Campaigns and Elections (GOVT 215)
Spring 2015

Professor Nick Goedert
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Meeting Times: 11:00-12:15 or 2:45-4:00 Tues/Thurs
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-4:00
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Description

Elections rest at the heart of America’s representative democracy. In this course, we will examine U.S. elections and electoral campaigns, exploring such questions as:

- What are the role of political parties in nominating candidates and influencing campaigns?
- What is the role of the media in elections?
- What are the roles of political action committees and interest groups?
- What kinds of advertising in campaigns are most effective?
- How much are elections influenced by day-to-day campaign activity?
- How are legislative and local campaigns different from presidential campaigns?
- How fair are our elections, and what might we do to improve them?

The course will begin by addressing several of these questions in sequence with application to presidential elections. After spring break, we will spend a few weeks focusing specifically on the 2012 presidential campaign, and competing narratives and explanations for its outcome. The course will conclude with a unit on the particular considerations of legislative and local elections, focusing on congressional campaigns.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course, it is expected that students will be able to:

- Explain the American electoral process and the role of political parties in it.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of campaign strategies and various actors within the process.
- Differentiate between the considerations involved presidential, statewide, and local elections.
- Produce a research paper on an historical campaign integrating outside research with the themes and materials discussed in class.
- Participate more knowledgeably in American elections and politics more generally. Understand undemocratic aspects of American elections.

Readings

The course has five required books:

The books should be available from the campus bookstore and online. Additional articles and book excerpts will be posted on Moodle as noted in the syllabus.

Requirements

The course grade consists of the following:

1. Midterm Exam (in class March 12): 20%
2. Final Exam: 40%
3. Research Paper: 20%
4. Class Participation: 20%

Exams: There will be two examinations in the course, an in-class midterm on March 12th, and a final on the designated final exam date. The final will be cumulative, but focus on material from the last half of the semester. Each exam will have a designated in-class review session, and the final will have at least one additional optional review session. Both exams will include multiple choice, short answer and one or more longer essay questions. All exams are open-notes, although you are not permitted to access electronic devices or the internet during the exam.

Research Paper: 20% of your grade will be based on an 8-10 page paper due on Tuesday, May 5th. The paper will require you to evaluate the campaign strategies used by the candidates and parties in an historical American election of your choice. You should also discuss how journalistic or political science accounts might explain the results of this election, along the lines of our investigation of the 2012 presidential campaign. You may choose a presidential general election, a presidential primary campaign, an election for Senate or Governor, etc. (The following elections are not eligible: any election from 2012 or 2014, and the 2008 and 1960 presidential elections.) Details of the project will be discussed in class. I am willing to read drafts or outlines of the paper submitted by April 23rd.

Participation and Moodle Posts: Class participation will be composed of both your participation in class discussions and your responses to the readings posted on Moodle. For each class session, students are expect to:

- Attend all classes, having read the designated material from syllabus;
- Be well-prepared to answer questions about the of the week’s readings
- If you cannot attend a class, please let me know ahead of time

You are required to post three reading responses on Moodle over the course of the semester. At least one of these posts should be made by Week 6, and a second should be made by Week 10. You should post under the correct week on the GOVT 215 Moodle site. Posts are due by 10pm on the night before the associated class meeting.

There is no required format or length to the Moodle posts, although I would expect many will be about one typed page or two paragraphs. You may respond to any aspect of any the day’s readings; you may
tie together multiple readings, readings from previous weeks, current events or you own life experiences or simply argue why you think a particular argument is correct or incorrect, etc.

The Moodle posts will not be given individual letter grades; for the most part, they will be graded on a pass/fail basis. If I find your post particularly interesting or insightful, I may ask you to expand on it in class.

