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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes making speech communication more interdisciplinary and, in particular, combining political science and speech in a team-taught course in election campaigning. The goals, materials, activities, and plan of such a course are discussed. The goals include: (1) gaining new insights into the process of contemporary campaigns and dismissing the myths surrounding the role of political parties, (2) understanding the structure of an election campaign organization that operates on a local level, (3) developing a capacity to see political and social problems in terms of asking empirical questions, (4) learning more about the political behavior of voters in issue elections, and (5) providing students with an opportunity to observe and question political poll takers and officials. The course would be taught on a classroom-field experience basis, and the activities would include lectures, presentations, readings, films, special projects, and tests. The plan of the course is based around an inventory of propositions predicting the relationship between political campaigning and political behavior (i.e., voting turnout and partisan direction of the vote). (TS)

# Political Science and Speech Communication - A Team Approach to Teaching Political Communication

by

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Paper prepared for delivery at the
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POLITICAL SCIENCE AND SPEECH COMMUNICATION - A TEAM APPROACH TO TEACHING POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

In the not-too-distant past the academic discipline of speech communication was looked upon as a stepsister of the English department or as a natural extension of theatre arts. We were viewed as interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary. The tremendous growth of university education in the post war era was reflected in the growth of speech communication departments. We became more and more an entity unto ourselves. In doing so, we tried to draw distinct parameters around our area of study. Many people felt this was necessary to justify our existence. After all, our M.A. and Ph. D. degrees had to be conferred by a separate academic discipline.

It has only been in the last few years that we started to move out of our selfimposed academic encirclement. This is more true at the graduate level, where study is independent and, therefore, easily modified. But it is at the undergraduate level that we really need to move our wagons into the academic encirclement of other departments. We feel there are compelling reasons for interdisciplinary courses in undergraduate education.

Our rationale centers around three main points:

ONE - Outside of our fundamentals classes, speech communication departments offer few courses that regularly enroll majors from the social science and humanities areas. If we could offer them

interdisciplinary courses that combine general or specific notions of communication with their field of study, non-major enrollment under the credit listing of speech-communication should increase.

TWO - Exposing our field of study through interdisciplinary courses can create the opportunities for proselytizing among non-majors. Let them find out the real truth about us, that we are more that just teachers of public speaking. I have already prepared a short homily for the edification of political science students who enroll in our class.

THIRD - More important that missionizing these non-majors is the opportunity to expose them to the literature in our discipline. Not only the student but your brother faculty members will benefit from this experience. We demand that our students read articles in social psychology, sociology, linguistics, political science, history, etc., so they can better understand the variables that influence the communication process. Why not introduce them to our contributions toward understanding man's behavior?

## Natural Marriage

Between the disciplines of political science and speech communication there are numerous areas of study that overlap.[1] But probably the most natural overlap is the area of election campaigning.[2] Both disciplines are striving to answer or at least to understand the relationships between communication and political behavior. Both disciplines are eager to unravel the

myriad of conflicts that exist among explanation as to "why the election was won . . . or lost." By joining together we can avoid duplication of effort and bring different insights to bear in the systematic explanation of the election process.

Finally, this natural marriage can benefit the undergraduate student. His view of election campaigning will be two-dimensional. He will be exposed to the views of a communicologist and of a political scientist. Each can bring into focus the relevant research from his own discipline and can identify the major propositions about campaign decision making that are in need of systematic investigation.

Goals of Team Taught Course in Election Campaigning

What follows is a listing of the primary goals or accomplishments that we are working toward in team teaching a course in election campaign.

1. Acquisition of new insights into the process of contemporary campaigns and the dismissal of certain misconceptions surrounding the role of political parties, professional

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[1]Traditionally public address studies have investigated the rhetorical strategies of men running for national or state office. In addition, there are studies of politically oriented special interest groups that have been the backbone of social movements in America and Britain.

[2]The newest interest group for the International Communication Association is Division 6 - Political Communication

consultants, polls, interpersonal communications, computers and mass media in the campaign process on a local level.

2. Understanding the structure of an election campaign organization that operates on a local level. This would provide the students with awareness into the problems of staffing, funding, operating, etc., a short ranged, limited-achievement organization.

3. Developing a capacity to see political and social problems in terms of asking empirical questions, seeking valid and reliable evidence, and evaluating the methods used to arrive at conclusions about the factual conditions underlying these problems.

