

MGMT-GB.3165 01

Power and Professional Influence with Professor Molly Kern

Fall 2025

Syllabus as of July 15, 2025 – any changes will be communicated via Brightspace

Instructor: Molly Kern (she/her, [hear my name](#))
Email: mkern@stern.nyu.edu

Classroom: KMC 2-65
Meeting time: Tuesdays: 1:40-4:20pm (9/2/2025 - 10/21/2025)

Teaching Fellow: Daisy Slawek
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Drop in hours: by appointment
Platform: [Brightspace](#) (includes class videos)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed for individuals interested in learning more about the art and science of influence in organizations. Many people are ambivalent, if not disdainful, of those who seek to wield power and influence at work, but power and influence are key mechanisms by which *things get done*.

For those considering careers in management, it is important to be able to diagnose situations as opportunities to exercise power and influence in order to form and implement new strategies. In addition, managers are usually on the receiving end of these processes. An astute manager knows how to anticipate moves that others will make, how to block or avoid them when they have undesirable consequences, and how to help these moves succeed when their consequences are beneficial.

The course aims to provide you with “political intelligence” in a sense. After taking this course, you will be able to: (1) diagnose the true distribution of power in organizations, (2) understand your own relationship to power, (3) build your own professional sources of power, and (4) develop influence techniques so that you can resolve conflict more effectively, foster cooperation, and lead change in organizations. These skills will be invaluable throughout your career.

COURSE MASCOTS

Meet Willa (aka Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz), Newton (Sir Isaac Newton), and Daisy. You can learn more about them by reading this syllabus. And ... the more you know about them, the better your odds at winning cold call immunity! Read on ...



COURSE REQUIREMENTS

While this course is not one in which grades are central, they are nevertheless required. I have tried to align the weighting of each component with each component's learning value.

Pre-class Survey (15%): Completing [this survey](#) (it will take about 25 minutes) helps me get to know you more quickly, especially important since we only have six weeks together. And ... while it's officially due at the start of the first class, if you complete it by 48 hours before your first class begins, you're eligible for the cold call immunity raffle! I will also be feeding back some of the data to you later in the course (all deidentified).

Participation in and Contribution to the Learning Community (25%)

Much of what you gain from this course will be exposure to the ideas and insights of other students. As such, it is essential that you come to class prepared to share your perspective with others and to test your analyses against the analyses of your classmates.

All class sessions will involve active discussion based on the readings and cases, with an emphasis both on theoretical questions and practical implications. You should be prepared to share your ideas and to listen to and interpret the issues presented by others. Keep in mind that your goal should be to contribute high quality (rather than high quantity) comments and questions. High quality contributions reflect (a) rigorous analysis or diagnosis, (b) integration across material, and/or (c) thoughtful recommendations for the characters in cases or your peers in the classroom. Balancing airtime is an important feature of a strong classroom contributor; speaking in every class should not be your goal.

At the end of each class, you will complete a three minute memo in class. These are an important component of your grade. There are no right or wrong answers; however, the more reflective you can be, the better and the more you can tie our class to your specific experiences, the better. I will sometimes incorporate topic-specific prompts into the memo in which you share ways in which you are applying / observing our work from inside the classroom to your life outside the classroom. I will review these after each class and also use them to track attendance.

Everyone receives one "freebie" for missing class which can be used for any reason at all with no grading penalty. I encourage you to watch the class video, imperfect as it is, on Brightspace. You do not need to let me know in advance that you will be out. You will receive no class participation credit for any classes missed. My children were taking calculus when we got both Newton and Willa.

If you miss more than two class meetings, you will receive an incomplete. These attendance and class participation policies apply to any and all reasons for missing class, other than extreme personal circumstances or illness with a medical note. If you know in advance that you will be missing more than two sessions, I strongly advise that you reconsider taking this course. If you unexpectedly need to miss more than two sessions, please reach out to your TF and me as soon as possible.

Career Memo (25%)

Write a memo about your career. It should be brief and is limited to 1 single-spaced page, 1-inch margins, 12-point font. Refer to "Tips for Influential Writing" attached to the assignment on Brightspace. Please think about this as an opportunity to both reflect for yourself and influence what and how the reader is thinking.

