

POLS 238 – Grassroots Engagement

Fall 2025

Instructor	Professor Amy Meli
Meeting Time	Monday 6:00 – 9:00 pm
Location	102 Dana Science Building
Email	meliad@hollins.edu
Office Location	104 Pleasants Hall
Office Hours	Tuesday and Thursday 10 a.m. – noon and by appointment

Course Overview

In this course, students will learn how grassroots movements impact political outcomes and how to engage the public in order to make political change.

Grassroots movements are often the driving force behind change in public opinion on key issues, the success or failure of landmark legislation, and the election or defeat of public officials. Through the course of the semester, we will learn how the human brain drives how people think about issues, how cultural movements often manifest themselves through art or culture before they appear in politics, and how to leverage new technology and data to support grassroots work. But most importantly, we will examine how the most effective way to change minds is through human relationships, which is why building relationships through trust is the ultimate work of a grassroots organizer.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand and execute a grassroots stakeholder analysis that identifies family, friends, foes, and strangers in an advocacy campaign.
2. Understand the three different types of grassroots advocacy (community advocacy, legislative advocacy, and campaign advocacy) and how the strategies employed by each type of campaign is driven by the issue's location within the life cycle.
3. Understand how the use of data, technology, and messaging can all have an impact on the outcome of a campaign.
4. Demonstrate mastery of the above learning objectives by completing an original grassroots engagement plan.

Required Readings and Other Course Materials

All course materials will be available via the course's Moodle page.

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the readings or other course materials that are assigned for that day. Each day in class, we will spend time discussing the assigned readings. Your responsibility is to (1) come to class having completed the reading (2) bring with you one reaction to the day's assigned reading. Your reaction could be a concept you found especially interesting, a topic for class discussion related to the reading, or a clarifying question. Be ready to discuss your reaction in class.

Course Assignments

Participation (15 points): I expect you to come to class prepared and participate in class in a way that demonstrates comprehension of the assigned reading.

Social Trends (10 points): Throughout the semester, you will identify a social trend, which you will present in class. The goal of this assignment is to learn how grassroots movements work alongside social trends that happen outside of politics.

Assignments (40 points): You will complete five assignments over the course of the class. Each assignment will be worth 10 points (the lowest assignment grade will be dropped). The assignments will ask you to apply material learned in class and through the assigned readings. The goal of the assignments is to apply what you have learned in class to the outside world of politics.

Final Project (35 points): During the last four weeks of the semester, you will complete an original grassroots plan on a current legislative issue that you choose. The purpose of this assignment is to apply the concepts you learn in class to a real-world context. Details about this project will be provided later in the semester.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week/Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments Due/Guest Lecturers
1 - Sept. 8	Foundations, Social Trends	None	
2 - Sept. 15	Mission, Vision, and Strategy Social Trends Continued	All will watch <i>Invictus</i> movie Students will read one of the following and share what they learned with their classmates: Group 1: <i>Polarized by Degrees</i> (Introduction) and <i>The Big Sort</i> (Intro & Chapter 1) Group 2: Putnam, <i>Bowling Alone</i> (Chapters 1-3)	
3 - Sept. 22	Audience Analysis, Influentials	<i>The New Corporate Activism</i> (Smuggler Mountain case) Big Food Strikes Back First Follower video	Assignment 1: Vision Statement
4 - Sept. 29	Power mapping	“How a Lobbying Blitz Made Sports Betting Ubiquitous”	Assignment 2: Audience Analysis
5 - Oct. 6	Sponsoring organizations Personal story	Being Heumann, page 1-44 <i>Milk</i> movie	
6 - Oct 13	Message and story, Political psychology	<i>Don't Think of an Elephant</i> (Chapter 1)	Assignment 3: Power Mapping

		Podcast: The Gray Area: The Age of Mega-Identity Politics	
7 - Oct. 20	Listening, Community Organizing	<i>Being Heumann</i> page 44 - 81 This Daily podcast “Is There Any Point to Protesting?”	
8 - Oct. 27	Legislative Campaigns Part 1	<i>Being Heumann</i> (updated pages here)	Assignment 4: Process Recording
9 - Nov. 3	Legislative Campaigns Part 2	CMF Reports <i>Astroturf</i> video	Guest lecturer - Melissa Horn
10 - Nov. 10	Grassroots in Elections	Green and Gerber <i>Get Out the Vote</i> (Chapter 1) “A Kamala Harris Canvasser’s Education”	Assignment 5: Action Alert
11 - Nov. 17	Bringing it all together	<i>Pride</i> movie	
12 - Dec. 1	Work session	None	
13 - Dec. 8	Final presentations	None	

Accessing Required Course Texts

If you are unable to obtain the required texts for this course, please review the course texts checklist for alternative options.

Academic Support and Tutoring

Hollins faculty and staff are committed to providing all students with the academic support they need. Many types of learning support are available inside and outside of class. You are always welcome to talk with me or with your academic advisor if you are comfortable doing so. Other options include success coaches and peer tutors, both available in the library on the first floor. Success Coaches provide guidance on both academic and non-academic matters, helping you develop strategies to achieve your goals. You can schedule an appointment using this link or drop in during business hours. Working with a peer tutor is a great way to maximize your learning and your success in writing, math, and assignments for other subjects. You can easily schedule an appointment at Hollins University Tutoring or drop in during open hours.

