Essay Question 1 – Isabel J.

There is plenty of research in social psychology that can be used to help guide campaign managers who want to convince voters to vote for their candidate. However, we must keep in mind that since the Supreme Court ruled in Citizens United v. FEC that corporations have the same spending rights as citizens in elections, corporations have donated millions of dollars to political campaigns. Because of this significant change in our elections, many voters are extremely skeptical of all campaign messages.

If I were a campaign manager for this upcoming presidential election, I would advise the candidate to focus on cognitive aspects of attitudes over affective aspects of attitudes since most viewers will be processing the ads thoughtfully, not spontaneously (173). Studies show that especially in forming attitudes towards politicians, people tend to make decisions based off the affective component, not the cognitive component, of their attitudes (Abelson, Kinder, Peters, & Fiske, 1981; Stangor, Sullivan, & Ford, 1991) (162). However, these studies are very outdated and based off the people I have spoken with, I suspect these findings are no longer significant.

Another factor that faces politicians is their reputation both as people and as professionals in their field. Communicators perceived as experts in whatever they are advertising tend to be more effective (171). This is particularly relevant in the upcoming election because many candidates are not experts in politics or international relations (Donald Trump). On the other hand, the candidate with arguably the most experience in politics (Hillary Clinton) has many inconsistencies in her personal behaviors as well as her political decisions, which discredits her years of experience.

Studies have also shown that no matter how good the message is, people will not be persuaded if the messenger is seen as very different from them. Recently candidate Bernie Sanders spoke to mostly Republican students at the conservative school Liberty University. He began by addressing the fact that they probably disagree with a lot of his views on individual-level decisions like abortion and gay marriage but that they can agree on other larger-scale issues like economic inequality. Candidates should seek to be as honest as Bernie Sanders because “communicators also may be seen as biased if they present only one side of an issue while completely ignoring the potential problems or counterarguments to the message. In these cases, people who are informed about both sides of the topic may see the communicator as attempting to unfairly influence them” (172). Another study (though it could be outdated) shows that students who were not highly involved in a topic did not focus on the message but the communicator and then students who were highly involved in the topic focused on the message and not the communicator (Chaiken 1980) (173).

I would advise the candidate to speak confidently, quickly, and straightforward because that makes them seem more expertised (MacLachlan & Siegel, 1980; Moore, Hausknecht, & Thamodaran, 1986) (171). Also, speaking faster reduces the likelihood that the listener will come up with counterarguments (Megehee, Dobie, & Grant, 2003) (171).

I would also advise the candidate to explain the sleeper effect to voters, because I have personally seen it work effectively for candidates backed by the Koch brothers, who are known for donating millions to strongly conservative politicians who create ads filled with propaganda against their opponents. The sleeper effect occurs when one discounts a message because the presenter is untrustworthy but over time one remembers only the content of the message and not the untrustworthy source (Kumkale & Albarracín, 2004) (172).

The candidate should make sure they create ads that put people in a good mood or that when voters attend their speeches, the venue puts them in a good mood. Studies shows that “we tend to like things more when we are in a good mood, and—because positive affect indicates that things are okay—we process information less
I would advise the candidate to not only talk about the positive contributions they would make but also the negative outcomes that will occur if they are not elected. One interesting study found that a message that emphasized the negative aspects of not getting a breast cancer screening mammogram was more effective than a similar message that emphasized the positive aspects of having a mammogram in convincing women to have a mammogram over the next year (Banks, Salovey, Greener, and Rothman 1995) (174). Of course the candidate must be careful to emphasize that voters have self-efficacy and by voting for this candidate they are avoiding the negative outcomes (Aspinwall, Kemeny, Taylor, & Schneider, 1991 and Passyn & Sujan, 2006) (174).

Essay Question 2: Changing Attitudes Towards Homophobia – Shruthi V.

Just as there exists color-blind racial attitudes, I feel there are color blind sexist attitudes too. People have cognitive dissonance (conflict between internal beliefs and behavior) when it comes to the LGBTQ community. With the recent legislation legalizing same-sex marriage, majority of the people feel that they are unbiased towards this community, but actually carry an innate prejudice against them.

Social media is the important link in reducing such biases. I have a few strategies that could possibly be implemented in college campuses. Instead of trying to revolutionize the mindset of an entire population, it is important to start small, and reduce the biases in our own (smaller) communities.

Like the Humans of New York, there should be a Facebook page for Humans of the Queer/Unique Community. The people who identify themselves as LGBTQ should come forward to speak about their experiences, and the biases that they face. They will be expert communicators since this will be up close, personal and therefore, real. When they elaborate about the specific instances where they have encountered negative responses or have been looked down upon by the heterosexist community, people would realize and further empathize with their situation. This method is part of the spontaneous message processing: people shall read and register these stories as they flip through their Facebook news feed. Not only will the stories trigger the affective component of our attitudes, but they shall also give solutions to reducing the biases. Another strategy that I would employ is through the LGBTQ clubs that are prevalent in most colleges. There could be once a month social or a picnic where non members can attend and interact with LGBTQ students and staff. This would go a long way in breaking stereotypes and negative opinions. Inviting popular LGBTQ media personalities (for example, Ellen DeGeneres) to the campuses to hold seminars, interactive discussion forums or Q&A sessions with the general student body would carry more weight in acceptance and a positive shift in attitudes.

People are more likely to be persuaded when the content relates to their underlying goals and self-interests (textbook, pg 197). Inculcating a feeling of responsibility and friendship can help change attitudes. Common activities like photography, debate or sports can help both the communities mingle with each other. The reward would be stronger friendships and a bridge in prejudices. This reward can help change behavior and cement a positive attitude (textbook, pg 185).

This will be part of the foot-in-the door technique, where once people commit to a small thing, they are willing to accept bigger commitment. Following the integration of common sports and hobbies, the new camaraderie with the LGBTQ community can be widened by inviting these members into bigger social groups. Once the general public see the ease with which communication is carried out between the two sides, the bias against the LGBTQ members will be considerably reduced.

Hence, these are few strategies that could help in changing the attitudes of the heterosexist community around colleges to reduce biases against the LGBTQ community.