4. Contribute to the knowledge about political behavior of voters in issue elections. The vast bulk of the literature on the election campaign deals with Presidential electioneering, large city and state-wide election campaigns. We hope to identify the major research questions of issue elections and carry out investigations that will gather data to help us answer the questions.

5. To provide the students with a unique opportunity to observe, question, and hopefully challenge the beliefs and opinions of experienced political campaign managers, political poll takers and elected officials.

## Materials and Activities of the Course

When dealing with subject matter through personal involvement, there is a strong tendency to develop a "how to" or "cookbook" course. However, due to lack of a substantial body of

knowledge in the area of election campaign, this method of course development is not applicable. But, there is a need to allow students to experience election campaigning and to confirm or to deny empirically specific propositions.

The course will be taught on a classroom-field experience basis. The classroom activities will consist of lectures, presentations from local politicians, campaign managers, political opinion pollers and mass media consultant, films and several tests. All students will be responsible for reading specific articles or chapters. In addition, the student will select a specific area of election campaign and will be responsible for covering it in a special reading list. We hope to formulate the areas around major propositions.

In addition, the students will be placed into teams that will work with local organizations that are involved in elections. This will include school boards, city and townships, public agencies (park commissions or county aviation commissioner) and other groups that are placing issues or candidates on the ballot. It will be the responsiblity of the instructor to see that student involvement is substantial and responsible.

## THE PLAN OF THE COURSE

### Propositional Inventory

One strategy we will follow is constructing an inventory of

propositions[3] predicting the relationship between political campaigning and political behavior (i.e., voting turnout and partisan direction of the vote). Since much of the literature is (1) pre-operational, (2) time bound and/or (3) on presidential election campaigns, we will spend much attention on constructing an inventory of competing or rival propositions. This propositional inventory is expected to have payoff in increasing our ability to specify the conditions under which an individual will engage in certain form of political behavior. Five sets of competing propositions that we will deal with are presented below.

1. Using data from the Survey Research Center's 1952 presidential election study, Converse concludes that there is a curvilinear relationship between party identification and partisan direction of the vote when controlling for number of mass media used.[4]

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[3]The advantage of compiling an inventory as a base from which to launch a course is recognized by Berelson and Stainer who maintain that a propositional "... inventory helps to reveal gaps in knowledge and perhaps suggests how to fill them. We are impressed with the value of such inventories in showing where inquiry is particularly needed in a given field..." Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Stainer, Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964), p. 662.

[4]Philip E. Converse. "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes." Public Opinion Quarterly, 26 (Winter, 1962) 578-599. The tau-beta coefficients are approximately .70 for the no exposure grouping, and range from .67 to .62 and to .72 for those monitoring one, two, three, or four mass media channels.

Dreyer, on the other hand, discovered a linear relationship when he replicated Converse's study using the SRC's 1956, 1960, 1964, 1968 post-election data.[5]

2. According to Lazarsfeld and Katz, "The 1940 (Erie County) study (The People's Choice) indicated that personal influence affected voting decisions more that the mass media did . . ."[6] A more recent study analyzing data collected in Pennsylvania following the 1968 election disconfirms the two-step flow of communication hypothesis.[7]

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[5]Edward C. Dreyer. "Media Use and Electoral Choices: Some Political Consequences of Information Exposure," Public Opinion Quarterly, 35 (Winter 1971-72) 544-553.

[6]Elihu Katz. "The Two-Step Flow of Communication," Public Opinion Quarterly (Spring, 1957), 70.

[7]John H. Kessel. "Pennsylvania, 1968: Analysis of a Belief System," a paper prepared for delivery at the 1971 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 29 - May 1, 1971. Chicago, Illinois.

In his examination of the respondents' evaluations of the usefulness of political parties, primary groups, and mass media in their voting decision calculus and how much they learned from each channel,[8] Kessel found that, among those who preferred one channel of information (about one half of the sample), 90 percent ranked mass media highest while only 6 percent gave political parties the highest ranking.[9]

3. Berelson and his associates point out that:

> Some propagandists, and some students of propaganda, believe that ambiguity often promotes effectiveness, since each subject is then free to define the matter in terms satisfactory to himself. While a sharply clear statement may win some friends by its very decisiveness, it may also lose some people for the same reason.[10]

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[8]The questions were: "Now, how important (were political party activity, political conversations, and mass media) to you when you were making up your mind who to vote for this year?/Take the political parties with their campaign literature, telephone calls, and the rest that they did. Would you say you learned a great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or nothing at all from the political parties? ... What about talking to others? Would you say that you learned a great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or nothing at all from talking to other people? ... And what about newspapers and television? Would you say that you learned a great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or nothing at all from newspapers and television?

