

**MPA 881 – Government Communications**  
**Outline - Spring 2024**  
**Location: Rm D216 Mackintosh-Corry**  
**May 6<sup>th</sup> to May 10<sup>th</sup>**  
**9am-4pm**

*Below is a brief overview of the course along with its principal themes and a rough calendar. This outline is intended solely as a general guide and tool for broad preparation. By necessity, alterations will occur, particularly to the calendar as we will need to accommodate guest lecturers and may need to be flexible for in-class assignments. A list of readings and suggested syllabus is also provided to help participants prepare. Finally, a breakdown of how evaluations will be rendered is offered. Looking very forward to the week.*

### **Course Overview**

Few things matter more in government than communications – although, in many ways it is still seen as the weak sibling to policy formation and program execution. Strong communications cannot make a weak policy work well or a flawed program flourish. But poor communications can most assuredly sabotage sound policies and well-constructed and even effectively managed programs.

Such is the centrality of communications to contemporary government life. Strategic communications planning is the foundation stone of most modern governing practices – driving risk assessment, preferred approaches, public engagement, policy mitigation and issues management. In fact, communications considerations are sometimes so determinative they can motivate key elements of a government’s agenda and its policy offerings. Whole programs can be constructed to serve purposes that are largely borne of communications fears or to provide government representatives with needed messages and tools in response to public anxieties.

Communications is also uniquely bred throughout the machinery of government – occupying institutional positions within both the professional public service and at the elected level in the form of Ministerial staff. Cabinet submissions typically require appendices with communications analysis and rollout plans. And Cabinet Committees will often dedicate explicit agenda time to probing and reviewing communications considerations, as well as auditing paid and social media creative. In short, communications considerations are wholly integrated at multiple levels within government as policies and priorities are established and pursued.

In the context of today’s interconnected yet disaggregated networks of communities, success for many governments, in many circumstances, is defined by communications: its policies and programs, its priorities and motivations and, ultimately, its ability to connect with key audiences in ways that are convincing and reinforcing.

And yet, the practice of government communication has never been more complex or even treacherous. Traditional purposes for government communication – such as the broadcast of key government initiatives and the promotion of government programs and benefits – are being challenged and broken down by technology, cultural shifts, the dissemination of disinformation and an accelerating withdrawal of deference to norms and trust in institutions.

It is within this complex environment that our course will be set. It will have three core objectives:

- To provide participants with a broad-based grounding in the theory and practice of government communications – working primarily (but not exclusively) with ideas and policies as compared to products and services.
- To provide a decidedly practitioners' perspective to government communications, exploring discrete functions such as paid media, earned media, owned media, media relations, issues management, polling and more.
- To help prepare participants for the practical experience of working in government communications and/or overseeing or interacting with those responsible for government communications.

Finally, it is hoped that the course will be informative, lively, interactive and enjoyable.

### **Suggested Background Reading**

The following books are strongly suggested as background reading prior to arrival at the course or even to be consumed during the week of class itself. These titles are selected because of the insight they provide on the broad topic government communications. Participants will undoubtedly deepen understanding and perspective through their reading and as such, they can indirectly contribute to a better, fuller outcome.

Fox, Bill (1999)	<i><u>Spin War: Politics and New Media</u></i> Key Porter Books
Delacourt, Susan (2013)	<i><u>Shopping for Votes</u></i> Douglas and McIntyre
Marland, Alex (2016)	<i><u>Brand Command</u></i> UBC Press
Brodie, Ian (2018)	<i><u>At the Centre of Government</u></i> McGill-Queens University Press
Wernick, Michael (2021)	<i><u>Governing Canada: A Guide to the Tradecraft of Politics</u></i> UBC Press
Fox, Bill (2022)	<i><u>Trump, Trudeau, Tweets Truth</u></i> McGill-Queens University Press
Taras, David & Waddell, Christopher	<i><u>How Canadians Communicate IV: Media and Politics</u></i> AU Press

## **Course Requirements**

Structured lectures and class discussion will be anchors of daily course work – with outlines of all lectures to be posted daily after class. Recording of lectures for the strict purposes of coursework will be permitted.

