

Political Science 4026-1 – Campaigns and Elections
Fall Semester/2020 Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-2:50 in 204 Tureaud
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Office Hours: 9:00-10:30 T/Th and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Elections are the most visible and scrutinized events in American politics. While some are more interesting and exciting than others, those that allow for the possibility of a change in partisan control of government are the most eagerly anticipated. The presidential and congressional contests taking place this fall have that potential, as the two parties seek to gain control of a divided government. Indeed the contests begin with the nomination phase of the presidential elections taking place this spring in the fifty states and US territories. Given the raucous character of the nomination contests so far, and of US politics in general, this seems like the perfect time to examine the nature of campaigns and elections in the United States.

The course is roughly grouped into four sections as described on moodle. The first section looks at the big picture of how elections fit into our democratic processes and what the major models of voting behavior look like. The second examines presidential and congressional elections more specifically. The third looks at the strategic environment of elections; the parties, social networks, and public opinion influence election outcomes. The final section addresses voter choice and electoral decisions. Throughout the course we will keep our eyes on how the nomination races are shaping up, so it will be in your best interest to follow the various campaigns and outcomes through your favorite news outlets, blogs, or even old fashioned newspapers and television.

I would like to follow the format of an extended research seminar. This means that we will meet to discuss the readings and campaigns going on around the country. You need not have more than a basic understanding of American government to do this. You also, of course, need to attend class and be willing to consider questions seriously within the context of the systematic study of voting behavior. Since this is a class about voting and elections, you should also keep informed of what's going on in the national political scene. Reading a newspaper is perhaps the easiest and best way to accomplish this. The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, or The Los Angeles Times will provide information on the fall congressional races. Local news outlets will provide plenty of coverage for the Louisiana Senate race. You will also find good commentary and information from political blogs, like Nate Silver's 538, The Cook Political Report, Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball, and Politico, to name just a few. Real Clear Politics and other sites will have tons of polling data to peruse as well. I will gather these and other sites on moodle in the Internet Resources folder.

TEXTBOOKS

Political Behavior of the American Electorate, 14th ed., by Theiss-Morse, et. al.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for this course are four examinations, two short writing assignments, and class participation composed of quizzes and discussion. The dates for exams and papers are listed on moodle, in the class schedule and reading assignments section. Exams: Four multiple choice exams will be given. The final is not comprehensive. These exams will make up 60% of your grade (15% each).

Paper: The paper assignment will be described on the first day of class. It will involve analyzing a state and its nomination rules. More details will be provided on moodle and in class. The paper assignment will be 2500 words and will be worth 30% of your grade.

Participation: I won't be taking attendance per se, but you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Participation will be composed of two parts (each accounting for 5% of your grade). The first part will be obtained through in class short quizzes. On random class days I will take attendance by administering a short quiz (a question or two) over the readings for that week. There will be SIX of these quizzes, and you need to make at least FOUR of them to receive full credit for participation (5%). Making 3 of the quizzes will earn you 2.5 points for participation, and anything less than 3 will earn you 0 points. You can also obtain bonus points by getting correct answers to the quiz questions. For each correct quiz you can earn a quarter bonus point to be added to your final grade, so if you get all 6 correct you can earn 1.5 additional points to your course average. There will be no makeups on these quizzes since I've already given you two free misses. The second part (5%) will be composed of your actual contributions to class discussion. These will be self-reported by you in participation logs that will be due at midterm and final exam time. Any question or contribution you make to class discussion should be noted, as well as any other points you care to bring up that you may not have mentioned in class. Participation makes up 10% of your grade overall.

In summary, your grade breakdown is as follows:

Four Exams: 60%
Paper: 30%
Participation: 10%

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Standards of academic conduct are described in the University's Code of Student Conduct. By registering for this course you acknowledge your awareness of the Code, and your intention to follow the requirements of the Code. In short, don't cheat and don't plagiarize. Please see me if you have any questions about any aspect of the Code and how it relates to the specifics of this course.