

Generative AI in Persuasive Communication: MMC 6936 - 25968

Spring 2025

(Syllabus subject to change based on the best interests of students' learning in the course)

Basic Information

Instructor: Haoran “Chris” Chu

Email: chu.h@ufl.edu (Preferred method of communication. Please include MMC6936 in the subject line.)

Office Phone Number: 352-294-9115

Class Periods: 1094 Weimer, Monday, Period 7-9, 1:55 PM – 4:55 PM

Office Hours: Monday 12:55 PM – 1:55 PM, 4:55 PM – 5:55 PM or by appointment, 2066A Weimer

Course Descriptions

This course is an intensive exploration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and its transformative role in persuasive communication. Designed to foster a deep and holistic understanding of GenAI and its applications, the course equips students with the theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and critical perspectives needed to navigate the evolving landscape of strategic communication in the age of AI.

Students will engage with three central components. First, the course offers foundational insights into the mechanisms of GenAI, including machine learning, natural language processing, and content generation. Second, students will explore and gain hands-on experience with the application of GenAI in crafting persuasive messages, tailoring strategic campaigns, and enhancing narrative engagement across contexts like health, public relations, and political communication. Third, the course critically examines the intersection of persuasion theories with GenAI, exploring how these frameworks inform AI-driven strategies and how AI innovations reshape theoretical paradigms.

Lectures and readings will provide both theoretical and applied perspectives, but the heart of the course lies in active participation. Through discussions, case studies, and critiques of real-world GenAI communication strategies, students will exercise critical thinking, debate, and collaborative problem-solving. By the end of the course, participants will not only understand the principles of GenAI and persuasion but also gain practical skills to integrate AI effectively and ethically in professional communication practices.

This course is useful and important for those aspiring to careers in strategic communication, public relations, health communication, advocacy, or any role involving innovative messaging in the age of AI. Active participation and engagement are key, as students will collaboratively shape an environment of shared learning and intellectual growth.

Note: Students' active participation and contribution to class discussions are critical to the success of this course, fostering an environment of shared learning and intellectual growth. As such, students are expected to come prepared to each class, having thoroughly engaged with the reading materials.

LEARNING MATERIALS

- No text is required. However, you expected to read all assigned readings, including any that are added later in the semester and those suggested by your fellow students.
- Readings for each week will be made available on Canvas or emailed to you, on occasion.
- For your own research and interest, check out academic journals such as *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, *AI & Society*, and proceedings such as the *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*.

Please Note:

- This syllabus and other course content are subject to change based the best interest of student learning. Changes will be announced on Canvas and via email. It is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to check your UF email regularly.**

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- **Conceptualize and Interpret:** Understand, interpret, and critically evaluate the foundational mechanisms, theories, and models of generative AI and their relevance to persuasive communication.
- **Analyze and Critique:** Engage in critical analysis of GenAI-driven communication strategies, evaluating their construction, distribution, and reception in various persuasive and strategic contexts.
- **Contextual Understanding:** Develop a nuanced understanding of the ethical, cultural, societal, and psychological factors that influence and are influenced by the integration of GenAI in communication.
- **Effective Communication:** Design, implement, and assess persuasive communication strategies that leverage GenAI effectively while ensuring alignment with audience needs, ethical considerations, and contextual appropriateness.
- **Practical Application:** Translate theoretical understanding into practical skills by applying GenAI tools to craft tailored messages, develop innovative campaigns, and address contemporary challenges in persuasive communication.
- **Theory Integration:** Explore and synthesize persuasion theories with GenAI applications, fostering a reciprocal understanding of how theory informs AI strategies and how AI innovations reshape theoretical paradigms.
- **Collaborative Problem-Solving:** Engage in discussions, case studies, and critiques to collaboratively address challenges and opportunities in the use of GenAI for communication, fostering intellectual growth and professional readiness.

