POLI 100M: Political Psychology

Final Project Guidelines

DUE: September 9, 2017, 11:30AM, submitted to TritonEd

The ultimate learning outcome of this course is for students to be able to develop and communicate in writing a well-reasoned argument about how psychological principles can explain political behavior and/or outcomes in the real world to an audience that best fits their career goals. Students should be able to integrate course concepts to defend their arguments as well as acknowledge limitations. In pursuit of this outcome, students will complete a final project. Students have some flexibility over the format of the final project. I suggest that you choose a format that best suits your career goals. This assignment is designed to give you an option for a writing sample when you apply for jobs or graduate school.

Options:
1. Write a political blog post explaining how political psychological concepts help us understand a particular political phenomenon of your choosing. For example, you could argue how a political psychological concept helps us understand the 2016 election, withdrawal from the Paris Accords, the AHCA, etc.
2. Write a campaign strategy memo explaining how political psychological concepts will help your candidate win. For this option, you could either choose a candidate to run in 2018, or you could write a memo to the campaign staff of a candidate who lost in 2016, explaining how they could have strategized differently, using political psychology.
3. Write a communications strategy memo for a current politician or elected official, such as President Trump, Senator Harris, Senator Feinstein, Congressman Scott Peters, Congressman Hunter, etc. Use concepts from this course to make recommendations to this politician's communications team.

Requirements:
- Length: Your final project must be between 1,000 and 1,500 words long. Note that this 500 word cushion should be plenty sufficient. Assignments that are less than 1,000 words or more than 1,500 words will be penalized.
- Due Date: September 9, 2017, 11:30AM, submitted to Turn It In on TritonEd. I recommend that you take a screenshot of the submission confirmation screen to document that you submitted it on time in case there are any technical issues. Late assignments will be penalized per the syllabus.
- Grading: Assignments will be graded according to the rubric provided at the end of this document. Assignments will either be weighted as 25% or 35% of your final grade, whichever you selected in your grade contract.
- Formatting: Formatting on this assignment is flexible. Assignments should be written in complete sentences that are grammatically correct and free from spelling errors. Formatting suggestions for each assignment option will be provided in more detail on the next page. Assignments should be in 12-point font, Times New Roman. Assignments should have 1-inch margins. Assignments can be single or double-spaced.
- Citations: While this is not a research assignment, you may find that doing a little additional research is helpful for your assignment. If you choose to use sources beyond lecture, you should cite them in the text of your assignment, either with parenthetical citations or footnotes. If you use course readings, you should cite them appropriately in the text of your assignment as well. You should include a works cited page at the end of your assignment, listing your citations. You may use MLA, APA, or Chicago style. Your works cited page does not count toward the 1,000-1,500 word count.

Option 1: Political Blog Post

Task: Write a political blog post explaining how political psychological concepts help us understand a particular political phenomenon of your choosing. For example, you could argue how a political psychological concept helps us understand the 2016 election, withdrawal from the Paris Accords, the AHCA, etc.

Examples: There are several political blogs out there. I recommend looking at *The Monkey Cage*, which generally includes posts written by political scientists explaining real world political events with their research. Not all of the posts are about political psychology, but they should give you a good model of how to structure and format your post.

Elements to include:
1. Attention-grabbing introduction. You need to grab the reader's attention! You might open with a puzzle, an interesting or unusual example, a jarring statistic, etc. (Recommended: ~100-200 words)
2. Clear thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph. You should include a clear thesis statement that articulates your argument and previews the supporting evidence that you will include in the rest of your post.
3. Explain the political phenomenon you are analyzing. You should spend about 100-300 words briefly explaining the political phenomenon you are analyzing. Give the reader enough background information the topic.
4. Describe non-psychological explanations for the phenomenon (Recommended: ~100-300 words). Explain how analysts currently understand and explain the topic without psychology.
5. Explain the psychological concepts that help us better understand the topic. You should spend about 250-400 words describing the psychological concepts that help us better understand the topic and directly analyzing and applying the concepts to the topic. You should make sure that you define and explain the concepts accurately. Make sure that you highlight how these concepts apply to the topic you are explaining.
6. Evaluate some of the limitations of the psychological approach to understanding this phenomenon. What does your psychological explanation leave out? (Recommended: ~100 words)
7. Conclusion. You should conclude your post by restating your thesis statement. You should emphasize the ways in which your psychological explanation is better than the alternatives that don't use psychology. (Recommended: ~100 words)

Optional things to include:
- Pictures, videos, charts, or graphics
- Links to other stories, research articles, etc.

Option 2: Campaign Strategy Memo

Task: Write a campaign strategy memo explaining how political psychological concepts will help your candidate win. For this option, you could either choose a candidate to run in 2018, or you could write a memo to the campaign staff of a candidate who lost in 2016, explaining how they could have strategized differently, using political psychology.