[9]Kessel, "Pennsylvania, 1968," pp. 15-16.

[10]Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign (Chicago: University of Chicato Press, 1966), p. 217. Nicholas Biddle, William Henry Harrison's campaign manager, is reported to have advised: "Let him say not one single word about his principles, or his creed--let him say nothing--promise nothing. Let

In a recent article, Shepele predicts that under specified conditions a candidate's probalility of winning are greater if he is explicit.[11]

5. Many authors have popularized the notion that mass communication are extremely powerful in forming and shaping political attitudes and behavior.

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([10]cont.) no Committee, no convention--no town meeting ever extract from him a single word about what he thinks now, or what he will do hereafter. Let the use of pen and ink be wholly forbidden as is he were a mad poet in Bedlam." Quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little Brown, 1945), p. 211. Downs (Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York; Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 135-137) and Key (V. O. Key, Jr. Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups (New York: Growell, 1958), p. 241) see candidates' ambiguity rooted in our two-party system. For evidence that Eisenhower and Stevenson pursued a strategy of ambiguity in 1956 see Stanley Kelley, Jr., Political Campaigning (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1960), pp. 50-84. For evidence that Nixon and Humphrey were ambiguous and evasive on the Vietnam War issue see Benjamin I. Page and Richard A. Grody, "Policy Voting and the Electoral Process: The Vietnam War Issue," American Political Science Review, LXVI (Sept., 1972), 979-995.

[11]Kenneth A. Shepele, "The Strategy of Ambiguity: Uncertainty and Electoral Competition," American Political Science Review, LXVI (June, 1972) 555-568.

Leonard Hall, former Republican national chairman, maintains that "you sell your candidates and your programs the way a business sells its products.[12] One book on "the new politics" warns that "These new managers . . . can play upon the voters like virtuosos. They can push a pedal here, strike a cork there, and presumably, they can get precisely the response they seek.[13]

Apparently, many politicians believe that candidates can be sold as toothpaste is. As MacNeil states:

> Broadcasters and advertising men have a vested interest demonstrating the power of their methods. Politicians, who are creatures of fashion, have found their claims irresistable.[14]

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[12]Quoted in Joe McGinnis, The Selling of the President 1968 (New York: Trident Press, 1969), p. 27. A similar view has been expressed by Reeves: "I think of a man in a voting booth who hesitates between two levers as if he were passing between competing tubes of toothpaste in a drugstore. The brand that has made the highest penetration in his brain will win his choice." Rossen Reeves as quoted in Jules Abels, The Degeneration of Our Presidential Election((New York: MacMillian Publishing Co., Inc., 1968) p. 57.

[13]James M. Perry, The New Politics (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1968), p. 213.

[14]Robert MacNeil, The People Machine (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 40. Frederick Papert, founder of Papert, Koenig, and Lois Companies, Inc. questions the miraculous powers attributed to the image makers: ... the notion that we are able to 'create' winners, or even to remove warts, is nonsense. We can only reveal." He adds that "What we cannot do is create. We can't make the voters believe that a dummy is smart, a bent man straight, a follower a leader, a bad man good." Frederick Papert, "Good Candidates Make Advertising Experts," in The Political Image Merchants' Strategies in The New Politics, ed. by Ray Hiebert, Robert Jones, Ernest Lotito, and John Lorens (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books Ltd., 1971). p. 97.

Contrasted with the view that the "hidden persuaders" are influential in electoral campaigns is the hypothesis that the conversion potential of political communications ". . . is progressively reduced by the presence, within the communication situation, of a host of intervening conditions, each of which tends by and large to minimize the likelihood of a response disjunctive with prior inclinations."[15]

Party identification is a factor mediating the impact of political communications. Voting behavior research based on the Survey Research Center's (SRC) model of the electoral decision process indicates that party identification is the single most important determinant of electoral turnout (See Table 1) and voting choice[16] (See Table 2).