Guest lectures will also provide course participants with the perspective of expert practitioners in select disciplines related to government communication such as media, public opinion research, advertising/marketing and so forth. It may not be possible in all instances to guarantee the posting of guest lecturer's contents so strict attendance and notetaking is advisable.

Other elements and requirements include:

- *Class Readings* – a handful of readings are provided, or will be provided, in order to supplement and embellish key themes and course concepts. The number and length of readings will be relatively limited. It is expected that course participants will complete these readings. Familiarity with the material will be a graded component.
- *In-Class Exercises* – two in-class exercises will be conducted on, one each on Days 2 and 4 (see below). The first will be focused on a 'SWOT' analysis and the second will require the completion of a Message Bible. Both will be assigned in class on day-of following background and instruction in each of these areas. Participants will be expected to work in small groups, generating and producing work product which will be verbally presented. These exercises will be a graded component.
- *Take-Home Assignment* – a final assignment will be provided on the course's final day, to be completed and submitted within a few weeks of the . This assignment will comprise a significant component of participants' final grade.

Participation will matter. All those enrolled will be graded on attendance and active engagement, contribution to class discussions and in-class work. Exceptions and accommodations will be made on an individual basis upon discussion.

## **Proposed Class Calendar: May 6<sup>th</sup> to May 10<sup>th</sup>**

Below is a proposed calendar outline with key themes and the expected focus for each day. Please note that each day is divided into two distinct classes – a morning and afternoon session.

*\*\*This calendar is for broad planning purposes only and is subject to change and modification. In particular, the availability of guest lecturers may force alterations.*

<b><u>May 6 – Morning Session</u></b>	<b><u>May 6 – Afternoon Session</u></b>
<p>Course Overview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introductions</li><li>• Review outline, expectations, requirements</li><li>• How It Works<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Overview of government communication functions</li><li>○ Mandate, mechanisms, tools</li><li>○ Tensions, pressures</li></ul></li><li>• Relationship between public service and political level</li><li>• Division of responsibilities</li></ul> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">How Canadians Communicate IV: Media and Politics (aupress.ca)</a> Ed. by David Taras and Christopher Waddell – Chapter 2 (Alboim) and Chapter 7 (Flanagan).</li><li>• <i>Governing Canada: A Guide to the Tradecraft of Politics</i>, by Michael Wernick – Chapter 2 (pg 13-35)</li><li>• <i>At the Centre of Government</i> by Ian Brodie – Chapter 6 (pg 109-129)</li></ul>	<p>Lecture # 1 - Strategic Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is 'strategic communications'</li><li>• Concept of risk assessment, mitigation</li><li>• Putting into practice</li><li>• Roles and Tensions</li><li>• Introduction to SWOT analysis<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Overview</li><li>○ Template</li><li>○ Judgments</li></ul></li></ul> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Brand Command</i>, by Alex Marland – Chapter 9 (pg 287-325)</li></ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 7 – Morning Session</u></b></p> <p>In-Class Exercise #1 - SWOT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline Scenario &amp; Task</li> <li>• Divide into teams</li> <li>• 45 minutes for work-time</li> <li>• Presentations</li> </ul> <p>Readings: None</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 7 – Afternoon Session</u></b></p> <p>Guest Lecture – Polling and Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Role of Public Opinion Research in government communications</li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> </ul> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://irpp.org">Poll-driven politics – the role of public opinion in Canada (irpp.org)</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca">PDF - 21st Annual Report on GC POR Activities 2021-2022 EN (tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca)</a></li> </ul>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 8 – Morning Session</u></b></p> <p>Lecture # 2 – Message &amp; Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media environment</li> <li>• Building a Narrative</li> <li>• Channels &amp; Platforms</li> <li>• Case Study</li> </ul> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Spinwars</i> by Bill Fox – Chapter 2 (pg 23-58), Chapter 4 (pg 85-112)</li> <li>• <i>Trump, Trudeau, Tweets Truth</i> by Bill Fox – Chapter 7 (pg 220-265)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>May 8 – Afternoon Session</u></b></p> <p>In-Class Exercise #2 – Core Messaging &amp; Building a “Bible”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline Scenario &amp; Task</li> <li>• Divide into teams</li> <li>• 45 minutes for work-time</li> <li>• Presentations</li> </ul> <p>Readings: None</p>
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<b><u>May 9 – Morning Session</u></b>	<b><u>May 9 – Afternoon Session</u></b>
<p>Lecture # 3 – Issues &amp; Crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis – the new ‘govt’ model</li> <li>• Division of Responsibilities</li> <li>• Templates and tools</li> <li>• Messaging strategies</li> <li>• “To Do’s” and “To Dont’s”</li> <li>• Case Study</li> </ul> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Trump, Trudeau, Tweets Truth</i> by Bill Fox – Chapter 10 (pg 357-406)</li> </ul>	<p>Guest Lecture – Government &amp; Political advertising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paid media and advertising in government</li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> </ul> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">How the Liberals won — an inside look at the targeting and tactics that got Trudeau re-elected   The Star</a> by Susan Delacourt</li> <li>• <a href="#">How much is too much? Nearly half of Canadians think gambling ads have gotten out of hand   Ipsos</a></li> </ul>