GRADING CRITERIA

NOTE: Please understand that **points and percentages are different units**. The total point of this course is 1,000 and the total percentage is 100%. Therefore, 10 points are equal to 1 percent. All the following grading criteria (including extra credit) are based on the point system (1,000 points). All assignment due dates can be found in the course schedule attached to this syllabus.

- **Class Participation/Attendance** (100 points/10 percent)
 - Students are expected to actively engage in class discussions by coming prepared to discuss the assigned readings and materials. You are encouraged to respond to questions posed by the instructor and peers, contribute insights related to the week's topics, and critically analyze the intersections between generative AI and persuasive communication.
 - Participation includes sharing your thoughts on the application of generative AI tools, theories of persuasion, and real-world case studies presented in class. Active involvement is especially critical during discussions of your selected papers and weeks when your response papers are due. Contributions should demonstrate a thoughtful engagement with the readings and a willingness to connect theoretical concepts with practical applications.
 - Additionally, students are expected to engage respectfully and constructively with diverse viewpoints, fostering a collaborative and intellectually stimulating environment..

- **Discussion Leader** (200 points/20 percent)
 - Each week, you will take on the role of discussion leader for one of the assigned readings, focusing on the intersection of generative AI and persuasive communication. Your responsibility is to facilitate a rich, engaging conversation that highlights the key issues, arguments, and findings from the paper while connecting them to broader themes such as GenAI mechanisms, strategic applications, and persuasion theories.
 - When leading the discussion, assume your classmates have completed the readings. Rather than summarizing the paper extensively, focus on sparking critical dialogue by exploring its implications, critiques, and connections to real-world applications. Encourage your peers to reflect on how the paper's findings inform or challenge existing theories and practices within the context of GenAI.
 - Expectations:
 - **Preparation:** Read all assigned materials for the week. Your presentation should emphasize the core arguments of your selected paper and solicit critical comments and questions from the class.
 - **Outline Submission:** Submit a discussion outline to me by **8 PM on the Sunday** before your scheduled discussion. The outline should include the key points you plan to address and any questions you intend to pose to the class.
 - **Engagement:** Guide the discussion by fostering participation from all students. Aim to integrate diverse perspectives and draw connections to course concepts, practical applications, and ethical considerations.
 - **Optional Consultation:** You are encouraged to meet with me in advance to discuss your approach or seek clarification. If you wish to suggest an alternative article or propose a substitution, please notify me at least one week prior to your discussion.
 - **Flexibilities:** Depending on the class size, you will have two free passes to opt out of leading the discussion on specific weeks if needed. Please notify me during the prior week's class if you plan to use one of your free passes.

- **Discussion Questions** (150 points/15 percent)
 - From week 2 to week 13, for each paper you are not leading, you should post three (or more) discussion questions to the corresponding discussion boards on Canvas **by 8 pm on the Saturday** before class. These questions should stimulate thoughtful discussion and help us explore the key issues in the readings.
 - **Guidelines for Effective Questions:**
 - Address common themes across the readings, such as how GenAI mechanisms influence persuasive communication strategies or challenge traditional persuasion theories.
 - Explore differences in methodologies, theoretical approaches, or practical applications.
 - Critique the paper's strengths and weaknesses, particularly regarding its relevance to real-world communication contexts involving GenAI.
 - Link the paper to previous topics, readings, or case studies discussed in class.
 - Clarification questions (e.g., definitions of terms or explanations of statistical methods) are valuable but should be reserved for in-class discussion rather than posted on the discussion board.

