

## **Syllabus: Contemporary Public Diplomacy: Changes and Challenges**

Course Number and Section: SIS 730-014

March 20, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. — SIS Founders Room

March 27, Online – Zoom link to be shared after March 20 class

Instructor: Lynne Weil, [lweil@american.edu](mailto:lweil@american.edu)

**Description:** Contemporary U.S. public diplomacy is done in an ever-increasing variety of ways, including interaction between students, entertainers, educators and activists. PD professionals today need to be digitally literate as well as sensitive to how social media are used differently from country to country. They must be prepared to stay on top of emerging trends and meet the shifting priorities of national security. This class will combine recent readings on PD topics, discussion of a variety of U.S. PD programs in the public and private sectors, and practical exercises to help students navigate the changing landscape of contemporary public diplomacy.

**Course objectives:** The course provides an overview of current and emerging challenges for public diplomacy professionals, offering a reality check on theoretical notions of how PD should work in an ideal world. The fact that the world is far from ideal is what makes PD so essential and, at times, so difficult. Students will learn about recent shifts in the focus of PD and how they affect the field, delve into the main challenges faced in carrying out effective programs and build a toolkit for managing today's PD environment.

**Learning outcomes:** Students will learn how U.S. public diplomacy is tied to shifting national security priorities and how top-level PD leadership sets the agenda in response. They will gain skills that are essential to working-level PD professionals, including choosing and using the right communications tools for different situations, setting goals that are consistent with policy, and developing strategic outreach plans.

### **Topics, assignments, reading material**

**For March 20 class:** *Topics to include defining public diplomacy, surveying its current state, examining recent major shifts in emphasis and setting long- and short-term goals. A workshop and classroom simulations will help students become familiar with current PD tactics and tools.*

***Read the following items for this class:***

U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy: [2020 Comprehensive Annual Report](#) (published February 2021) – Executive Summary (pp. 2-13) and Recommendations (pp. 15-18).

Public Diplomacy Council: [Memorandum for President-Elect Biden](#) (published November 2020)

The Washington Post: [Biden tells the world “America is Back.” The world isn’t so sure.](#) – By Ann Gearan and Ashley Parker (published February 2021)

[USC Center for Public Diplomacy Blog](#) – Skim recent entries and be ready to discuss topics that you found especially interesting.

**For March 27 class:** During the week between classes, students will come up with a one-page outreach plan using a mix of traditional public diplomacy techniques and digital tools including social media. They'll either (1) take on the challenge of pushing back against propaganda from an adversary such as Russia, China or Iran that is being deliberately spread within a third country of their choice (outside the United States) or (2) propose various “smart power” approaches to countering violent extremist ideology in a country of their choice (outside the United States).

Topics for the March 27 class will include deeper dives into how PD resources and programs have shifted to respond to recent national security imperatives, pressures on high-level decision-making in PD policy, and the way in which digital diplomacy has affected the field. The second half of the class will include student discussions of their writing assignments.

*All students read the following items for this class:*

The White House: [Interim National Security Strategic Guidance](#), March 2021 – look especially for messaging points intended for domestic vs. overseas audiences.

[The Hill: How to Fix the U.S. Public Diplomacy Deficit: Restore USIA and Defense 360: Bad Idea: The Misguided Quest to Recreate USIA](#)

The Washington Post: [Restoring the Voice of America after Trump “wrecking ball” won’t be easy. But it’s worth saving.](#) – By Margaret Sullivan, December 13, 2020

[NPR: USAGM Chief Fires Trump Allies](#) – By David Folkenflik, January 22, 2021

Harvard Kennedy School of Government: [A U.S. Diplomatic Service for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#) – by Nicholas Burns, Marc Grossman and Marcie Ries, November 2020 – Executive Summary only.

