

# PPOL 6100Y: Communicating Public Policy

<b>Semester:</b>	Summer 2025-26
<b>Credits:</b>	3 credits
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	None
<b>Class time:</b>	Tuesdays/Wednesdays/Thursdays 2:30 – 5:20 PM
<b>Class venue:</b>	Room 6580 (near lifts 27/28)
<b>Instructor:</b>	<b>Dr Alvin Li</b> Division of Public Policy, HKUST Email: <a href="mailto:lia@ust.hk">lia@ust.hk</a>
<b>Office hours:</b>	By email appointment
<b>Teaching assistant:</b>	Xihan DONG ( <a href="mailto:xdong723@connect.ust.hk">xdong723@connect.ust.hk</a> )

## Course description

This intensive course equips Masters students with practical skills and critical insights needed to communicate complex policy issues effectively across multiple formats and platforms. Communicating Public Policy is a hands-on workshop-based course that explores the entire spectrum of policy communication — from formal written documents to digital media strategies, public awareness campaigns, and oral presentations.

Through rigorous analysis of global case studies and the creation of practical communication products, students will develop the technical skills, strategic thinking, and ethical understanding needed to engage diverse audiences in policy discourse. The course is structured around four key areas: the power and foundations of policy communications; written communications for various audiences; multimedia and digital communication strategies; and strategic approaches to policy communication including crisis response. This practice-oriented approach prepares students to become effective policy communicators capable of influencing public understanding and decision-making in increasingly complex information environments.

This course employs a workshop-based instructional approach that balances theoretical frameworks with extensive hands-on practice, creating an active learning environment where students develop practical communication skills through experiential methods. Each three-hour session combines analytical components — where students critically examine exemplary policy communications from around the world — with practical components where they apply these insights through guided group activities, interactive sessions, and the incremental development of communication products. Collaborative learning

will be facilitated through small group projects that simulate real-world perspectives and contemporary case studies and real policy communication challenges. This approach creates multiple opportunities for students to practice, refine, and demonstrate their developing competencies in policy communication across the spectrum of formats and contexts they will encounter in their professional careers.

## Course learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- **Design and implement comprehensive policy communication strategies** across multiple platforms and formats with a sophisticated understanding of audience needs and communication contexts.
- Build strategic competencies in **message framing, crisis communication, and digital engagement** that enhance your capacity to advance policy objectives.
- Demonstrate proficiency in **crafting clear, compelling, and evidence-based policy messages** tailored to specific stakeholders, from decision-makers to the general public.
- Acquire **practical experience in creating various communication products**, including policy briefs, multimedia presentations, public awareness campaigns, and oral presentations.
- Develop **critical analytical skills to evaluate the effectiveness, ethical implications, and potential impacts** of policy communications through examination of real-world examples and case studies.

## Course expectations

This course won't work unless you offer your active participation and engagement! You are expected to actively contribute to class discussions and group activities. The classroom serves as a collaborative forum for sharing our diverse perspectives and experiences, where we engage respectfully with our peers' viewpoints and contribute meaningfully to collective learning.

This course emphasises a collaborative and interactive learning environment with minimal technological distractions. Laptops, tablets, and smartphones are generally discouraged and not allowed during class time – trust me, you'll learn much more and have a lot more fun without them! Mobile phones should remain silenced and stored away during class sessions to maintain attention and foster meaningful discussions.

## Foundational readings, practical guides, samples

As this course adopts a practical, workshop-based approach that prioritises competency development alongside conceptual understanding, our reading materials reflect this dual focus. You will engage with three complementary types of resources:

- **Foundational scholarly articles** from communication science, policy communication, and digital media studies that provide the conceptual frameworks underpinning effective practice;
- **Professional practice guides** developed by effective NGOs, international organisations, universities, and private sector companies that distil real-world expertise into actionable frameworks;
- **Best practice samples** showcasing both highly effective policy communications from around the globe.

## Assessments

The assessment structure for this course is designed to evaluate your practical communication skills, strategic thinking, and critical analysis abilities through a combination of individual and group-based assignments that mirror real-world policy communication tasks:

Critical policy communication analysis:	15%
Individual policy communication portfolio:	30% (10% x 3)
Group project: Creating an IG account/ Recording a podcast:	25%
Online discussions:	10%
Active participation:	15%
Attendance:	5%

Specifically, for the individual portfolio, students can choose three out of 5 policy communication product outputs, including a policy memo, an op-ed, a public awareness campaign, an Instagram carousel post, or a policy explainer video.

