression of dissent and what today would be called “mind control”) and a Sophistic view that depicted rhetoric as a set of teachable strategies that any citizen (which meant wealthy male in ancient Greece) could employ to achieve his goals in the assembly, courts or social rituals. Which view is most consistent with your values? Why?

Discussion Questions over the American System:

--Perrow argues that economies can be organized through markets, hierarchies, communities, or networks. What are the key characteristics of each? What would life be like in each one? Why?
--How and why did the US economy move away from “small firm markets” to “hierarchies?” What role did the courts play in this change. There are three related questions: (1) how/why did the corporate form develop, (2) how/why did we shift to a system of easy incorporation, and (3) what role did the “Dartmouth decision” play in all of this?
--Why was it important that federal started to take precedence over state laws?
--What was the impact of the court decisions after Dartmouth?

Discussion Question on Perrow's Analysis of "Corruption" (January 28)

--What is "corruption?" What factors complicate its definition? In the U.S. context, what is the difference b/t "corruption" and corporate persons exercising their Constitutional rights?
--What role did "corruption" play in the formation of the American System?

Case Study on Pharmaceutical Pricing

**Part I: Watch “The Other Drug War”** (all)
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vGkp97-464 for Part 1 and follow links to parts 2-6).

**Reading:** case study at the end of Chapter 1 of your textbook (all, focus on arguments made by industry and its critics)

**Discussion question** (non-honors students) complete the “weekend fun” exercise included in chapter one, and sketch out responses to the questions at the end of the case study that concludes the chapter. In the process make sure you find out how much the drug you’ve selected will cost you (note: most of you will need to add the copayment that you pay for the drug to and the total amount that your health insurance company pays for it). Then, find out how much it would cost if you were a U.S. military veteran (see the families.usa website) and how much it would cost if you bought it in Canada (which has the second-highest
pharmaceutical costs in the developed world), or in a European country. Explain any discrepancies.

**Part II: The Creation of Medicare Plan D**

**Reading:** Text, case study at the end of chapter 4, “Dealing (Legal) Drugs: The Rest of the Story” (all)

**Discussion question:** complete the “Weekend fun” exercise and sketch answers to the discussion questions at the end of the chapter. Be sure you also can answer these questions: how does a bill become a law (do NOT review your notes from high school or college civics class)? Explain how and why a “free marketer” (Republican) administration and Congress passed the largest socialist program since the New Deal (Medicare Plan D)

**Follow-up Reading:** Plan D follow-up pdf. (all)

**Topic 2 (2/9-2/23). Everything for Sale?**

**Readings:** Conrad, *Organizational Rhetoric*, chp. 2 (all)

pdf on U.S. middle class (all)

**Enrichment** (honors students):

Option 1: Corak, "Inequality from generation to generation" or D'Addio, "Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantage"

**Discussion Questions:** (1) what are the key factors that influence opportunity and mobility across generations? (2) why does the U.S. rank where it does (in comparison to other developed countries)? (Discussed on February 9)

Option 2: *Kuttner, Everything for Sale, “Intro” and Chapter 1*

**Discussion Questions:** (1) what are the assumptions underlying “free market fundamentalism” (Kuttner calls them “heroic” assumptions); (2) what factors/processes create what he calls “market failures;” (3) what is a “second best market” and why would we want one; (4) Under what circumstances are market systems the preferable way to organize a society/economy? (Discussed on February 18)

**Case Study: Free Markets, Babies, and All That**

**Readings:** Conrad, chp. 2 case study, “Buying Babies (and other things)”

*”Use with Posner” pdf

**Discussion Questions:** (1) What, according to Posner, are appropriate limits to the free market system? What, according to his critics, are appropriate limits? If one applied those conceptions of limits to an economy as a whole, what would the resulting system look like? (2) In “the Use With Posner” file I’ve attached similar debates about other
aspects of a free market in human biology (e.g., sperm, eggs, ova, sex-selection, organ donations, etc.). What is an appropriate “mix” of free market and government control in these industries? Why? What does your answer have to do with economics? (2) Answer the same questions regarding other aspects of “family formation” and health care.

February 25. First Examination and Term Paper Topics Due

UNIT TWO: ORGANIZATIONS, RHETORIC AND PUBLIC POLICYMAKING (details to come)

UNIT THREE MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL IMAGE(S) (details to come)

Misc. Course Information

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement

  The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information, visit [http://disability.tamu.edu](http://disability.tamu.edu).

- Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

  “An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.” For additional information, please visit: [http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor](http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor)
• **Grading Scale:**

A = 90%-100%
B = 80%-89%
C = 70%-79%
D = 60%-69%
F = <60%

*If you receive an * next to your grade on a project or exam, it means that I concluded that something other than your mastery of the material influenced your grade. If your final total for the semester is within 5 points of the next-higher grade, and you had one or more *s, I may bump your grade for the course up to the next letter grade.

* I do not take attendance, so questions regarding “excused absences” are only relevant to the exams. On those I defer to the university’s list of “excused absences.” If you need to miss for other reasons (receiving a Nobel Prize, playing for the national soccer team of one of our allies, or comparable events), see me.

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