The Green | An Integrative Learning Commons, located on the first floor of the library, is where you'll find success coaches, peer tutors, and additional resources: Career and Life Design; the Global Learning Hub; Student Support Offices for HU Connect, HOPE Scholars, and International Student Engagement (ISE) Programs. The Green includes the Center for Learning Excellence (CLE), which houses the peer tutors and other learning supports. Other offices for Student Success, Well-being, and Belonging are located on the second and third floors of the library. These include Student Accessibility Services, the Student Success Coordinator, and the Chief Title IX Officer.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Hollins affirms that students are entitled to an equitable learning environment that fosters their agency, develops their capacity for self-advocacy, and is free of unfair and exclusionary practices.

For accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Services at sas@hollins.edu, or find more information and submit an online inquiry on the Learning Accommodations page. Student Accessibility Services works with students to develop individualized support services, including reasonable accommodations that facilitate access to learning, living, and other experiences at Hollins.

Mental Health and Wellness

Emotional and mental well-being is essential for academic success. I recognize that college students can experience mental health challenges that make learning difficult. You may be experiencing life stressors, such as increased anxiety, feeling down or overwhelmed, strained relationships, suffering a loss, or dealing with a personal struggle. If you have or a friend has difficulties that are interfering with your academic or personal success, please know that helpful, effective, and confidential resources are available at Hollins.

Available Resources Hollins University Health & Counseling Services at 540-362-6444 or hcs@hollins.edu. Appointments for face-to-face and video counseling are available. Health & Counseling Services will assess and may refer students to other, off-campus providers based on your individual mental health needs.

University Chaplain: The Chaplain provides confidential spiritual care, pastoral counseling, and emotional support to students of all faith backgrounds and beliefs. The Chaplain can also assist you in connecting with on- and off-campus resources to help you navigate personal challenges.

Fall 2025 Counseling Hours

Note that Health and Counseling will be closed from 12:15-12:45 every Monday through Thursday to allow employees to have a break for lunch. If there is an emergency, students may call 540-362-6444 (Office) for assistance.

Title IX

Hollins University's Sexual Harassment Under Title IX Policy designates specific employees of the institution as "individuals with authority." These employees include the President; vice presidents; Housing and Residence Life staff (including Community Assistants); Campus Security staff; all employees within Student Success, Well-being, and Belonging (except for Health and Counseling staff and the University Chaplain); and Human Resources staff. In accordance with federal law, these employees are required to report information they receive regarding students who may have experienced sexual harassment, harassment, bullying, sex-and-gender-based harassment, sexual violence, dating/intimate partner violence, and stalking covered under Title IX to the university's Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Tiffany Hinton, at titleix@hollins.edu. This includes information shared with individuals with authority in any manner, including, but not limited to, in-person communications, electronic communications, and class assignments.

Sexual harassment under Title IX means conduct on the basis of sex (including gender identity and sexual misconduct) and sexual orientation that satisfies one or more of the following:

1. An employee of the university conditioning the provision of an aid, benefit, or service of the university on an individual's participation in unwelcome sexual conduct ("quid pro quo" or "this for that");

2. Unwelcome conduct determined by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to the recipient's education program or activity; or

3. Sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking as defined by federal law.

Once an individual with authority reports a Title IX sexual harassment situation to the Title IX Coordinator, the Title IX Coordinator is then legally required to contact students with resources and options and determine next steps.

Information regarding sexual harassment, bullying, gender-based harassment, sexual violence, dating/intimate partner violence, and stalking is confidential to the fullest extent possible.

Additional information regarding Hollins University's Title IX policy, including resources, can be found at <https://www.hollins.edu/about-hollins/commitment-to-dei/harassment-grievance-processes-including-title-ix/>.

Hollins Honor Code

The basis of life at Hollins is honor and trust. The Honor Code, which embodies these ideals, applies to and must be upheld by all members of the Hollins community. Students, in a symbolic commitment to live by the Code, sign an Honor Pledge during their first six weeks at Hollins.

Honor Code Pledge

I pledge to conduct myself in an honorable and trustworthy manner at Hollins University by not lying, stealing, or cheating. I understand that my responsibilities to the Honor System are as follows when an honor offense occurs. I will:

a. report myself to the Honor Court; and/or b. ask another to report herself or himself for an offense; and/or c. report the violation to the Honor Court if the student does not do so.

I, _____, place myself under the Honor System of Hollins University. I understand that a plea of ignorance will not excuse me in the matter. I also understand that I am subject to prosecution should I fail to report a violation.

Please remember that all work submitted for assignments must be your own and must include the appropriate citation of sources. Cheating and plagiarism are violations of the Hollins Honor Code (see the 2025-2026 Student Handbook). This includes submission of material from published work and material found on the internet without sufficient citation, submission of papers for purchase, and/or the use of ChatGPT and other AI-generated text without citation. Students who engage in cheating or plagiarism will be directed to the Honor Court. As your professor, I will strive to make clear my expectations for each assignment, including citations. If you are ever in doubt about appropriate citation for your sources, I am here to help you! Please make an appointment with me to discuss this further.

Sample Citation (adapted for MLA citation style with Rebecca Seipp) ChatGPT. "insert your prompt here." OpenAI, <https://openai.com>. Accessed on 3 February 2025.