<b><u>May 10 – Morning Session</u></b>	<b><u>May 10 – Afternoon Session</u></b>
<p>Guest Lecture – Working with the Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation</li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> </ul> <p>Readings: None</p>	<p>Wrap-Up &amp; Final Assignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of key elements and concepts of course</li> <li>• Final Assignment</li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> </ul> <p>Readings: None</p>

**June 14 - DEADLINE FOR FINAL ASSIGNMENT**

- To be submitted by 5pm via email to [reid.scott@queensu.ca](mailto:reid.scott@queensu.ca)

## **Instructor – Contact Information and Availability**

Scott Reid - Term Adjunct & Lecturer Queen's University School of Policy Studies  
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416.788.8190  
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## **Class Schedule**

MPA 881 will be held daily from May 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> in Rm D216 Mackintosh-Corry  
Morning Session – 900am-12pm  
Afternoon Session – 1pm-4pm  
Office Hours – May 6, May 8, 4-5pm. Or by appointment.

## **Course Grading:**

Class participation	10%
In Class Exercise #1	20%
In Class Exercise #2	20%
Final Assignment	50%

## **MPA 881 – May 2024: Reading List Summary**

### **Titles**

Fox, Bill (1999)	<i>Spin War: Politics and New Media</i> Key Porter Books
Delacourt, Susan (2013)	<i>Shopping for Votes</i> Douglas and McIntyre
Marland, Alex (2016)	<i>Brand Command</i> UBC Press
Brodie, Ian (2018)	<i>At the Centre of Government</i> McGill-Queens University Press
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Fox, Bill (2022)	<i>Trump, Trudeau, Tweets Truth</i> McGill-Queens University Press
Taras, David & Waddell, Christopher	<i>How Canadians Communicate IV: Media and Politics</i> AU Press

### **Individual Readings**

- [How Canadians Communicate IV: Media and Politics \(aupress.ca\)](#) Ed. by David Taras and Christopher Waddell – Chapter 2 (Alboim) and Chapter 7 (Flanagan).
- *Governing Canada: A Guide to the Tradecraft of Politics*, by Michael Wernick – Chapter 2 (pg 13-35)
- *At the Centre of Government* by Ian Brodie – Chapter 6 (pg 109-129)
- *Brand Command*, by Alex Marland – Chapter 9 (pg 287-325)
- [Poll-driven politics – the role of public opinion in Canada \(irpp.org\)](#)
- [PDF - 21st Annual Report on GC POR Activities 2021-2022 EN \(tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca\)](#)
- *Spinwars* by Bill Fox – Chapter 2 (pg 23-58), Chapter 4 (pg 85-112)
- *Trump, Trudeau, Tweets Truth* by Bill Fox – Chapter 7 (pg 220-265)
- *Trump, Trudeau, Tweets Truth* by Bill Fox – Chapter 10 (pg 357-406)
- [How the Liberals won — an inside look at the targeting and tactics that got Trudeau re-elected | The Star](#)
- [How much is too much? Nearly half of Canadians think gambling ads have gotten out of hand | Ipsos](#)