- Discussion questions will be graded weekly, with each set worth 20 points. You will receive a 10-point bonus if you complete at least 7 sets of discussion questions throughout the course.
- During weeks when you choose to write a response paper, you can summarize the questions proposed in your response paper and submit them as your discussion questions.
- **Response Paper** (200 points/20 percent)
 - In keeping with the seminar design, you will be asked to read a considerable amount of original or in-depth materials before each class. To facilitate this, you will write short response papers (2 double-spaced pages max.), raising questions or issues for discussion or responding to questions I may pose. There is no need to cite core readings, but external references should be properly cited. Response papers should NOT simply summarize the readings, but reflect your own thinking based on the readings.
 - Please note that you need to read the readings even if you are not submitting a response paper.
 - Starting week 2, these short papers are due by **8 pm on Canvas the Sunday** before the relevant class. You may choose any week during week 3-14 to submit **FOUR response papers** in total.
 - Each response paper is worth 50 points and will be graded based on merit.
- **Research Project** (350 points/35 percent)
 - At the start of the semester, we will discuss and decide as a class whether to pursue a collaborative research project as a team or to proceed with individual research papers/proposals. This discussion will take place during the first week of class, and the decision will be made democratically, based on class consensus.
 - **Option 1: Collaborative Research Team Project**
 - If the class chooses the collaborative approach, we will work together as a research team to develop a project that has the potential to result in a publication or conference presentation. During the first three class weeks, we will brainstorm and select a research topic and specific research questions. We will then collaboratively design the study, develop stimuli and questionnaires, conduct a literature search, and write the paper.
 - **Phase 1: Literature Review (100 points/10 percent)** – The first product of our project will be a systematic literature review that lays the foundation for our research. Each team member will be responsible for researching and writing about specific aspects of the literature relevant to our research question. This product will result in a comprehensive review section that integrates all contributions.
 - **Phase 2: Stimuli & Questionnaire Design, Pre-registration & IRB** (100 points/10 percent) – The second product involves the design of research stimuli and questionnaires, as well as completing pre-registration (if applicable) and preparing the IRB submission. Each student will take on specific tasks within this phase, contributing to the creation of the study materials and ensuring all ethical requirements are met.
 - **Phase 3: Paper Writing or Extended Abstract** (100 points/10 percent) – The final product will be either a full research paper or an extended abstract suitable for submission to a conference or journal. Tasks will include writing, editing, and integrating all sections of the paper. Each team member will contribute to different

sections, and the final product should be a cohesive, well-argued piece of scholarly work.

- **Overall Contribution (50 points/5 percent)** – Throughout the semester, your overall contribution to the project will be evaluated. This includes your participation in team meetings, collaboration on tasks, responsiveness to feedback, and your role in ensuring the successful completion of each phase. Your contribution will be assessed through peer evaluations and my observations.
- **Option 2: Individual Research Paper/Proposal**
 - If the class opts for individual research papers/proposals, each student will develop a research paper or proposal on an aspect of generative AI and persuasive communication. The paper/proposal should include a compelling rationale for the study, a systematic literature review leading to research questions or hypotheses, and a proposed or applied research method section, along with references in APA style.
 - Depending on the feasibility of the research you are proposing, you may conduct the research during the semester or use the assignment as an opportunity to develop the foundation of a research that may serve as your next study or even your thesis. No need to worry if you are unsure about how “feasible” a study has to be – I will go over the processes involved in conducting a research study during the semester. The overall process of the research paper/proposal is broken into three phases.
 - **Phase 1: Literature Review (100 points/10 percent)** – The first product of your project will be a systematic literature review that lays the foundation for your research. You will craft a 5-8 page literature review that provides a thorough exploration of your topic, identifies gaps in the existing research, and suggests potential research questions or hypotheses.
 - **Phase 2: Research Design (100 points/10 percent)** – The second product involves developing a detailed methods section that outlines your research plan, including the design of any stimuli or questionnaires. Justify your methodological choices and describe how you would handle ethical considerations, including preparing for IRB approval if necessary.
 - **Phase 3: Paper Writing or Extended Abstract (100 points/10 percent)** – At this phase, you will expand what have drafted so far into a complete research paper or proposal, synthesizing your literature review, research questions or hypotheses, and methodology into a coherent document..
 - **Overall Performance (50 points/5 percent)** – Throughout the semester, your overall performance will be evaluated. This includes your responsiveness to feedback, and your role in ensuring the successful completion of each phase. Your contribution will be assessed through my observations.