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[15]Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, Voting and Nonvoting (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1968), p.4.

[16]The effect of party identification on voting choice is well documented. See Angus Campbell and Henry Valen, "Party Identification in Norway and the United States," Public Opinion Quarterly, 25 (Winter, 1961), 524; Warren E. Miller, "The Political Behavior of the Electorate" in American Government Annual, 1960-1961 ed. by Earl Latham (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960) p. 56; Ithiel de Sola Pool, Robert P. Abelson, and Samuel L. Popkin, Candidates, Issues, and Strategies (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1964), p. 114; Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Public: in Ideology and Discontent, ed. by David E. Apter. (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p. 241; Philip E. Converse "The Concept of a Normal Vote" in Elections and the Political Order ed. by Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966), p. 18; Angus Campbell and Donald E. Stokes, "Partisan Attitudes and the Presidential Vote," in American Voting Behavior ed. by Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck (New York: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 356-357, and Arthur C. Wolfe, "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election." American Political Science Review, LXII (December, 1969), 1099. The high relationship between strength of party identification and direction of the vote has become so firmly established that the Republican Party has incorporated this finding in its campaign strategy.

Key and Manger argue that "Often electoral decision is not an action whose outcome is in doubt but a reaffirmation of past decisions . . ." to support the Democratic or Republican Party.[17]

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([16]cont.) The following statement appears in a report submitted by Ray C. Bliss to the Republican National Committee: "The strong party identifiers . . . will vote for their party's candidates 82 percent of the time regardless of the candidates or the issues. Obviously, it is imperative that we expand the number of these firmly committed Republicans." Quoted in Kessel, The Goldwater Coalition: Republican Strategies in 1964 (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968), p. 302.

[17]V. O. Key Jr. and Frank Munger, "Social Determination of Electoral Decisions: The Case of Indiana," in American Voting Behavior, ed. by Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959).

TABLE 1



PERCENTAGE VOTING DEMOCRATIC IN FIVE ELECTIONS

| | 1952 Pres. | 1956 Pres. | 1960 Pres. | 1964 Pres. | 1968 Pres. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strong Democrat | 83.6% | 85.3% | 91.0% | 95.3% | 87.0% |
| Weak Democrat | 61.9 | 63.2 | 71.7 | 82.1 | 59.9 |
| Independent Dem. | 61.0 | 67.5 | 89.9 | 90.0 | 52.0 |
| Independent | 15.2 | 16.5 | 46.0 | 77.0 | 25.6 |
| Independent Rep. | 6.6 | 6.5 | 12.3 | 25.0 | 3.9 |
| Weak Republican | 6.8 | 7.3 | 13.1 | 43.2 | 10.8 |
| Strong Republican | 1.5 | 0.5 | 1.6 | 9.7 | 2.5 |

Sources: John Merrill Shanks, "The Impact of Voter's Political Information on Electoral Change: A Reexamination of the Quality of American Electoral Decisions." (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1970), P. 70 and Survey Research Data obtained through the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research.

TABLE 2

Participation by Party Identification: 1952-1968

| | 1952 | 1956 | 1960 | 1964 | 1968 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strong Democrats | 75% | 79% | 83% | 81% | 81.0% |
| Weak Democrats | 70 | 68 | 77 | 73 | 70.6 |
| Independent Democrats | 74 | 73 | 72 | 71 | 69.3 |
| Independents | 76 | 77 | 74 | 62 | 65.8 |
| Independent Rep. | 78 | 74 | 84 | 84 | 81.1 |
| Weak Republican | 76 | 79 | 87 | 85 | 79.3 |
| Strong Republican | 93 | 81 | 88 | 92 | 86.3 |

Source: "Tables showing the Relationship between Political Participation, Voting, and Selected Background Characteristics in Six U.S. Elections." in Political Behavior and Public Opinion: Comparative Analysis, ed. by Lewis Bowman and G. R. Boynton (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), p. 456.

The impact of party identification[13] on partisan attitudes is well summed up by Campbell and his colleagues.

> . . . the influence of party identification on attitudes toward the perceived elements of politics has been far more important than the influence of these attitudes on party identification itself. We are convinced that the relationships in our data reflect primarily the role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects.[19]

## Testing Hypotheses

As Key points out, "Given the limits of knowledge of the political role and effects of mass communications, about all that can be done is to make educated guesses around the edges of the problem."[20]

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[18]The concept and measurement of party identification are two of the many fundamental contributions the Survey Research Center has made since it began conducting national elections studies in 1952.