## Academic integrity and AI policy

Academic integrity is fundamental to the learning process and professional development in this course. While AI tools are increasingly prevalent in academic and professional settings, their use in this course must be thoughtful and limited. Students may, under special circumstances, utilise AI tools for general search purposes, fact-checking, writing enhancement, and reference verification, but these tools must not generate the substantial portion of any assignment. When AI assistance is used, students must explicitly acknowledge its use and demonstrate critical evaluation of AI-generated information, including providing your prompt history and conducting self-fact-checking to verify its truthfulness. The focus

remains on developing original thinking, analytical capabilities, and independent judgment. Students must verify all AI-generated information against reliable academic sources and scientific journal evidence. Personal reflection and original analysis should form the core of all submitted work. This policy aims to foster responsible AI use while maintaining the course's educational objectives and academic standards. All work submitted must adhere to university guidelines regarding plagiarism, proper citation, and academic honesty. ***All submitted works will undergo a AI-checking process, including checking the authenticity of each source reference.***

## **Active participation policy**

The classroom environment in this course is designed as a collaborative learning space where knowledge and insights emerge through dynamic interaction. Our sessions will follow a flipped classroom approach, emphasising mutual knowledge generation and collective wisdom-building. My teaching philosophy emphasises inquiry-based learning through open-ended questions that explore your unique insights, perspectives, and critical thinking rather than seeking predetermined answers. Our classroom serves as a safe space for constructive dialogue, where students are encouraged to build upon each other's contributions, whether in agreement or respectful disagreement.

I completely welcome spontaneous questions during our classes to ensure clarity and deeper understanding. Active participation extends beyond mere attendance - it involves engaging with case materials, contributing to discussions, and sharing your unique perspectives drawn from your diverse backgrounds and experiences. This approach is particularly vital in policy communications, where cultural differences may affect the effectiveness of various communication messages, styles, and preferences.

## **Assignment policy**

Regarding assignments, the assessment structure is carefully crafted to develop crucial knowledge and practical skills relevant to policy communication. While high standards and full effort are expected, I acknowledge the demands of your studies and other commitments. If you experience any genuine difficulties meeting deadlines, email me *and* the TA to arrange reasonable extensions. My goal is to create a supportive learning environment that prioritises meaningful learning and skill development over rigid deadlines. This flexible approach is for you to produce your absolute best work while maintaining a healthy balance with other academic and personal commitments during your postgraduate learning journey.

Under **exceptional circumstances**, students are welcome to email me and teaching assistant to request reconsideration of assignment grades if you genuinely believe your work merits a higher mark. However, please understand that we utilise our extensive experience in assessment and our grading schemes are deliberately designed to accurately reflect whether student work achieves specific competency levels expected at Masters level. While we might occasionally overlook nuanced points or encounter borderline cases requiring further consideration, our assessment practices follow established academic standards and criteria.

Should you wish to request a re-grade, you must **email us within two working days** of receiving your score, accompanied by a **written justification** clearly articulating why you believe your grade should be reconsidered. Your justification should reference specific assessment criteria, provide evidence from your work, and demonstrate substantive academic reasoning rather than mere disagreement with the grade awarded.

Important note: Please be aware that while grade reconsideration might result in no change or a slight increase in your mark, **it may equally result in a decrease** should our re-evaluation reveal aspects we initially assessed too generously. By submitting a reconsideration request, you accept this possibility and acknowledge that the revised grade will be final.

## **Course outline by classes**

This course is strategically structured around four interconnected modules to build comprehensive understanding of effective policy communication in contemporary governance contexts. **Module 1 (classes 1-3)** establishes the fundamental power and theoretical foundations of policy communications, examining how effective messaging shapes public understanding and policy acceptance while exploring the ethical dimensions that distinguish legitimate persuasion from propaganda and misinformation. **Module 2 (classes 4-6)** focuses on developing your ability to craft tailored written communications for decision-makers, specialists, and public stakeholders through policy briefs, reports, white papers, and position/persuasion pieces that demonstrate mastery of audience analysis and evidence-based argumentation. **Module 3 (classes 7-11)** explores multimedia and digital communication strategies while simultaneously experimenting with new mediums including podcasts and digital platforms. **Module 4 (classes 12-13)** addresses specialised and strategic approaches to policy communication including crisis response, culminating in student presentations that synthesise course concepts through real-world applications while demonstrating integrated understanding of rapid response strategies and portfolio-based communication approaches.