Examples: Campaigns typically operate with a thorough campaign plan that outlines many details of the campaign, including vote goals, field plans, fundraising goals, fundraising events, personnel, advertising plans, and more. An important feature of most campaign plans is the "Strategy Overview" or "Strategic Summary" that appears at the beginning of the campaign plan. This summarizes the goals and strategy involved in the overall campaign plan. Below are some examples of real world strategy memos. Yours will be a little bit different from this, focusing the strategy on justifying why and how you are going to use psychological concepts to win the election, but these examples should give you a sense for what professional strategy memos look like.

- Linda Maloney. This strategy section is a little shorter than what you'd be aiming for in your project, but you can get a sense for what these look like in the real world.
- Barack Obama—Shifting the Economic Narrative. The formatting in this example is not quite what you'd want to do. You could do something like the introduction section "Shifting the Economic Narrative" to justify why a campaign needs to focus on political psychological concepts. Then where this example continues to list examples, reasons why they need to shift the economic narrative, and suggestions for how to do that, you could do 1-3 shorter examples of this about the political psychological concepts you intend to work with.

Elements to Include:
1. Address your memo to the appropriate staffer and/or candidate. Use a header that includes TO, FROM, RE:, and the DATE
2. Formal, concise introduction. This should include your thesis statement that articulates which political psychological concepts you intend to use and how they are going to help your candidate win. (Recommended: ~100 words)
3. Provide a little background information introducing your candidate, the office s/he is pursuing, and the district (if applicable) s/he is intending to represent (Recommended: ~100-200 words)
4. Explain the psychological concepts that you intend to apply to the campaign. You should define them concisely and accurately. Your reader might not know very much about political psychology and might be skeptical, so you need to explain it in an approachable way that makes the case for why this is going to help you win more than current strategies. You might consider one short section on each concept. Or if you're going to use one concept applied to multiple campaign activities (ads, canvassing, fundraising, etc.), you could have one section introducing the psychological concept and then a section applying it to each campaign activity. (Recommended: 350-600 words)
5. Evaluate the limitations of your psychological approach to winning the campaign. What do your suggestions ignore? What might be difficult about integrating psychology into your campaign? (Recommended: ~100 words)
6. Conclusion. Restate your thesis statement. Summarize the main points of your memo. Emphasize why psychology helps your candidate win more than the current methods. (Recommended: ~100 words)

Option 3: Communication Strategy Memo

Task: Write a communications strategy memo for a current politician or elected official, such as President Trump, Senator Harris, Senator Feinstein, Congressman Scott Peters, Congressman Hunter, etc. Use concepts from this course to make recommendations to this politician's communications team.

Examples:
- Sustainable Systems for a Waste-Free Future. You would not need to include a schedule like this memo does. You would also focus more discussion on why you are proposing various communication activities, in contrast to this memo that focuses more on the action plan. The structure of this memo could be a good model, though: starting with an introduction/purpose, then a guiding strategy, where you could highlight which psychological principles you intend to use and why, and then the communication strategy and tactic overview could include 3 or so specific ideas for communication outreach, discussing why these will be useful.
- American Electrical, Inc. This memo is clearly far too short, but what is useful about it is the clear, direct purpose statement in the beginning and the summary. One approach to your memo could be to identify a specific problem (e.g. scandal, controversial vote the politician recently cast, etc.) and design a communications strategy to handle that problem. Much like this sample memo, you would summarize the problem and explain how you propose to tackle it, using psychological methods. In the proposed tasks section, you would need to provide a lot more detail justifying why these tasks would be effective.
- Michelle Nunn Campaign Memo (Section 5: Communications Plan). This is the communications section of a full campaign plan. This is a very 'bare bones' memo, but it might be useful for you to see what responsibilities communications departments have.

Elements to Include:
1. Address your memo to the appropriate staffer and/or candidate. Use a header that includes TO, FROM, RE:, and the DATE
2. Formal, concise introduction. It might be useful to identify a specific problem you are trying to help the politician address (e.g. a scandal, justifying a controversial vote, inability to reach voters of a certain demographic group, etc.) The introduction should end with your thesis statement that articulates which political psychological concepts you intend to use and how they are going to help your politician. (Recommended: ~100 words)
3. Provide a little background information introducing your candidate, how s/he is currently handling the problem (e.g. the current communications strategy), and why it is important to address that problem. (Recommended: ~100-200 words)
4. Explain the psychological concepts that you intend to apply to the communications strategy. You should define them concisely and accurately. Your reader might not know very much about political psychology and might be skeptical, so you need to explain it in an approachable way that makes the case for why this is going to help your politician more than current strategies. You might consider one short section on each concept. Or if you're going to use one concept applied to multiple communication outreach efforts (e.g. ads, social media, speeches, face to face interactions), you could have one section introducing the psychological concept and then a section applying it to each outreach effort. (Recommended: 350-600 words)
5. Evaluate the limitations of your psychological approach. What do your suggestions ignore? What might be difficult about implementing your proposal? (Recommended: ~100 words)
6. Conclusion. Restate your thesis statement. Summarize the main points of your memo. Emphasize why psychology helps your politician more than the current strategy. (Recommended: ~100 words)