[19]Campbell et al., The American Voter, p. 135. According to the Michigan group, party identification ". . . raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation. The stronger the party bond, the more exaggerated the process of selection and perceptual distortion will be." Ibid., p. 133.

[20]V. O. Key Jr., Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 345

When our efforts to construct a propositional inventory based on extant research fail to shed additional light on the impact of campaigning on electoral behavior, we will turn to secondary analysis of data[21] such as that found in Table 3. An "educated guess" based on the data contained in Table 3 is that, since such a large proportion of individuals decide how they will vote before the campaign starts, the impact of the campaign is limited.

## Potential Payoff of Course

Empirical findings in the well-springs of the voter's decision making process (i.e., the elements that enter his voting calculus) gain significance not because of any direct effect they have on the voter but because of their potential impact on the political behavior of candidates and political leaders.

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[21] We now have the 1968 Comparative State Elections Project (CSEP) data collected by the Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina. The size of the sample (N-7673) allows us to perform multivariate analysis when testing hypotheses on the impact of communication on electoral behavior. We are also preparing to purchase additional data bases. Students will be taught the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Program.

Many candidates and political leaders are convinced that the route to victory is feeding the electorate ". . . a steady diet of buncombe".[22] An appreciation of the elements that enter the voter's choice could lead candidates for public office to more informed, policy-conscious attempts to communicate substantive concerns to the public. Eventually, such efforts could lead to the electorate's attaining a higher level of policy awareness and more impressive attempts to deal with outstanding social concerns. Ultimately, as candidates become more aware of the voter's motivations and take more specific policy positions in their campaigns, there will be greater political linkage and increased accountability, responsibility, and sensitivity on the part of public officials.

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[22]V.O. Key, The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential 1936-1960 (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) p. 7. Key hypothesized that "Fed a steady diet of buncombe, the people may come to expect and to respond with highest predictability to buncombe. And those leaders most skilled in the propagation of buncombe may gain lasting advantage in the recurring struggles for popular favor." Ibid.

TABLE 3

POINT IN TIME RESPONDENT DECIDED HOW HE WAS GOING TO CAST PRESIDENTIAL VOTE[a]

| Time of Vote Decision | Percentage Deciding | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1952 | 1956 | 1960 | 1964 | 1968 | 1972 |
| Knew all along, always vote for the same party, pre-convention | 31.6% (382) | 44.7% (557) | 23.8% (340) | 17.3% (191) | 16.7% (975) | 34.0% (498) |
| Pre-convention because of . . . (reference to candidacy of Democrat or Republican), as soon as . . . (he) said he would run | 3.8 (46) | 14.5 (181) | 6.2 (88) | 23.1 (255) | 19.5 (1140) | 11.0 (161) |
| Decided at time of convention, just after the convention, when he was nominated (Reference to either Democratic or Republican candidate regardless of whom respondent voted for). | 31.9 (836) | 18.3 (228) | 30.3 (433) | 25.0 (276) | 27.3 (1594) | 18.0 (264) |
| Decided after the convention, during the campaign | 20.8 (251) | 11.6 (144) | 25.5 (364) | 20.7 (229) | 15.7 (918) | 23.0 (337) |
| Decided within two weeks of election | 9.0 (109) | 7.4 (92) | 8.5 (121) | 8.9 (98) | 15.0 (876) | 8.0 (117) |
| Decided on election day | 2.3 (28) | 2.3 (28) | 2.7 (39) | 3.6 (40) | 5.3 (311) | 6.0 (88) |
| Don't know; refused | .6 (7) | 1.4 (17) | 3.1 (44) | 1.5 (17) | 0.4 (23) | |
| Total Number of Cases | 1,209 | 1,247 | 1,429 | 1,106 | 5,837 | 1,464 |

[a]The question was: "How long before the election did you decide that you were going to vote the way you did?"

Note: The figures enclosed in parentheses are the number of cases upon which the percentages were calculated.

Sources: Survey Research Center data obtained through the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. 1968 data from Comparative States Slection Study. 1972 data from H. T. Reynolds, Politics and the Common Man: An Introduction to Political Behavior (Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1974), p. 109.