## **Module 1: The Power of Policy Communications**

### **Class 1 (16 June) - Foundations of public policy communications**

- Key concepts: Policy communication vs traditional PR/media; psychological biases and cognitive limitations; trust and misinformation; public participation
- Activity: Comparative analysis of the effectiveness of different global and thematic campaigns and identifying underlying assumptions, target audiences, messaging strategies, and effectiveness indicators.

### **Class 2 (17 June) - Audience analysis and message framing**

- Key concepts: Stakeholder mapping; audience psychographic segmentation; prospect theory; cognitive heuristics; data visualisation
- Activity: Policy stakeholder/audience mapping with tailored messaging strategies

### **Class 3 (18 June) - Ethical and unethical policy communications**

- Key concepts: Consequentialist vs deontological approaches; cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, truth; manipulation vs persuasion; propaganda and disinformation.
- Activity: Creating unethical vs ethical versions of the same policy communication

## **Module 2: Mastering Written Formats for Diverse Policy Audiences**

### **Class 4 (23 June) - Policy memos and briefs for decision-makers**

- Key concepts: Executive summary techniques; evidence hierarchy and source credibility; visual design for policy documents; writing for busy policymakers; international best practices.
- Activity: Analysis of effective vs ineffective policy documents

### **Class 5 (24 June) – White papers and public consultations**

- Key concepts: Long-form document structure, purpose, and style; comprehensive policy analysis and communicating risk; case study document analysis
- Activity: Collaborative white paper outlining

### **Class 6 (25 June) – Opinion pieces and op-eds**

- Key concepts: Persuasive writing and argument structuring; op-eds; publication strategy and media impact; contemporary examples.
- Activity: Op-ed pitch competition

## **Module 3: Exploring Digital and Multimedia Communications**

### **Class 7 (30 June) - Public awareness and education campaigns**

- Key concepts: Behaviour change theory; mass media effectiveness; multimedia integration
- Activity: Campaign concept development studio with client pitches

### **Class 8 (2 July) - Digital and social media strategy**

- Key concepts: Platform-specific strategies; engagement metrics
- Activity: Social media crisis war room simulation with real-time response coordination

### **Class 9 (7 July) – Video communications**

- Key concepts: Visual storytelling; narrative arc development; accessibility requirements
- Activity: Storyboard competition and rapid PSA production using smartphones

### **Class 10 (8 July) - Audio storytelling with podcasts**

- Key concepts: Audio-specific techniques; interview skills; format selection strategies
- Activity: Policy podcast production lab with expert interviews and editing

### **Class 11 (9 July) - Public speeches and oral presentations**

- Key concepts: Classical rhetoric (ethos, pathos, logos); data visualisation; cultural adaptation
- Activity: Policy pitch "Shark Tank" with peer investor panels

## **Module 4: Specialised (Crisis) and Strategic Communications**

### **Class 12 (14 July) - Crisis communication**

- Key concepts: Situational Crisis Communication Theory; real-time response protocols; reputation
- Activity: Public sector crisis simulation and response strategy development

### **Class 13 (15 July) - Student presentations and course synthesis**

- Integration: Student portfolio presentations demonstrating mastery across all communication formats
- Activity: Peer evaluation and reflections in communication evolution

*\*Weekly activities are subject to change\**

## **Final word**

In our rapidly evolving digital age, the ability to communicate complex policy ideas clearly and persuasively isn't just an academic skill - it's a fundamental tool for creating meaningful change in our communities and beyond. I'm super excited about the transformative journey we're about to embark on together! Through our intensive Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday workshop sessions, we'll dissect compelling global case studies, engage in hands-on communication challenges, and learn from each other's diverse cultural perspectives and personal experiences.

Whether you're passionate about climate change, social justice, mental health, or LGBT+ rights, the strategic communication skills you'll master here will amplify your voice and enhance your impact throughout your entire career. From crafting compelling policy briefs that influence decision-makers to designing digital campaigns that educate the public, you'll develop a comprehensive toolkit that bridges the gap between brilliant ideas and real-world implementation.

Let's make this intensive summer semester a meaningful experience where we not only master the art and science of policy communication but also discover how we can contribute to more informed, engaged, and participatory communities. See you over the coming weeks!