COURSE GRADING SCALE AND PERCENTAGES

Grading Items	Points	Percentage Allocation
Class Participation/Attendance	100	10%
Discussion Leader	200	20%
Discussion Questions	150	15%

Response Papers	200	20%
Research Project	350	35%
Total point	1,000	100%

Letter Grades:

93.5-100%	A	83.5-87%	B	73.5-77%	C	63.5-67%	D
90-93.4%	A-	80-83.4%	B-	70-73.4%	C-	60-63.4%	D-
87.1-89.9%	B+	77.1-79.9%	C+	67.1-69.9%	D+	60-59.9%	E

LATE/MISSED SUBMISSION

Late submission in general will not be accepted. Discuss with me in advance if you are not able to submit an assignment on time due to exceptional reasons.

USE OF GENERATIVE AI

In this course, we will explore the transformative role of generative AI in persuasive communication, including its applications, limitations, and ethical implications. Students are permitted to use generative AI tools as part of their work, provided the use is transparent, appropriately disclosed, and critically evaluated.

If you choose to incorporate generative AI into your assignments, you must:

1. Clearly document where and how generative AI tools were used (e.g., for brainstorming, drafting, or providing examples).
2. Vet and revise any AI-generated content to ensure it aligns with academic standards and accurately reflects your own understanding and critical thinking.
3. Include a brief reflection on your process, detailing how you used the tool and the steps you took to verify its reliability and appropriateness.

All assignments must ultimately represent your original work, incorporating your critical analysis and personal insights. Failure to disclose the use of generative AI tools or submitting unvetted AI-generated content as your own work will be treated as a breach of academic integrity and may result in penalties.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR GRADES

I am more than happy to talk with you about your grade and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your graded work. That said, I require a 24-hour “cool off” period. We will not discuss your grade until we both have time gather our thoughts and have a productive conversation. After the initial 24 hours, students have one week to meet with the instructor to discuss the grade. If the student does not meet with the instructor **within a week**, then the instructor considers the matter closed. All discussions regarding grades are conducted in person, in my office.

EFFORT VS. EXCELLENCE

You do not receive a grade for how hard you worked, only on the final product. Instructor grades your work on the degree of excellence it demonstrates. Make no mistake about the relationship between the two, as hard work often results in solid evaluations. That said, just because you spent “10 hours in the library” before a test or a group project doesn’t guarantee you a good grade. You have to study properly, address assignment requirements, and the like in order to assure a solid grade. I will help out in every way I can along the way and ALWAYS want you to do well. Don’t hesitate for a second to reach out to me (just don’t do it at the last second!).

UNIVERSITY HONESTY POLICY

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conducthonor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

COURSE EVALUATION

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

Materials in this course—unless otherwise indicated—are protected by United States copyright law [Title 17, U.S. Code]. Materials are presented in an educational context for personal use and study and should not be shared, distributed, or sold in print—or digitally—outside the course without permission. Students may not record, reproduce, screenshot, photograph, or distribute any video, audio, or visual content from this course. This restriction includes but is not limited to live discussions, discussion boards, posted course materials, course evaluation form, visual materials that accompany lectures/discussions, such as slides and whiteboard notes, etc.

VIDEO RECORDING

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

MISCELLANEOUS

- The instructor reserves the right to make any changes to the syllabus, schedule, assignments, readings, forms, lecture topics, assessments, and any other course content if deemed necessary to facilitate classroom management and to achieve the learning objectives for the course. Students are responsible to stay aware of these changes.
- Only students enrolled in this course may attend (and receive credit for) this class.
- I take plagiarism very seriously. Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an “E” for the course and disciplinary action. Do not submit the same work to more than one class. Do not adapt work from another class for this class. Do not adapt someone else’s work and submit it as your own. This course requires original work, created at this time, for this purpose.