What are your goals, with respect to power and influence, for the next five years of your career? Be as concrete as possible in describing your goals (e.g., What position(s) would you like to attain? What impact would you like to have? What decisions would you like to be making? What rooms would you like to be in? What autonomy are you seeking?), discuss why they are important to you (e.g., What do you hope to accomplish in those positions?), and articulate specific action steps that you plan to take to achieve those goals (e.g., What is something you can do within the next year to make progress toward one of your goals?).

For some, this may be challenging to write because you are not used to adopting a long-term perspective in thinking about your career path or because you are sorting through possible career paths. Relatable! This is completely typical and nothing to worry about. For the sake of the course, it will help to have a “use case” so **just pick a possible career path** that you are exploring and write about that. No one is holding you to it! I want this course to be immediately useful to you and in order to do that, it helps for you to have your specific career background and a possible future available in concrete form. The skills and knowledge you build in the course can then be redeployed to whatever career path you eventually travel.

Final Paper (35%)

You will write a final paper analyzing a current or past situation related to power and influence. It should be brief and is limited to 1½ single-spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 12-point font. Like the memo, papers are better when they synthesize your professional experience and course content. (Again, refer to “Tips for Influential Writing” attached to the Career Memo assignment on Brightspace. Please think about this as an opportunity to both reflect for yourself and influence what and how the reader is thinking.)

Analyze a situation you have faced in either your career or a current professional relationship that relates to an idea (or two or three) we discussed in class. Retrospectively, apply the concepts to dissect a particular episode or relationship you now understand in a new light.

The purpose of this paper is to engage in self-reflection and better understand a situation in which you have played a role related to power. Current or recent (last 2 years) situations are best. The criteria for this assignment are similar to the criteria for a good comment in class. That is, your paper should be relevant, concise, and extend the analysis of the class material in a useful way. In writing this paper, you should assume that we share the common ground of the class experience and start from there. Please do not use time or space summarizing any cases, readings, or class discussions.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required

The [Power and Professional Influence coursepack](#) is available online at Harvard Business Publishing. You will need to create an account if you have not purchased any material at this website before. Most of the readings are contained in [this coursepack](#), unless I could provide them for free on Brightspace (denoted as such in the syllabus). **This also grants you access to the in-class simulation. Without it, you will not be able to participate in Session 4.**

I have made a concerted effort to minimize out-of-pocket costs. **I do not want cost to be a stressor for you in this course. If it is, send me a short email (no explanation needed) and I will ensure you have what you need and promise to give you a chance to do the same for a future student down the road when you are able to do so.**

Optional Reading

So many books, so little time. Each book listed below is well-written, evidence-based, and actionable. I suggest that you select one book from the list below and read the entire book through the course of the semester. I am agnostic to whether you buy, find at the library, share, or borrow, and whether you read in print, digital, or audio form.

- Battilana, Julie, & Casciaro, Tiziana. (2021). Power, For All. Simon & Schuster.
- Bohns, Vanessa. (2021). You Have More Influence Than You Think. Norton.
- Chance, Zoe. (2022). Influence is Your Superpower: The Science of Winning Hearts, Sparking Change, and Making Good Things Happen. Random House.
- Cialdini, Robert B. (2008). Influence: Science and Practice. (5th edition). Allyn & Bacon.
- Fragale, Alison. (2024). Likeable Badass: How Women Get the Success They Deserve. Doubleday.
- Gruenfeld, Deborah. (2020). Acting with Power: Why We Are More Powerful Than We Believe. Currency.
- Pfeffer, Jeffrey. (2010). Power: Why Some People Have It and Others Don't. Harper Business.

POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS

Use of GenAI for Written Assignments

AI is an evolving tool in academia and professional writing; its use is both allowable and encouraged in this course **for the written assignments**. I encourage you to find ways to use it to **deepen rather than erase** your learning in this course.