*For those whose one-page proposals will focus on pushing back against propaganda by one of the United States’ adversaries, consider the ideas raised in these resources:*

State Department Global Engagement Center: [Special Report on Russia’s Pillars of Disinformation and Propaganda](#), August 2021

[Public Diplomacy and the New “Old” War: Countering State-Sponsored Disinformation](#) – U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, September 2020

*For those whose one-page proposals will focus on countering violent extremism, consider some of the ideas raised in these resources:*

[Lessons from Strengthening Capacity in Countering Violent Extremism](#) – U.S. Institute of Peace, May 22, 2018

[Netwar in Cyberia: Decoding the Media Mujahidin](#) – USC Center on Public Diplomacy, November 2018

**Grading policy:** Students enroll in this course on a Pass/Fail basis. Absence from either of the two classes due to circumstances within a student's control will result in a failing grade; students who miss the first class due to circumstances beyond their control – such as illness, accident, religious observance or representing the university at off-campus activities – will not be able to get credit for this course. Anyone who misses all or part of the second class must present reasonable documentation of their excuse for absence and will be required to submit assignments by a date agreed upon with me.

**Class participation:** Participation is an important element of this course. The more engaged you are, the more interesting the class will be. I define participation broadly because students have various levels of comfort when it comes to taking part in class.

You are expected to complete all assigned readings before coming to class and to participate in small group and whole class discussions. The purpose of the classroom discussions is to help us all develop meaningful interpretations of the ideas conveyed in the readings. Being a full participant means that you come to class having carefully read the assigned readings, and that you are prepared with questions, comments and criticisms based on them. Active participation in group activities as well as deep engagement in course discussions reflecting an understanding of the readings are required to receive a passing grade. Please see me either before or just after class on our first day if you have any concerns about taking part in such discussions.

**Academic Integrity:** All students are governed by American University's Academic Integrity Code. The Academic Integrity Code details specific violations of ethical conduct that relate to academic integrity. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the code. All of your work (whether oral or written) in this class is governed by the provisions of the Academic Integrity Code. Academic violations include but are not limited to: plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration, dishonesty in examinations whether in class or take-home, dishonesty in papers, work done for one course and submitted to another, deliberate falsification of data, interference with other students' work, and copyright violations. The adjudication process and possible penalties are listed in American University's Academic Integrity Code booklet, which is also available on the American University website. Being a member of this academic community entitles each of us to a wide degree of freedom and the pursuit of scholarly interests; with that freedom, however, comes a responsibility to uphold the high ethical standards of scholarly conduct. Details about the Code can be found on the AU website ([www.american.edu/academics/integrity](http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity)).

**Information for Students:** Click on the name of each support service for more information.

**[Academic Support and Access Center](#)** All students may take advantage of the Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC)(MGC 243) for individual academic skills counseling, workshops, Tutoring, peer tutor referrals, and Supplemental Instruction. Additional academic support resources available at AU include the Bender Library, the Department of Literature's Writing Center (located in the Library), the Math Lab in the Department of Mathematics &

Statistics, and the Center for Language Exploration, Acquisition, & Research (CLEAR) in Asbury Hall. A more complete list of campus-wide resources is available in the ASAC.

If you wish to receive accommodations for a disability, please notify me with a letter from the Academic Support and Access Center. As accommodations are not retroactive, timely notification at the beginning of the semester, if possible, is strongly recommended. To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the Academic Support and Access Center at 202-885-3360 or [asac@american.edu](mailto:asac@american.edu), or drop by the ASAC in MGC 243.

**Counseling Center** The Counseling Center (x3500, MGC 214) offers intake and urgent care services, counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

**Writing Center** The Writing Center (x2291, Bender Library, 1st floor) provides writing consultants to assist students with writing projects. Students must call to set up a free appointment. See [www.american.edu/cas/writing/index.cfm](http://www.american.edu/cas/writing/index.cfm).

**Center for Diversity & Inclusion** The Center for Diversity and Inclusion (x3651, MGC 201) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, Multicultural, First Generation, and Women's experiences on campus and to “advance AU's commitment to respecting & valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy.” See [www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/index.cfm](http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/index.cfm).

**Emergency Preparedness:** In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies.

In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the AU Web site ([www.prepared.american.edu](http://www.prepared.american.edu)) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college-specific information.