Final Project Grading Rubric

	No Proficiency 0	Limited Proficiency 1	Some Proficiency 2	Proficiency 3	High Proficiency 4
Thesis (10%)	Thesis is missing	There is a statement that could be a thesis, but it is unclear and ambiguous. It does not give direction to the paper.	There is a thesis statement, but it is vague and only loosely related to the writing.	Thesis is fairly clear and matches the writing task. The thesis provides some direction and focus to the paper. The thesis is somewhat original.	The thesis statement develops fresh insight that challenges the reader's thinking. The thesis is clear, provides direction to the paper, and matches the rest of the writing.
Organization (15%)	Unclear organization. The reader has a difficult time following the paper. There are no transitions or subheadings.	There is an organizational plan for the paper, but it does not match the thesis statement or the structure of the assignment.	Some signs of logical organization. May have abrupt or illogical shifts at times. The flow of ideas might not be effective.	Organization supports the thesis. Transitions and subheadings are mostly appropriate. The sequence of ideas communicated could be improved.	The organization fully supports the thesis. The sequence of ideas is effective at communicating the argument. Transitions and subheadings are effective for guiding the reader through the paper.
Support (30%)	Offers simplistic, undeveloped, or ambiguous support for the thesis statement. Psychological concepts are not introduced or applied to the political context. There are inappropriate or off-topic generalizations or faulty assumptions. There are no examples.	Offers somewhat obvious support for the thesis that might be too broad (e.g. "Psychology is important in all human behavior"). Psychological concepts are introduced, but the application to the political context is unclear. The psychological concepts are irrelevant to the thesis. The supporting examples and/or evidence is repetitive.	Offers some support to the thesis using psychological concepts. The psychological concepts are applied to the political context, but the connection could be more clear. There is no effort to explain how the psychological concepts help us understand the political topic better than previous explanations.	Offers solid support for the thesis with original reasoning. The psychological concepts are creatively applied to the political context. Makes good use of examples and details. Some effort is made to explain why the psychological concepts help us understand the political topic better, but this is somewhat underdeveloped or unclear.	Offers substantial, logical, and concrete development of ideas that strongly support the thesis. Psychological concepts are creatively applied to the political context with a clearly articulated connection. There is a concrete explanation for why the psychological concepts help us understand the political context better than previous explanations. There are illustrative, appropriate examples in support of the thesis.
Accuracy (25%)	Psychological concepts are not accurately explained.	Psychological concepts are somewhat accurately explained, but there are some obvious errors. There are	Psychological concepts are explained mostly accurately. There are some errors, particularly in	Psychological concepts are explained accurately. There are no errors in explaining the	Psychological concepts are explained accurately without errors. The concepts are explained in an appropriate amount of detail with appropriate

		more inaccurate explanations than accurate explanations.	explaining how the concepts apply to politics. The errors do not undermine the overall argument.	concepts, but some could be explained in more detail and/or with examples. The concepts are explained clearly to an audience with limited psychological background.	examples. The concepts are explained clearly to an audience with limited psychological background.
Limitations (15%)	The paper does not acknowledge limitations of the psychological approach to understanding the political behavior.	The paper attempts to acknowledge limitations to using a psychological approach, but the limitations discussed are too broad (e.g."It's hard to know what goes on in people's brains", "It will be hard to convince people of this new approach") or unclear.	The paper acknowledges some limitations to using a psychological approach, but the limitations are not specific to the thesis statement or the topic of the paper.	The paper acknowledges limitations to using a psychological approach to understand the political phenomenon. The limitations are narrowly tailored to the thesis statement and topic of the paper. The limitations discussed are somewhat creative, but might be obvious.	The paper acknowledges limitations to using a psychological approach to understand the political phenomenon. The limitations are narrowly tailored to the thesis statement and topic of the paper. The limitations discussed are creative, demonstrating critical thinking about the psychological and political topics. The paper briefly evaluates whether (and why) the psychological approach is still valuable in light of these limitations.
Style (5%)	The paper does not match the style of the desired type of writing. It is unclear which of the three options was selected.	The paper somewhat matches the style of the desired type of writing, but it is ambiguous.	The paper mostly matches the style of the desired type of writing based on provided examples. It is mostly clear which option was selected, but this is not ready to be used as a writing sample for a job application.	The paper matches the style of the desired type of writing. It is clear which assignment option the student selected. The tone and style of the writing in addition to the formatting are professional and suited to the right audience.	The paper matches the style of the desired type of writing. It is clear which assignment option the student selected. The tone and style of the writing in addition to the formatting are professional and suited to the right audience. The style of the paper is appropriate to be used as a writing sample for a job application and/or published as a political blog post with little to no changes required.