This is what that means to me. GenAI should be like a thoughtful and thought-provoking roommate with whom you might discuss a written assignment, not a hungry professional writer roommate who does it for you in exchange for you covering Seamless tonight. The thoughtful and thought-provoking roommate challenges you so that you emerge wiser from the assignment. The hungry roommate just gets the assignment done so that you can order dinner, leaving you no wiser from the assignment. Have I mentioned that my three four-legged roommates are very influenced by bacon?

More formally, I invite you to use AI responsibly as a learning aid, such as for research, grammar checks, or refining drafts that are written in your own voice. Do not submit the assignment to GenAI as a prompt, have it generate a couple of pages, add a personal anecdote and make the writing less pretty here and there to make it look authentic. That's the hungry roommate version. And we'll be running the assignments through ourselves to have samples of what the hungry roommate versions look like.

Regardless of whether you do or don't use AI in completing the assignment, you are required to submit a GenAI usage log with every assignment, specifying the prompts you used and the tasks where you used GenAI output. By the way, the relationship between Willa's and Newton's namesakes is often quite similar to their own.

Use of AI for Preparing for Case Discussions

Please do NOT use GenAI or any other form of external help to prepare for cases before we discuss them in class. That's the equivalent of watching the series finale of before you start binging a show. Or having a roommate who spoils movies you're excited to watch. Don't be that roommate. It ruins the movie which Daisy has been known to do when she starts barking for attention.

Student Accessibility

If you have a qualified disability and will require academic accommodation during this course, please first contact the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](mailto:mosescsa@nyu.edu) (212-998-4980, mosescsa@nyu.edu) and then share their letter with me as soon as possible (ideally before our first class). I am happy to work with you to make sure your goals are met so please feel free to reach out.

More broadly, if you have information to share with me about the optimal way in which you learn, please let me know (regardless of whether there is documentation to share). This includes any mobility issues as some activities take us out of our seats in the classroom. I am relatively new to captioning, alt-text, and other accessibility protocols and welcome any feedback about how to improve or expand my practices. Please know that I am very willing to collaborate with you to create a supportive learning environment. Again, please reach out sooner rather than later and assume that I will be interested in hearing from you on these issues. Let's work together.

Student Wellness

Life is stressful. I turn to professionals when I need help and encourage you to reach out when you need help. The NYU Wellness Exchange offers mental health support. You can reach them 24/7 at [212 443 9999](tel:2124439999), or via the "NYU Wellness Exchange" app. There are also drop-in hours and appointments. Find out more [here](#).

Religious Observances and Other Absences

NYU's [Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. You must notify me in advance of religious holidays or observances that might coincide with exams, assignments, or class times to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives. Students may also contact religiousaccommodations@nyu.edu for assistance.

NYU Stern is committed to ensuring an equitable educational experience for all students regardless of identity or circumstances and strives to recognize the obligations its students have outside of Stern. Please review all class dates at the start of the semester and review all course requirements to identify any foreseeable conflicts with exams, course assignments, projects, or other items required for participation and attendance. If you are aware of a potential conflict, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss any potential conflicts to determine whether/how they can be accommodated.

Inclusion Statement

This course strives to support and cultivate diversity of thought, perspectives, and experiences. The intent is to present materials and activities that will challenge your current perspectives with a goal of understanding how others might see situations differently. By participating in this course, it is the expectation that everyone commits to making this an inclusive learning environment for all.

Honor Code

My hope is that you are here to learn, get something useful out of your time spent in this course, and be part of a vibrant learning community. These opportunities do not come often in life, less so as we get further into adulthood. How I wish I could tell my younger self this!

I think highly of you and your integrity, and hope you see yourself the same way. Please check in with me if you are uncertain about what represents an honor code violation. Here are just a few of the ways in which the honor code applies.

- I reserve the right to submit written work to plagiarism detection software. AI should not be writing your work.
- Do not view anyone else's work prior to doing your own (this includes searching for a case online / on AI), or discuss cases / exercises with students who have already done the case / exercise in class (e.g., another section) or discuss a case / exercise with others who have yet to have class.
- If you are familiar with a case or exercise introduced in class, please do not be a "spoiler" in any way. I know many ways in which to still make the class extra useful for you in these cases, just let me know in advance.
- No recordings of any kind can be made of class without my permission.
- All exercises and their "solutions" are confidential and are not to be circulated or shared in any form.
- No recordings or photos or screenshots of class are to be shared within or outside of class in any form, especially in a way that would make a classmate uncomfortable. Any violation will be treated as an honor code violation.