**Board Game:** Over ten weeks of the semester, we will pit the two sections of the class against each other in the board game *1960: The Making of the President*, simulating the presidential campaign between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. The game is played over nine turns, each representing one week of the campaign, with special turns for the presidential debate and election day. I anticipate that we will play once a week over lunch, beginning in the second week. Representatives of one section will run Kennedy’s campaign, and the other will run Nixon’s, choosing sides in our first meeting. The winning section will be rewarded with pizza for the entire class on our last meeting day. Participation in the game is open to any student in the class who wants to play. *This part of the class is completely optional and not part or your grade in any way.*

**Class Schedule**

**Week 1:** Introduction; The American Electoral System
- January 27, 29
- Readings:
  - *Polsby*, Ch. 1, “Voters”

**Week 2:** Election Laws & Campaign Finance
- February 3, 5
- Readings:
  - *Polsby*, Ch. 3, “Rules and Resources”
  - *Nelson*, Ch. 8 “Campaign Finance: Campaigning in a Post-Citizens United Era”
  - Case Excerpt: *Citizens United v. FEC*

**Week 3:** Political Parties & Nominations
- February 10, 12
- Readings:
  - *Polsby*, Ch. 4, “The Nomination Process”
  - Larry Bartels, “Expectations and Preferences in Presidential Nominating Campaigns”

**Week 4:** Campaign Strategy – Get Out the Vote
- February 17, 19
- Readings:
  - *Polsby*, Ch. 5: “The Campaign”
  - *The Victory Lab*, Ch. 1-3
  - Alan Gerber & Donald Green, “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment”
Week 5: Campaign Strategy - Advertising
- February 24, 26
- Readings:
  - *The Victory Lab*, Ch. 8
  - Daron Shaw, “The Effect of TV Ads and Candidate Appearances on Statewide Presidential Votes, 1988-96”
  - Gerber, Gimpel, Green, & Shaw, “How Long Lasting are the Persuasive Effects of Televised TV Ads?”
  - Excerpt from Darrel West, *Air Wars*

Week 6: The Media
- March 3, 5
- Readings:
  - Stephano DellaVigna & Ethan Kaplan, “The Political Impact of Media Bias”
  - Excerpt from John Hendricks & Dan Schill, *Presidential Campaigning and Social Media*

Week 7: Midterm
- Midterm review & Catch-up March 10
- **Midterm Exam in class Thursday March 12**

**NO CLASS MARCH 17 & 19: SPRING BREAK**

Weeks 8 & 9: The 2012 Election – Overview & The Journalistic Narrative
- March 24, 26, 31
- Readings:
  - Excerpt from Halperin & Heilemann, *Double Down*

**NO CLASS THURSDAY, APRIL 2**

Week 10: The 2012 Election – The Political Science Narrative
- April 7, 9
- Readings:
  - Excerpt from Sides & Vavrek, *The Gamble*

Week 11: Congressional and Local Elections
- April 14, 16
- Readings:
  - *Nelson*, Ch. 7: “Congress: Partisanship and Polarization”
  - Excerpt from Gary Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, Ch. 2 & Ch. 6
Week 12: Congressional Campaigns & Finance
  • April 21, 23
  • Readings:
    o Excerpt from Gary Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, Ch. 4
    o Excerpt from Richard Fenno, *Home Style*

Week 13: Congressional Districting and its Effects
  • April 28, 30
  • Readings:
    o Excerpt from David Lublin, *The Paradox of Representation*
    o Bernard Grofman and Thomas Brunell, “‘The Art of the Dummymander’”
    o Nicholas Goedert, “Gerrymandering or Geography?”

Week 14: Congressional Election effects
  • May 5, 7
  • **Research Papers dues Tuesday, May 5th**
  • Exam review May 7
  • Readings:
    o Brandice Canes-Wrone, “Out of Step, Out of Office”
    o Additional reading TBD

**Final Exam (DATE TBA)**

**Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a violation of College policy and may result in a failing grade and/or other disciplinary measures. Please review the guidelines on “Principles of Intellectual Honesty” available in the Student Handbook (go to http://www.lafayette.edu/currentstudents and click on Student Handbook under Resources and Services), which elaborate College policy on plagiarism and academic integrity.