I am glad we are sharing this learning experience together!

Taping of Class

All classes are automatically recorded using the ceiling cameras in the room. While both the audio and video are mediocre at best and are unable to capture the interactive learning component of class, I strongly encourage you to watch the video if you miss class. You can find the videos on Brightspace under MediaSite.

Technology use

Class will be conducted in-person. Please keep your phones stored away and turned off/on airplane mode (if you face extenuating circumstances and you need to keep your phone on and available to you, please communicate this to me). No laptop or tablet use without prior permission. Willa outweighs Daisy by 300%, yet who do you think has the power in our house?

Be on time

We will start class on time. We all have complicated lives, but please know that coming late, or leaving early, affects your classmates, and thus, will also have a negative effect on your contribution to our learning community. We will take several breaks of varying lengths during each class session.

Professionalism

Anything that might distract your classmates and/or me or that I view as unprofessional can impact your contribution to the learning community. I reserve the right to give you zero or even negative points for this component of your grade.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is rare to create a course without feedback and inspiration from others. This course was created by Professor Joe Magee, and adapted by Professor Dolly Chugh. I thank them both for their collaborative spirits, creativity, and commitment to strong pedagogy.

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS

Session 1: Naïve Influence: Introduction to the Course

Due Today: * [Pre-Class Survey](#) *** (BONUS: if submitted 48 hours before first class, you're eligible for the cold call immunity raffle!)**

Coursepack readings: Jick & Gentile, "Donna Dubinsky" *HBS case*

1. Why was Dubinsky initially successful at Apple Computer? (1981-1984)
2. How and why did things begin to unravel for Dubinsky?
3. How did Dubinsky react and why?
4. What should Dubinsky have done differently?
5. What were Debi Coleman's advantages and weaknesses?

Session 2: Paths to Power: Fitting In versus Standing Out

Coursepack readings: Mayo & Hull "Rosalind Fox at John Deere" *HBS case*

Isaacson "The Reality Distortion Field" Ch. 11 of *Steve Jobs*

1. What individual attributes did Fox and Jobs possess that were/are sources of power?
2. What did effective performance mean to Fox and Jobs?
3. What would you say "standing out" and "fitting in" mean to Fox based on her experiences?
4. What did Fox do to build her reputation?

Session 3: Rise to Power/Seduced by Power

Due Today: * [Career Memo](#) *** (submit on Brightspace before class begins)**

Case (video): Excerpts from Rick Burns' "New York" about Robert Moses (3 segments, on Brightspace)

Readings (on Brightspace): Dean, "Reaching for the Top, Touching Bottom" Ch. 1 of *Blind Ambition*
Dean, "Blind Ambition" (additional excerpts)

1. How did Dean get into this mess? What were the factors outside of his control, and what were attributes of him as a person?
2. How has Dean mismanaged his career with respect to building relationships and his reputation?
3. What specific steps could Dean have taken to avoid this situation?

Session 4: Practicing Professional Influence : Organizational Change Simulation

Bring Today: We will be doing a computer-based simulation in class so *** please bring a laptop *** if at all possible.

Coursepack readings: Change Management Simulation Background Materials available on Brightspace/Content/Change Simulation

Session 5: Bases of Power – Relationships, Reciprocity, and Rapport

Coursepack readings: McGinn, “Heidi Roizen” *HBS case*

1. What steps did Roizen take, over various jobs, to develop a network? To maintain it?
2. What are the strengths of Roizen’s network as we see it at the end of the case? The weaknesses?
3. What suggestions would you give Roizen for adjusting and maintaining her network as she becomes more involved as a high-tech VC?

Session 6: Integrating It All: Managing Power in Your Career

Experiential exercise in class

*****Final Paper due at midnight ET *** (submit on Brightspace)**